

THE LION'S ROAR IN THE ASSEMBLY

Sa-pan's Scholarly Ideal

It is agreed that there are these two truths: the conventional and the ultimate. Reality is beyond the scope of intellection. Intellection is said to be the conventional.

—Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*

INTRODUCTION

In the verse above, the ninth-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva affirms a basic belief of the Mahāyāna: Ultimately, truth and reality are beyond intellection. The highest goal of Buddhist realization is ineffable—strictly, inconceivable. Some, building upon this notion, have claimed that Buddhism is (or ought to be) simply about practice. They declare that meditation, conceived as the very opposite of intellection, is the only appropriately Buddhist path of understanding. Yet the overwhelming majority of Buddhist practitioners have held an alternative vision, in which the intellect plays a decisive role in both Buddhist practice and history. The vast majority of the most influential and idealized practitioners in Buddhist history are not only great meditators, but great scholars as well. Indeed, Śāntideva's own verse begins one of the more intricate extended philosophical examinations of the nature of truth available in classical Sanskrit literature. He did not consider it a contradiction to be an intellectual, an accomplished scholar, pursuing what is beyond intellection; nor have most Buddhists who came before or after him.

The Buddha is often called “the teacher” (*ḥstan pa*), and his teachings, the dharma, became the model and guide for his followers after he was gone. Members of the Buddhist monastic community, the *saṅgha*, thus became teachers as well as students and practitioners of the dharma. The most prominent members of the community have been those of evident intellectual, not only meditative, accomplishment. For the Buddha, the two skills were intertwined; his ability to win debates and secure converts was taken as a sign of his spiritual

greatness. Of course, when the intellect is seen to be an ultimately untrustworthy manipulator of half-truths, there remain problems as to how best to regulate its functions. To some questions, the Buddha famously responded with silence, reasoning that in certain circumstances any answer will be misleading. On most days, however, the Buddha spoke.

The Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen traditions claim that their lineages survive through nonlinguistic “mind-to-mind” transmissions of realization from masters to disciples. The so-called Southern School patriarchs are famous for having rejected the book learning that keeps one enmeshed in a net of false conceptualizations. Yet, as Bernard Faure has so ably shown, it would be a mistake to take this “rhetoric of immediacy” too literally—for it is only through rigorous training in the elite cultures of the monastery that Zen neophytes are transformed into masters capable to receive or bestow a lineal transmission.¹

When we turn to Tibetan traditions, it is equally useful to note the rhetorical impact of different positions on scholarship and learning. Tibetan literature records many stories of great adepts besting arrogant and jealous scholars of logic and language. In a biography of Milarepa (1052–1135), for instance, one Geshe Tsakpūhwa challenges Milarepa by asking him to explicate a book of philosophy. In response, Milarepa says that he is not at all interested in the kind of learning and scholarly disputation that the Geshe represents, and supports this with a song describing how his own meditational skills are superior to any scholarship:²

I prostrate myself before Marpa the Translator,
May he bless me and keep me from dispute.

The blessing of my lama penetrated my mind.
I have never been overcome by distractions.

...

Having meditated on the instruction of the secret tradition,
I forgot the books of dialectic.

Having maintained pure awareness,
I forgot the illusions of ignorance.

...

Having dwelt in the unaltered state of naturalness,
I forgot the ways of hypocrisy.

Having lived in humility in body and mind,
I forgot the disdain and arrogance of the great.

These verses win over the crowd of observers with their implicit attributions of ignorance, arrogance, and hypocrisy to the disputational scholar, and the Geshe

leaves humiliated and angry. He will return to poison Milarepa in revenge. In another similar disputational situation, Milarepa is even more dismissive of scholarly training in language and logic:

Oh great teachers and scholars,
 Cling not to meaningless words and empty talk
 Deeming them to be the Truth!
 Even heretics can play with them.
 One can waste two-and-thirty lives and gain nought,
 If his mind but follows words.
 It would be much better, therefore,
 To conquer the devil of egotism.
 I have no time to waste in words, words, and still more words!
 Nor do I know logic or how to pose a proposition.
 Therefore, you are the one
 Who wins the argument today!³

These stories draw their power from a long-standing Buddhist trope, with as much of a tradition in Tibet as elsewhere, in which authors declare their preference for realization through practice over mere book learning. Yet here, again, we should not jump to the conclusion that this text considers *all* learning foolishness, and values *only* meditation. Milarepa's own guru, Marpa (1012–1097), gained great fame and massive wealth through his reputation as a “translator” (*lo tsā ba*), an honorific designation reserved for the greatest scholars of the day. Indeed, if Marpa was not a great scholar, his “translations” would provide an inauthentic source for Milarepa's own teachings. This observation, rather than a general anti-intellectualism, puts us on the proper trail toward an explanation of the scholar's challenge. The scholar's arrogance and jealousy are the most evident targets worthy of Buddhist critique. But the scholar/murderer in Milarepa's life story represents a very serious threat not only to the proper practice of Buddhism, but to the legitimacy and survival of Milarepa's lineage. Indeed, in the story mentioned, a scholar plays the significant role of indirectly causing Milarepa's death—significant even though, like Socrates, Milarepa drinks the poison willingly, and the scholar himself ends up regretting his act and converting to become one of Milarepa's disciples.

In fact, the scholarly challenge here embodied in myth might well be that of the growing “neoconservative” intellectual movement—a movement that sought to “Indianize” Tibetan Buddhist traditions and to purge them of all forms of inauthentic, “self-made” Tibetan knowledge.⁴ This movement was only in its youth when it challenged the authenticity of Milarepa's lineage, but it would grow to control the helm of Tibetan intellectual life in the centuries to follow. Its most vocal and influential advocate would be the great Sakya Paṇḍita Künge Gyeltshen (1182–1251, hereinafter Sa-paṅ). This book is a study of Sa-paṅ's

masterpiece the *Gateway to Learning* (*Mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*), in which Sa-paṅ provides his most comprehensive and compelling presentation of this new view of scholarship. The *Gateway* secured Sa-paṅ's reputation, in the eyes of Tibetans, as the model of a scholar—occasionally lampooned as excessively arrogant, but primarily revered as an ideal to which all students of the dharma should aspire.⁵

THE GATEWAY IN THE HISTORY OF TIBETAN LEARNING

In order to understand the Neoconservative Movement and Sa-paṅ's position within it, we must go back to the very beginnings of Tibetan literacy—for Tibetan identities are shaped around the distinctive character of the language in which Tibetan Buddhism is written. The earliest Tibetan writings date from the imperial period (c. 650–850). Traditional histories of this period link the origins of writing and scholarship with the importation of Buddhism, in particular from India. King Songtsen Gampo (617–649/50), considered the first Buddhist king, is said to have sent the scholar Thönmi Samḃhoṭa to India to devise a new alphabet for the Tibetan language on Indian models. The Tibetan alphabet is, indeed, derived from the Indic Brahṃī script, though forms of this script were already in circulation in Central Asia. In the wake of the script, however, came Buddhist learning, imported from Tibet's neighbors beginning during this time, and officially adopted as the state religion by King Thri Songdetsen (742–c.797) a century later. It is not entirely clear why the Tibetan emperors decided to adopt and support Buddhism—it was certainly controversial in their time. Matthew Kapstein has pointed out that Buddhist systems of learning surely provided a powerful set of tools and models for how to organize and run a newly complex imperial administration.⁶ Whatever the reason, though, the state-sponsored support of Buddhist institutions under the auspices of Thri Songdetsen and his successors, and in particular, their oversight and sponsorship of the translation of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan provided the foundation upon which all of Tibetan Buddhism is based.

This is true not merely because many hundreds of texts rendered into Tibetan at this time would, much later, be incorporated into the Tibetan canons for all time, but more importantly because the language and methods of the translators would provide the standard for all later translations, and indeed, the standard language of the dharma itself in Tibetan. Even when other, later translations became the central practice texts for other later Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the language would remain that of the early translators, and would accord with the rules of the “dharma language” (*chos skad*) formalized under King Thri Desongtsen (r. 804–815).⁷

This is not a claim as to linguistic determinism of the kind advocated by modern linguists such as Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf.⁸ Tibetan modes of thinking were never curtailed or limited by the structures of the “dharma language” for the very simple reason that the “dharma language” is not a natural language at all. It is a translator’s language, designed for the exclusive purpose of rendering Indian, Sanskrit texts, mostly Buddhist ones, into Tibetan. But fluent speakers of Tibetan cannot read it without being trained to do so. Like the Sanskrit that it translates, it is always something like a second or third language, never a first. Tibetans grow up learning their local variety of Spoken Tibetan, and so have their thought mediated by that language, not by the dharma language (if language indeed mediates thought). What’s more, the translation language is not even by any means identical with what is properly called “Classical Literary Tibetan”—the language of literate Tibetan composition.⁹ Thus, although the imperial decrees (*bkas bcad*) governing the translations of Sanskrit texts into Tibetan have had an immeasurable influence on Tibetan literature, they have by no means limited what could be written any more than what could be thought.

My claim is of a different order. The official translation language was designed to allow for the capture and transmission of a Sanskrit source in a language perhaps not exactly like Spoken Tibetan, but relatively easily learned by speakers of Tibetan. In these purposes—especially in capturing the Sanskrit—the dharma language was quite successful. As David Ruegg has noted, this could hardly be better exemplified than by the fact that every once in a while, a modern scholar who has used the traditional dictionaries and rules to “back-translate” from the Tibetan translations into Sanskrit to create a model of the lost Sanskrit original, will find his work very closely verified by the discovery of some previously unknown Sanskrit exemplar—causing much delight for modern scholars who specialize in such things.¹⁰ Yet the Tibetan success in generating a massive corpus of remarkably accurate renderings could not be bought without some sacrifice on the other end—namely, in the degree of learning necessary for speakers of Tibetan to comprehend the meaning of the “translated” texts. The official choice to prefer reflective authenticity over target language comprehensibility would prove a decisive factor in the development of later Tibetan intellectual traditions.

The issues surrounding this linguistic choice come into focus around the problem of textual “fabrications.” Although designed for translation, and different in various ways from the language in which Tibetans ordinarily wrote, the dharma language could, like any code, be used to compose new texts. As Ruegg has noted, such independent compositions appeared quite early in Tibetan translation history—and so we find, along with orders that translators may not invent their own new translation terminology, parallel complaints and rulings

against fabricated, “self-made” scriptures. There is no rule against writing religious texts. The issue here is using the *translation form* to compose texts. One can understand the complaint. What reason is there for standardizing translation methods other than to make scriptures available in their most authentic form possible? The whole point is to provide a system for ensuring that the translated scriptures authentically reflect their Sanskrit originals. To compose a text in this language, however, suggests the presence of a Sanskrit original where there is none.

Once again, Ruegg has made the issue crystal clear by distinguishing between texts that are historically “Indian” and those that are typologically “Indic.”¹¹ Any text composed in the dharma language (*chos skad*), though it is not a translation of a genuinely “Indian” original, will nonetheless adopt characteristically “Indic” ideas, concepts, and forms of writing; and, if it is to be accepted as an authentic representation of the dharma, it must reiterate traditional views and lines of argument as well. Ruegg is right to note that the “Indic” came to dominate Tibetan modes of Buddhist text (as well as artistic) production. But, and here is the problem, once the Sanskrit originals are set aside, and Tibetans are studying translated texts, how are they to distinguish between texts purporting to be derived from an “Indian” source and texts that are, like most Tibetan productions, merely “Indic”? Every translator worth his salty tea ought to be capable of fabricating a very convincing forgery. This fact, and attendant anxieties, are what fueled the Neoconservative Movement during the Tibetan renaissance.

The fall of the Tibetan empire precipitated a century-long dark age in Central Tibet.¹² Ronald Davidson’s most recent masterful work, *Tibetan Renaissance*, records how Tibetans drew upon the norms of late tantrism in India and Nepal to rejuvenate their culture after this dark period, establishing during only a few centuries the religious and political forms that would dominate Tibetan history to follow. One persistent theme that develops during this time is the notion that India was the sole authentic source of the true dharma.¹³ This meant that many of the most important agents in this development would be, once again, “translators” (*lo tsā ba*). This second round of great translators made trips to India and Nepal to study Sanskrit language and the dharma with enlightened masters, and to bring new scriptures back to Tibet. Unlike the earlier period, the translations during this “later dissemination” (*phyi dar*) were not organized or overseen by any central authority. There were a tremendous variety of methods developed during this period by which scholars could generate “shortened” lineages for themselves—not only discovering new texts in India, but as Kapstein has put it, some scholars “may be said to have *found India within themselves*” either through visions or through discovering hidden treasures.¹⁴ This alone would have provided cause for concern among those who would want a sharp line between authentic and inauthentic scriptures. But along with

the means of forgery, translators had a substantial motive. As Davidson emphasizes, the greatest of these translators returned to Tibet with the ability to leverage their monopolistic mastery of secret tantric cycles into a form of spiritual authority that granted them great wealth and power.¹⁵

We are finally in a position to understand the significance of the Geshe's challenge to Milarepa: For Milarepa's master, Marpa, was of course one of the great translators of the day. But Marpa did not pass on his translator's knowledge, and Milarepa himself was neither a linguist nor a logician. The implication of the scholar's challenge, then, is that Milarepa has no independent means of verifying the authenticity of Marpa's "translations." In fact—perhaps more to the point—Milarepa's claim to have the Indian Siddha Nāropa as his guru's guru was a contested matter, a difficulty exacerbated by the fact that the teachings were exclusively oral.¹⁶ Many teachings during this period consist in what Davidson terms "gray" texts—"neither definitely Indian nor identifiably Tibetan."¹⁷ Indeed, many texts that would become central to the practices of major Tibetan lineages to follow seem to have resulted from collaboration among Tibetan translators and their Indian teachers. My suggestion is that when we read Milarepa's critique of the ignorance and arrogance of a scholar obsessed with technicalities, we should understand it as a counterattack, or at least, a fortification against a potential attack.

It is the practice of distinguishing authentic from inauthentic scriptures that characterizes what I am following Davidson in calling the Neoconservative Movement. Such practice perhaps began as simply a strategy employed by translators to shore up their own reputations and undercut their rivals. Some published lists of spurious texts, and some seemed simply to have spread a damning word. But these early attempts to verify authentic teachings and invalidate inauthentic ones lacked a system. Their only unifying method was the basic test of asking Indian *paṇḍitas* whether they knew of the texts in their Sanskrit originals.¹⁸ The fact of the matter was that all lineages were vulnerable to an excess of scrutiny, and all translators were capable of occasionally identifying fallacies in the teachings of their rivals. It was only with the advent of a new form of scholar, trained like an Indian *paṇḍita* in linguistics and logic, that methods of scriptural analysis could be guided by systematic and rational procedures.¹⁹ It was only with the advent of a new view of the scholar's knowledge as comprehensive that decisions of scriptural inclusion—which to allow in, which to keep out—became especially critical. It was only with this new skill set that a scholar could learn to perceive the difference between the merely "Indic" and the genuinely "Indian." This new view of scholarship, of course, is the one advocated and delineated by Sakya Paṇḍita in his *Gateway to Learning*.

The *Gateway* is Sa-paṅ's textbook on the basic skills of a good scholar, and my purpose in this book is to explain the philosophy of scholarship embedded within its first two chapters, which discuss, respectively, scholarly composition

and exposition. This work will not focus on the *Gateway*'s third and final chapter, on debate, which has been expertly translated and studied by David Jackson.²⁰ Jackson's indispensable work also covers Sa-paṅ's education, career, and oeuvre in great detail. I will therefore focus only on those elements we need to know if we are to comprehend why and how Sa-paṅ comes to advocate a Tibetan variety of *paṅḍityam*. As we will see, Sa-paṅ believes that it is the responsibility of all legitimate scholars to defend the true Buddhist teachings (the dharma) against corruption and fabrication. He understands the dharma to be in constant competition with other doctrines and ideas, and under constant threat of misrepresentation. As might be assumed from the foregoing discussion, the latter is of particular concern to Sa-paṅ, since he believes the teachings to have been widely misunderstood and misrepresented by his Tibetan contemporaries, especially those from competing traditions.

In this context, Sa-paṅ believes that the great scholars must form a kind of elite Buddhist guard to protect the stronghold of the *dharma*—using, as their main intellectual tools, the great Indian traditions of grammar, literature, and philosophy. These are the traditions that Sa-paṅ is most concerned to promote among the Tibetans of his time. The *Gateway* therefore introduces the basics of these fields of learning, and, as I will show, it provides distinctive Buddhist arguments as to why scholars need to learn epistemology, philosophy of language, translation studies, hermeneutics, and literary theory. I will treat each of these topics in turn. It is remarkable enough to find a thirteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist addressing issues, such as translation and translatability, that are of central intellectual concern in today's academic community. What we will see is that Sa-paṅ's analyses of translation are grounded within a series of subtle, brilliant, and quintessentially Buddhist arguments about the nature of scholarship itself. For this reason, in each case, his arguments illuminate even current discussions in each field with a new perspective.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the origins of Sa-paṅ's new view of scholarship, and I lay out the general character of the scholar as Sa-paṅ presents it in the opening of the *Gateway*. In subsequent chapters, I will focus in turn upon Sa-paṅ's treatments of particular areas of scholarship: terminological expertise and translation theory (chapter 2), grammar and Buddhist philosophy of language (chapter 3), Buddhist hermeneutics (chapter 4), intellectual conventions (chapter 5), and poetics (chapter 6). In the concluding chapter (chapter 7), I pull together the themes of these chapters in the attempt to draw a complete picture of Sa-paṅ's comprehensive vision for Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. In the appendixes I supply (A) a summary and outline of the relevant sections of the *Gateway*, and (B) a translation of the first chapter of the *Gateway* up to, but not including, where Sa-paṅ begins to paraphrase the *Kāvyaḍarśa* of Daṅḍin.²¹

ŚĀKYAŚRĪBHADRA AND THE INDIANIZATION OF TIBET

In the *Gateway*, Sa-ṅga adopts a rhetoric of exasperation with the intellectual abilities of his contemporaries. As he writes, most Tibetans are badly educated at best, especially when it comes to issues of linguistic and textual analysis:

Some here in the snowy mountain ranges [of Tibet] who claim to be learned are not well trained in the analysis of sound itself, in providing the grammatical affixes for nominal inflection of a formed word, in providing the grammatical affixes for inflections (*ti ngan ta*) in verbal formation, in applying the four, six, etc. *kāraḥas*, in distinguishing such things as the object (*dn̄gos, vastu*) and the reversal (*bzlog pa, viparyāsa*) in an analogy, in the nature of verbal ornamentation, in distinguishing among such things as expressions of substance and quality, in the different methods for divisions and headings, in how to summarize based on the general and sub-headings in a summary, in deciding among opposing [positions] in reckoning and ascertainment (*grangs nges pa*), in eliminating wrong views, in how to get a definitive ascertainment by way of the purpose, and in joining the order of words and meanings in a structure that is pleasant to say and easy to understand, and so [they] are, for the most part, mistaken. This *Gateway to Learning* is related for their benefit.²²

The *Gateway* thus sets itself up as an attempt to rectify the dearth of proper scholarship in Tibet. This is the rhetorical stance of much of Sa-ṅga's work, in which he often dedicates space to correcting mistakes of Tibetan scholars and establishing what he sees to be the correct interpretation of the Indian masters.²³ Over against his rivals, Sa-ṅga paints himself as embodying the quintessence of Indian scholarship. This is articulated most dramatically in his poem *The Eight Affirmations of the Ego* (*Nga brgyad ma 'grel pa dang bcas*), wherein the ego affirmed is his own. He claims to be master of all of the esoteric and exoteric sciences, with no equal anywhere. In Kapstein's translation:²⁴

I am the grammarian. I am the dialectician.
 Among vanquishers of sophists, peerless am I.
 I am learned in metrics. I stand alone in poetics.
 In explaining synonymics, unrivaled am I.
 I know celestial calculations. In exo- and esoteric science
 I have a discerning intellect equaled by none.
 Who can this be? Sakya alone!
 Other scholars are my reflected forms.

In commenting upon the *Eight Ego* poem, Sa-paṅ challenges the doubtful reader to examine his many accomplished writings in order to test the great scholar's erudition.²⁵ One of those impressive works is, of course, the *Gateway*. A similar claim appears in the opening to the *Gateway*:

By having heard, seen, and grown accustomed to many [teachings]
 And being able to give close instructions [upon them], the glorious
 Kun-dga'
 Rgyal-mtshan [371] is explaining something here;
 Scholars, make yourselves happy: Listen up!²⁶

Sa-paṅ's vision of the scholar, then, which he embodied but which he believed most other Tibetans of his time failed to meet, was that of the consummate Indian intellectual, the comprehensive virtuoso *paṅḍita*. In his autocommentary to this verse, Sa-paṅ justifies his claims to expertise by listing texts he has studied in each area of learning.²⁷ Even if the *Gateway* does not go in depth into all of these realms of scholarship, it is still the "Gateway" for them all, since it provides the basic tools for all scholarship.

Why was Sa-paṅ's intellectual vision different from his predecessors? As heir to the throne at Sakya, Sa-paṅ was given a first-class education, and he proved an outstanding student.²⁸ He began his studies at home with his uncle, the great tantric scholar Trakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216), and then traveled to the upper Nyang Valley in central Tibet for study with several well-known masters, especially in epistemology and logic.²⁹ What finally changed the course of his education, and in turn, changed the course of Tibet's intellectual life, was that after returning home for his father's illness, Sa-paṅ met the great Kashmiri *paṅḍita* Śākyaśrībhadrā.³⁰

Buddhism had been in decline across northern India for some time before, but when Śākyaśrī first visited Magadha at the turn of the thirteenth century,³¹ the sun had truly set on the great Buddhist monastic colleges of India. Indeed, before long Buddhism would essentially die out in the land of its birth. Odantapura and Vikramaśīla, once great centers of learning, had been destroyed.³² Śākyaśrī and his followers had to continue on to Jagaddala for their studies. Even there it was only safe to stay for three years, after which they turned northward to Nepal and, when invited by the translator Thropu Lotsāwa, to Tibet. This is how India's tremendous loss turned out to be Tibet's good fortune. Still, though texts would continue to arrive throughout Tibet's history, the demise of Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, and the other major monastic centers of India desiccated the main sources for the flow of Buddhist Sanskrit literature into Tibet, "like a pond whose tributary streams have dried up."³³ The eleven years that Śākyaśrī and his retinue taught and studied in Tibet would represent one of the last major influxes of Buddhist texts and teachings from

India.³⁴ As a direct result of this “last word” on Indian scholarship, the students of Śākyaśrī would indelibly transform Tibet’s intellectual life and history.³⁵

For several years Sa-paṅ studied under Śākyaśrī, who was to become his preceptor (*upādhyāya*),³⁶ as well as with three other Indian *paṇḍitas* of Śākyaśrī’s entourage: Sugataśrī, Saṃghaśrī, and Dānaśīla.³⁷ Sugataśrī, in particular, acted as Sa-paṅ’s private tutor at Sakya for three years, teaching him Sanskrit grammar, poetics, *kāvya*, lexicography, and drama.³⁸ Sa-paṅ became a translator, was deeply interested and successful in Sanskrit language, and was among the first Tibetans to be granted the title *paṇḍita*—an expression of his having mastered the entirety of the traditional Sanskrit curriculum. It is this breadth of learning that distinguished Śākyaśrī’s disciples from previous Tibetan scholars. Eventually, through promoting the logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa*) tradition of Śākyaśrī, Sa-paṅ became one of the most influential philosophers of Tibetan history. But more importantly for the purposes of our discussion here, Sa-paṅ and the other Tibetan followers of Śākyaśrī were able to act as *paṇḍitas* capable in the full scope of Indian learning—formalized, we will see below, as “the Five Sciences” (*pañca-vidyāsthāna*).

This book is an investigation of the ideals of Śākyaśrī’s circle (the new wave in the Neoconservative Movement), as understood by its best known Tibetan advocate, Sa-paṅ. In order to get a sense of this movement from other sources, therefore, we should at least be aware of its two most prominent other members, among the best known scholar/translators of their time, whom Sa-paṅ would have identified as scholarly compatriots: Chak Lotsāwa and Thropu Lotsāwa.

As much as Sa-paṅ adopts a grandiose rhetoric of his own scholarly uniqueness, he is also recorded as having expressed his jealousy of Chak Lotsāwa for his scholarly abilities and experience:

When the Dharmasvāmin [Chag Lo-tsā-ba] was staying in Nepāla, the Dharmasvāmin Sa-skya Paṇḍita requested him to send him the bDud-rtsi thigs-pa (Tg. bGyud, LXXV, I), a commentary on the *Nāmasaṅgītī*. The Dharmasvāmin sent him the Indian original of the text. Then the Sa-skya Paṇḍita again asked the Dharmasvāmin to send him the Tibetan translation prepared by the Dharmasvāmin. When it was sent, the Sa-skya Paṇḍita looked through it and became very pleased. Later when they met at Sa-skya and discussed (the text), the Dharmasvāmin Sa-skya-pa said, “Surely after the lo-tsā-ba Rin-chen bzañ-po there was no other scholar greater than you! When I also thought of becoming a scholar like you, my father and grand-father did not allow me to go to India. As a result of which their grace diminished. At the best they did not make me abandon religion and wealth, at the worst they did not send (me) to India.” Later, in Mongolia the Sa-skya Paṇḍita is reported to have said, “Chag lo-tsā-ba is himself a scholar. If you wish to study, meet him!”³⁹

This remarkable passage adds dimension to the appearance of egotism in Sa-pan's *Eight Affirmations of the Ego*. The story seems to record that Sa-pan was interested to test the translation abilities of his former student,⁴⁰ but one cannot help wondering whether Sa-pan had not simply asked for Chak's Tibetan translation because he himself had questions about its very difficult original Sanskrit. Whichever the reason, though, Sa-pan was convinced after receiving the document that Chak had succeeded, throughout his travels, in becoming a greater scholar than Sa-pan, stuck in Tibet, was ever able to become. At least, this is the point of this story, which comes at the end of Chak Lotsāwa's biography—a document that, among its many interesting qualities, teaches the lesson that great practical advantages can accrue to a great scholar through travels in India.

If the translators were the scholar's scholars of Tibet, Chak Lotsāwa was what might be called a "translator's translator," and he achieved this state by seeking out texts and teachers in India and Nepal. His biography records that "he mastered the entirety of, in general, the five sciences, and in particular, tantra, linguistics, and logic" as a result of his study with twelve great Indian *paṇḍitas*.⁴¹ The story of his travels to India to see the great monasteries (*viḥāras*), which he undertook in spite of the dangers of repeated military incursions from Turkey, are well worth reading, and I will tell only one highlight. The climax comes perhaps when Chak discovers the great *paṇḍita* Rāhulaśrībhadra at Nālandā, deserted by his students. The translator stayed with him to study, hid with him when the soldiers arrived, and eventually carried the aged *paṇḍita* on his back to safety. One can understand why Sa-pan's family prevented him from travelling in India as a youth. There were real dangers to this pursuit of *paṇḍityam*, but the result, evident in Sa-pan's praise of Chak's abilities, could well be worth the risk.

I mentioned that Sa-pan was one of Chak Lotsāwa's teachers. Another was the great Thropu Lotsāwa, famed not only as another great disciple of Śākyaśrī,⁴² but also as a scholar who was able to bring three great *paṇḍitas* to Tibet from India.⁴³ This was no small achievement. Thropu Lotsāwa sent letters requesting Śākyaśrī to come to Tibet, and received a positive reply before he ever met the *paṇḍita*. When they first met, however, Śākyaśrī was apparently a bit surprised and disappointed by the youth of his host, and was rethinking his choice to follow him to Tibet. Informed of this, Thropu set up a display of his great intellect, questioning the nine lesser *paṇḍitas* before the learned assembly. This so pleased Śākyaśrī that he was ready to leave before Thropu could put together his own necessary arrangements.⁴⁴

These scholars were avid searchers for original, authentic, Indian teachings and interpretations, and for them Sanskrit learning was the method of ensuring the veracity of the teachings. Unlike other, competing scholars, who would attempt to fortify their connection to India by a shortened lineage, by a

vision, or by discovered treasures, these teachers sought to transplant the entire Indian tradition of learning itself. By studying for many years with the Kashmiri *paṇḍita* and his entourage, Sa-paṇ and his contemporaries gained a depth of Indian learning rarely seen among Tibetans. As for Sa-paṇ himself, he would retranslate Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* with Śākyaśrī and by promoting it transform the face of Tibetan philosophy; and, he would work to establish in Tibet what he saw to be the acme of Indian Buddhist scholarship even as it disappeared from its Indian homeland.

As to the question of Sa-paṇ's and Śākyaśrī's influence on future studies in Tibet, it would be difficult to overstate their success. This might partly be credited to the ideas themselves—in particular, to the way the five sciences serve the needs of rationalizing the neoconservative cause—but we must admit that the bulk of the cause rests in peculiar circumstances of history. For, in the last years of his life, Sa-paṇ was summoned by the Mongol Köden Khan, who was threatening to invade Tibet. Sa-paṇ brought his two young nephews, Pakpa and Chakna, both of whom therefore ended up spending their formative years living among the Mongol chiefs, as their captives. Some years after Sa-paṇ's death, Pakpa was chosen as the preceptor to Qubilai Khan, and consequently as religious and temporal leader of all of Tibet. Pakpa was thus the first in a series of figures in whom the combined leadership of the political and religious realms would be most permanently formalized in the tradition of the Dalai Lamas.

If Pakpa's relationship with Qubilai Khan followed from the fact of Sa-paṇ's having been summoned to Köden's court, it might seem appropriate to ask just why Sa-paṇ was summoned. Davidson is probably right to attribute the Mongol interests primarily to the Sakya lords' well-known monopolies on powerful tantric maṇḍalas, in particular their mastery of the *Lamdre* system of the *Hevajra Tantra*. Yet at least part of the Mongols' assumption that Sa-paṇ could prove a useful member of their court might well be attributable to the fact that he was widely reputed a great scholar—a reputation that he had secured for himself through composing the *Gateway*, among other works. The specifics of Sa-paṇ's literary interests, which we will have occasion to discuss in later chapters, are particularly suggestive in this regard. But this cause hardly predicts the incredible result: More than a century of Sakya overlordship of a unified Tibet, during which Pakpa and his Sakya successors promoted Sakya scholarship and oversaw vast translation enterprises dedicated to the development of Sa-paṇ's vision of *paṇḍityam* among Tibetans. This is the period during which nearly all of the Tibetan canon's works of Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*), literary theory (*alaṅkāra*), and metrics were first translated. It is the period during which Sakya monastery became established as the preeminent site for training in logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa*), the tool that Sa-paṇ considered the most crucial for distinguishing correct from incorrect doctrines. Indeed, great scholars of every

tradition would come to study at Sakya monastery, including such influential luminaries as the editor of the Tibetan canon, Butön Rinchendrup and the founder of the Gelukpa, Je Tsongkhapa. These scholars—indeed, all of Tibetan scholarship to follow—would come under the influence of the vision of learning articulated by Sa-paṅ and promoted by his Sakya successors. I do not mean to overstate this influence. Sa-paṅ’s unified curriculum was never practiced as he articulates it in the *Gateway*, and never had exactly the effect he had hoped. Yet Sa-paṅ is rightly credited with having consolidated the study of the “five sciences” across Tibet, and with having made the linguistic sciences—poetry (*kāvya*) in particular—the crown jewel in a great scholar’s intellectual repertoire.⁴⁵ The manner in which this took place, however, must be seen as something of an accident of history.

THE FIVE SCIENCES AND THE GOAL OF SCHOLARLY PERFECTION

Sa-paṅ does not think that a scholar’s education is, or should be, limited to topics that contribute directly to the practitioner’s advancement on the Buddhist path. Instead, he provides us a better model when he describes the purpose of debate, which is intended to preserve the true dharma against the false, to defend the correct interpretation against the incorrect:

A noble person should debate as proponent or respondent for the sake of dispelling error and for making understood the unmistakable facts of the matter, with the aim of maintaining his own doctrine.⁴⁶

My analysis in the chapters that follow will illuminate why Sa-paṅ believes that the full panoply of scholarly abilities fit together and how they allow the scholar to protect the “unmistaken facts of the matter”—that is, the true dharma. We will see that the linguistic skills that Sa-paṅ studied with Sugataśrī are no more and no less a necessary part of the scholar’s abilities than the *pramāṇa* studies for which he was most famous, and they all work together, reinforcing and supporting one another.

A traditional statement of this view appears in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (*The Ornament to the [Buddha’s] Discourses on the Great Vehicle*, MSA), which Sa-paṅ quotes in the opening to the *Gateway*:

Without becoming a scholar in the five sciences
Not even the supreme sage can become omniscient.
For the sake of refuting and supporting others,
And for the sake of knowing everything himself, he makes an effort in
these [five sciences].⁴⁷

The first half of the verse tells us that even an advanced bodhisattva must study the five sciences, or he can never achieve omniscience. Contrary to my opening claim, this does seem to place the *paṇḍita*'s education within the context of the Buddhist path. But we must investigate further. What are these five sciences (*vidyāsthāna*), which here represent the comprehensive knowledge of a true scholar, and which across Tibet in the centuries to follow would become the touchstone for judging a scholar's educational achievement?⁴⁸ Sa-pan glosses with a traditional list:

Grammar is [the science of] language; reasoning is [the science of] logic; the outer science is crafts; the inner science is the transmitted [Buddha's] teachings (*dharma*); and medicine is the science of remedies—[so are the five sciences] explained.⁴⁹

The five are linguistic science (*śabdavidyā*), logical science (*hetuvidyā*), medical science (*cikitsāvidyā*), science of fine arts and crafts (*śilpakarmasthānavidyā*), and the spiritual sciences (*adhyātmavidyā*) of the dharma. The second half of the MSA verse, as further explanation, divides up these five sciences into the three purposes served by the Buddha's studies: Two goals for others—to refute others and support others—and one goal for the Buddha himself—to come to know everything. As the commentary tells us, and as I represent in Table 1.1, linguistics and logic are studied to refute others; medicine and crafts are studied to assist, or support others; and the dharma itself is studied for one's own sake, in order to attain omniscience.⁵⁰

Now, it is clear how a doctor with medical training can help other people, and the fascinating question of why Buddhism values the arts as a way of helping others is, unfortunately, a question for another study. But the main topics of the *Gateway* are the first two sciences: linguistic and logical studies. The *Gateway*'s first and second chapters are introductions to the linguistic sciences, and its third chapter introduces logical debate.⁵¹ What makes “refuting others” such

Table 1.1. MSA 11.60 on the five sciences (*pañcavidyā*): first interpretation

Five Sciences	Purpose	For the Sake of
linguistic science } logical science } medical science } science of fine arts and crafts } dharma, “inner science”	refuting } supporting } knowing everything (omniscience)	others } oneself

a meritorious act that it befits an aspiring Buddha? Why is this said to benefit “others”? Well, the most evident possibility is that the bodhisattva has to serve the *saṅgha*, the Buddhist community, in this case by refuting wrong views—either as a teacher or in public debate against heretics and non-Buddhists. The point, as I take it, is that the true dharma, the Buddha’s teachings, needs to be protected against the corrosion of false views. So, the purpose of logic and linguistics are not to explore and create new ideas, but to protect and defend the correct Buddhist view against misunderstandings and against the attacks of non-Buddhists. It is an essentially conservative view of scholarship.

Now, to complicate things, notice that there’s an apparent contradiction between the first and second halves of the MSA verse. How can it be claimed in the second part that the ‘inner science’ of *dharmic practice* is what brings omniscience, when it was already said that the bodhisattva cannot attain omniscience without *all five* sciences? In fact, both appear in the commentary, as well. It says first that “All [are to be investigated] together for the sake of achieving omniscience,”⁵² and then goes on, when setting them out separately, to say that specifically “[one studies] spiritual science for the sake of knowledge for oneself.”⁵³ Why do you need all five if you’ve already got omniscience? The solution to the puzzle is in Table 1.2, where I’ve shifted the “others” and “oneself” up into the header row.

On this reading, the verse seems to be saying that the two *goals* of the bodhisattva’s study that are directed toward *other* beings—refuting wrong views and helping others—come earlier, and are necessary stages on the path toward omniscience. So when the verse says that the bodhisattva needs to study in order to gain omniscience, this is not meant to say that the bodhisattva has to gather together all of the various knowledges until he has acquired omniscience. Instead, the point is that the compassionate acts of a bodhisattva, the acts that help one to progress, spiritually, on the Buddhist path, require scholarly study.

To summarize the two points I take from this verse, and I believe Sa-paṅ would agree: First, logical and linguistic study are understood to work together,

Table 1.2. MSA 11.60 on the five sciences (*pañcavidyā*): second interpretation

Five Sciences	For Others	For Oneself
linguistic science	refuting	} omniscience
logical science		
medical science	supporting	
science of fine arts and crafts		
dharma, “inner science”		

conservatively, to preserve the authentic teachings; and second, this defensive practice of protecting the Buddhist dharma is an essential act on the path of the bodhisattva, the path to Buddhahood. This second point places the intellectual practices noted in the first point within the framework of the path, and thus imbues them with practical Buddhist value. This does place scholarship within a soteriological framework, since it is valuable to whatever degree it may contribute to defending the truth of the dharma. But this is entirely different from saying that the intellectual practices themselves are in any way distinctive Buddhist practices or paths. I believe that this is the general view that Sa-paṅ is advocating in the *Gateway*, and I will attempt to show in increasing particularity just how the various aspects of linguistics and philosophy he presents fit into this structure.⁵⁴

Before we move on to specific skills, though, we can gain a better general understanding from the opening of the *Gateway*. Early on, Sa-paṅ defines the scholar in two ways:

If you should ask, Who is called a “scholar”? Someone who knows all knowable things unmistakably; alternatively, whatever specific teachings you know, in that and that alone you get called “scholar.”⁵⁵

The second definition, that a scholar is always a scholar *of* something, is in agreement with a modern secular academic understanding of the term. But we do not ordinarily accept the existence of the first, the all-knowing scholar. Who is this omniscient scholar? It may be said that the entire opening of the *Gateway* is about this question. First, we need look no further than the *Gateway*'s opening verse of reverence. Sa-paṅ begins the *Gateway* by praising the guru and Mañjuśrī for possessing two lists of qualities shared in the essence of all Buddhas, the Four Specific Knowledges and the Four Fearlessnesses. As Sa-paṅ explains, these are the qualities of knowledge that allow the Buddhas to teach the dharma:

This partial [listing] of qualities [of the guru and Mañjuśrī] begins the treatise with [their] own attainment of confidence in the four specific knowledges, and [their use] for others [of] the four fearlessnesses to roar like a lion in the midst of the assembly.

These [qualities] are, furthermore, the four specific knowledges—meanings, classifications, confidence, and definitive wording—by means of which [the guru] has attained mastery over everything that can be known; and, both for his own (*rang*) sake and the sake of others, the four fearlessnesses—realization, abandonment, [teaching] the path to Buddhahood, and teaching its obstacles—which [he] has achieved by being invincible to others [such as] the *tīrthikas* together with [their] gods (*lha dang bcas pa'i mu stegs*). Through this method, in composing texts himself, explaining them to others, and clarifying wrong views, he fears nothing;

and since this is the complete basis for the perfection of the lion's roar, [I] explained this at the beginning.⁵⁶

The lion's roar in the midst of the assembly—an assembly that might include followers or opponents—is the perfect characterization of the Buddha's unwavering and invincible power to teach and protect the dharma. Sa-paṇ makes explicit that it is “through this method”—that is, the method of the four fearlessnesses and the four specific knowledges—that the perfect Buddhas fearlessly engage in the *Gateway's* three topics of composition, exposition, and debate. The Buddhas are, thus, the paradigmatic scholars. Clearly, these are the powers to be sought and emulated by all protectors of the dharma who seek to engage in these scholarly activities.

The modern commentator Tashi Chöpel gives a description of the four specific knowledges that explains the topics condensed in this brief passage with the central issues of the *Gateway*:

The four specific knowledges are:

1. The specific knowledge of true meanings, in which, having understood just as it is the essential nature and taxonomic grouping (and so forth) of everything in samsara and nirvana, one gains mastery over these teachable meanings, without even a shred of the faults of misunderstanding, wrong-thinking, or doubt;
2. The specific knowledge of classifications, in which one understands just as they are [both] the perfect words that are used to express these knowable meanings, and a full listing of the names of every thing, and so forth;
3. The specific knowledge of confidence, in which, having developed confidence in exposition, debate, and composition on all knowable things—skills that are summarized in the ten sciences—one has an inconceivable ability to uphold what is right and defeat mistaken views;
4. The specific knowledge of language, in which, in accord with the national language [Chinese] and the minority languages⁵⁷ one is able to teach [one's] meaning with the right words, without faults such as using unclear words, being less than thorough, or confusing causes and results.

These four, the lion's roar (declaration) in the assembly, are the uncommon inner cause of attaining the confidence that fears nothing of composing [texts] oneself, giving teachings to others, or clarifying mistaken understandings.⁵⁸

This comment shows the specific knowledges to be in a kind of cumulative order. First, one comes to know all things individually as they truly are, then one

understands how to express these classifications through language. Then, the third specific knowledge declares the virtue of confidence. A kind of extreme certainty comes as a result of having acquired perfect knowledge of all the sciences, and allows one to engage in teaching and defending what is right. Finally comes the fourth specific knowledge, which is not merely the linguistic knowledge necessary to express ideas (which was the second specific knowledge), but the very special linguistic knowledge necessary to express each idea in a way appropriate to its context and its hearer.

Likening the guru to Mañjuśrī, along with all the Buddhas, refers specifically to Sa-paṅ's own root guru, his uncle Trakpa Gyeltsen. It is an ordinary part of tantric Buddhist practice to envision one's guru as equivalent to the Buddhas of the three times, and we do not want to place too heavy an emphasis on this occasion. Still, claiming that his own guru was equivalent to Mañjuśrī *in teaching ability* suggests that Sa-paṅ was well positioned for a perfect reception of the teaching. This sets up the discussion that follows.

Next, Sa-paṅ explains his reason for composing the *Gateway*, which, as I have already noted, was to fill a gap in Tibetan learning. Sa-paṅ provides his list of categories on which he has seen Tibetans to be, "for the most part mistaken." Then, to declare his own ability to teach and clarify the issues on these topics, Sa-paṅ gives a resume of his own abilities. The following are the topics on which he claims to be expert, having "seen, heard, and grown accustomed to" major texts (which he lists) on each one: (1) Grammar, (2) Logic, (3) Poetry, (4) Metrics, (5) Poetics (*alaṅkāra*), (6) Synonymics, (7) Drama, (8) Medicine, (9) Crafts, (10) astronomical calculations of various kinds (including the vital energy analyses of the *Kālacakra*), and (11) all of the Buddhist "Inner Sciences," including Sutra, Vinaya, Abhidharma, and the four Tantra classes.⁵⁹

After this list, Sa-paṅ turns to the central topic of the nature of a scholar, citing the two types of scholar mentioned above. Which, we might wonder, is Sa-paṅ claiming to be? Well, it is immediately after these definitions of scholarship that Sa-paṅ cites the famous verse from the MSA discussed above, which says that omniscience (*sarvajñatvaṃ*) is unattainable by one who has not studied the "five sciences." Sa-paṅ says that these five sciences are "the subjects to be learned by that scholar"—meaning, perhaps, the one "who knows all knowable things unmistakably."⁶⁰ Thus, the *Gateway*, as a key to the five sciences, is a crucial first step in attaining omniscience; it is a "Gateway" to omniscience, which is itself an essential characteristic of the bodhisattva path. And, Sa-paṅ, the guide into this material, is clearly a master of all of the sciences.

Does this mean that Sa-paṅ is claiming to be an all-knowing Buddha? Of course, the MSA verse does not say that the all-knowing scholar is, necessarily, an advanced bodhisattva; omniscience is not described as a sufficient but only a necessary condition for the bodhisattva's advancement.⁶¹ Yet by equating the "five sciences" with the objects of knowledge of "that scholar," Sa-paṅ does seem

to suggest that mastering the five sciences is a *sufficient* condition for attainment of a kind of scholarly omniscience. Then, if the five sciences are what the omniscient scholar knows, Sa-paṅ does seem to be claiming, indirectly, to be all-knowing. We have, then, with the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* reference and the references to the lion's roar, two homomorphisms between the scholarly ideal—Buddha as scholar—and the living scholar, and sandwiched between them a suggestion that Sa-paṅ, among few other Tibetans, evinces that ideal.

A clearer answer to the question of Sa-paṅ's own claim to knowing everything comes from the life story of Sa-paṅ's disciple Martön, the author of the *Zhib mo rdo rje*, as recorded by Lowo Khenchen. When he showed Sa-paṅ his *Lamdre* commentary, the *Gsung sgras ma*, Sa-paṅ is reported to have said:

You have gained an understanding of the words in my explanation, without leaving out a single word. You will become a great expert who achieves mastery of everything knowable.⁶²

If Martön is to achieve mastery of everything that can be known as a result of his studies with Sa-paṅ, it is no stretch to imagine that Sa-paṅ considers himself to have achieved such mastery as well. Indeed, Sa-paṅ also seems to hold the view that the disciple can only be as good as the master.⁶³

But if Sa-paṅ believes this to be his own achievement and also a likely future for his student, surely we must use the English word “omniscience” with caution. We should remember that omniscience in Buddhism is not the same as the omniscience attributed to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, eternal knower of everything. Buddhist omniscience (*sarvajñatā*), for instance, is not a state of awareness that includes all things simultaneously. The Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu writes in the *Abhidharmakośa* that “we do not declare the Buddha to be omniscient owing to manifest knowledge of everything,” but rather “owing to potentiality.”⁶⁴ Whatever the Buddha takes as an intentional object, he knows perfectly, as fire consumes whatever fuel comes into contact with it. Another explanation says that the Buddha knows all dharmas (*sarvadharmajñatā*), but in the sense of knowing every *class category*—every *kind* of dharma, with its proper application. So he knows perfectly what he needs to know to respond appropriately to every situation, but this does not require of him the knowledge of every particular.⁶⁵ The Buddha knows everything he needs to know, when he needs to know it: I will call this *relative omniscience*.

Sa-paṅ gives every indication that the “five sciences” consist in a vast but still finite scope of knowledge that is attainable by humans. Sa-paṅ may truly believe that it is possible, through ordinary scholarly training in the five sciences, to learn *everything that you'll ever need to know*. This may not be identical to the complete knowledge of a Buddha. In fact, in the *Treasury*, Sa-paṅ explicitly says that knowledge of ultimate truth is beyond what can be conceived (*bsam gyi mi*

khyab pa).⁶⁶ But before achieving perfect Buddhahood, scholarship may provide the next best thing: a kind of omniscience that is available in this world, the relative omniscience of a scholar. Perhaps the ability to negotiate all known fields with a knowledge that is “active and useful” justifies the scholar’s claim to comprehensive mastery. Butön, after all, was also to be known as “the all-knowing one” for his scholarly—as well as religious—accomplishments.⁶⁷

How does this notion of relative omniscience conform to an ideal of learning actually sought in the circles Sa-pan wanted more Tibetans to emulate? I have already quoted Chak Lotāwa’s biography where it is said that he, too, “mastered the entirety of . . . the five sciences.”⁶⁸ Yijing reports of the Indian Buddhist “Method of learning in the West” that included “all the vinaya works and investigat[ing] the *sūtras* and *śāstras*”; extensive study in grammar and language (*śabdavidyā*) preceded that of logic (*hetuvidyā*) and metaphysics (*abhidharmaakośa*). As a result of this breadth in learning, the learned monks were able “to oppose the heretics as they would drive beasts . . . and explain away disputations as boiling water melts frost.”⁶⁹

But, as Yijing writes, not everyone is expected to fulfill this education agenda: “Of such persons in every generation only one or two appear.”⁷⁰ Xuanzang concurs in his description of Nālandā, writing that the slim odds of even passing the test to enter the debate court only limit the number of people subject to inevitable failure:

If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions; many are unable to answer, and retire. One must have studied deeply both old and new (*books*) before getting admission. Those students, therefore, who come here as strangers, have to show their ability by hard discussion; those who fail compared with those who succeed are as seven or eight to ten. The other two or three of moderate talent, when they come to discuss in turn in the assembly, are sure to be humbled, and to forfeit their renown.⁷¹

The community of learning at Nālandā thus had an exceptionally high standard for inclusion. The result was that those who could pass muster could be counted among the elite of Buddhist learning:

But with respect to those of conspicuous talent of solid learning, great ability, illustrious virtue, distinguished men, these connect (*their high names*) with the succession (*of celebrities belonging to the college*) such as Dharmapāla (Hu-fa) and Chandrapāla (Hu-yueh), who excited by their bequeathed teaching the thoughtless and worldly; Guṇamati (Tih-hwui) and Sthiramati (Kin-hwui), the streams of whose superior teaching spread abroad even now; Prabhāmitra (Kwang-yeu), with his clear discourses; Ji-

namitra (Shing-yeu), with his exalted eloquence; the pattern and fame (*sayings and doings*) of Jñānachandra (Chi-yueh) reflect his brilliant activity; Śigrabuddha (?) (Ming-min), and Śilabhadra (Kiaï-hien), and other eminent men whose names are lost. These illustrious personages, known to all, excelled in their attainments (*virtue*) all their distinguished predecessors, and passed the bounds of the ancients in their learning. Each of these composed some tens of treatises and commentaries which were widely diffused, and which for their perspicuity are passed down to the present time.⁷²

In a similar passage, Tāranātha names the six famed “gatekeepers,” or *dvāra-panḍitas*, at Vikramaśīla: Ratnākaraśānti, Vāgīśvarakīrti, Naropa, Prajñākaramati, Ratnavajra, and Jñānaśrīmitra.⁷³ I have these passages in mind when I call Sa-pan a “gatekeeper.” Sa-pan is describing the standard of learning held by those whose job it is to keep ragged, itinerant ideas from entering the intellectual stronghold. As Jackson quipped, the *Gateway* is a difficult gateway to pass through, and only a few virtuoso scholars in Tibetan history have tried.⁷⁴ This may be overstated (the *Gateway* was, after all, taught in general lectures to all monks at the Sakya College in Dehra Dun when I visited there in 2000), but surely it is correct that Sa-pan considered mastery of the five sciences a very special ideal of scholarship. It seems reasonable to say that part of the purpose of the *Gateway* was to show the way for elite scholars seeking to emulate those previous famed “gatekeepers.” In a story said to be Sa-pan’s own words, the *Zhib mo rdo rje* records the words of the great translator Drokmi’s *panḍita* teacher who recommended that he meet with Śāntipa, saying that he was “famed as a second Omniscient one in the age of strife,” and that he was “one of the six experts at the gates of the temple of Vikramaśīla.”⁷⁵ The term applied to these six “experts” is, of course, *mkhas pa*, which I am translating as “scholar” and “learning.” Thus, though the word used in Tibetan for a gatekeeper of Vikramaśīla is *sgo-srung*, Skt. *dvāra-pāla*, which is not the term Sa-pan uses for the gateway in the *Gateway*’s title, there is an implicit link between the ideal scholars who were the gatekeepers at Vikramaśīla, considered “omniscient ones” on earth, and the ideal scholar of the *Gateway to Learning*.

Sa-pan writes, in a concluding verse to the *Gateway*:

(III 73) So that the Sage’s Doctrine may widely flourish and so that it may remain for a long time in this world, I have opened the three entrance doors for the wise who uphold the traditions of scholarship. May the wise enter within!⁷⁶

In this verse the “three entrance doors” are, clearly, those of composition, exposition, and debate. One might think, then, that it is the *pupil* who is invited

to enter in, learn these methods, and begin to attain to a state of wisdom. Surely the pupil who seeks the highest of goals is intended as well, but Sa-pan especially extends his invitation to the wise—the already wise—who want to attain still higher states of learning:

This treatise, the *Entrance Gate for the Wise*, which establishes the procedures of composition, teaching and debate, is a gateway by which intelligent persons enter into the great city of liberation; it is a passageway to be crossed over by noble persons.⁷⁷

And, since the state of the dharma is in decline, Sa-pan believes that such noble persons are hard to come by, and that diligent study among the ignorant is hard to do:

(III 77) Nowadays this doctrine of the Śākya Lion diminishes day by day, like a pond whose tributary streams have dried up. Those who have bright minds [and] who desire liberation must exert themselves for an excellent understanding of this procedure.⁷⁸

Sa-pan sees himself as a protector of the doctrine, not merely as a link in the chain of the lineage, but a trainer for “those who uphold the traditions of scholarship.” This suggests the elite corps of scholars that Sa-pan envisions as the last bastion, protectors of the fortified city of proper scholarship.⁷⁹ It begins to make a bit more sense to speak of these persons—the virtuoso, scholar-intellectuals—as “omniscient” at least in a relative sense, in the hope that they really can protect the doctrine against all comers. Sa-pan is simply claiming, with a detailed resume of his own abilities, to be one of the greatest Tibetan representatives of this well-established tradition of elite Indian scholars.

A final citation from the *Gateway* places us, once again, on the line between an appeal to scholars in the world and a projection of an imagined realm of perfect knowledge. After an arduous and detailed discussion of potential errors in interpretation that might arise for untrained scholars, Sa-pan cites, once more, the importance of general training in the linguistic sciences, but then moves immediately into another topic, from which all knowledge may be approached “in general”:

If you desire to understand well the meaning of such words, you need to be suitably trained in the five sciences. Specifically, you should be well acquainted with grammar, metrics, poetics, and lexicography, etc. In general, you need to know the dharaṇī doorways into mastery over everything that can be known.⁸⁰

The “mastery over everything that can be known” is the same object as the four specific knowledges, and thus is the ultimate object of all intellectual occupation. But here the method of practice, far from the context of teachers and students and texts that are the common topics of the rest of the *Gateway*, involves the meditation upon *dharaṇī*, magical incantations, in order to perfect one’s knowledge. Sa-paṅ is not saying that one method works and the other doesn’t; rather, using both methods is best. Even if it is possible for ordinary beings to achieve this knowledge, we should not forget that one of the five sciences is Buddhist practice, which includes such extraordinary methods.

The belief in *relative omniscience* would appear to reflect two cross-culturally characteristic elements of “scholastic” traditions, as José Cabezón has summarized the concept: Scholastics hold a strong belief in “completeness and compactness,” that “nothing essential to the project of salvation has been neglected,” together with the idea of the “epistemological accessibility of the world,” that every fact is knowable.⁸¹ As I understand Cabezón’s argument, the two concepts of completeness and compactness are linked because they sit under a common aegis of authority: nothing has been overlooked by the tradition in its formalization and canonization, and so nothing new need be added and nothing old can be removed. This, together with the fact of the world’s transparency to analysis, allows us to make still greater sense of Sa-paṅ’s notion of the omniscient scholar: it suggests that *to understand properly is to understand the whole, and such understanding is attainable*.

Thus Sa-paṅ and his colleagues who sought to formalize the ideals of the neoconservative movement through “Indianizing” or “Indologizing” Tibetan modes of learning did not need so much to *invent* a scholastic tradition, as they needed to discover and comprehend it as a properly comprehensive scholastic unity, and then translate and reconfigure it for their Tibetan contemporaries. It is this project that we might call their building the fortifying walls, and training the gatekeepers, of the proper Buddhist intellectual tradition. A crucial element of this, and perhaps all, scholastic traditions, then, is the belief that the tradition, once mastered, qualifies one to be such a necessarily invincible gatekeeper. It provides one a religiously sound position sufficient to silence the opponent—sufficient to grant one the “lion’s roar” of victory—in any and every assembly in which one may appear. Surely Sa-paṅ would like his readers to believe that he was such an invincible lion. But he was not the only one. And those who read on might learn how, with work, they could achieve this perfect intellectual mastery for themselves.