Chapter 5
Narrative Sources of the Great Debate

The ‘Great Debate’ at Bsam yas (called variously the ‘Lha sa Debate,’ the ‘Council of Lha sa’ or the ‘Council of Tibet’) has attracted much scholarly attention from the mid-twentieth century up to the present.1 The aim of this chapter is not to give a definitive reading of the key issue of the debate, i.e. the contest between the gradual and sudden paths to enlightenment. Rather, it is to examine how the narrative of the debate in the Dba’ bzhed was assembled and the function this narrative played in this version of the text.


While discussing the sources that were used to build the account of the debate in the Dba’ bzhed, I will digress to explain the identity and stance of Sang shi, one of the disputants. The Dba’ bzhed sheds a new light on Sang shi’s words and his philosophical alignment. This prompts a reconsideration of later versions of the Testimony of Ba and also of previous scholars’ interpretations of Sang shi’s identity and position. These problems led me to add a further section called “Further Complexities: Sang shi in the Testimony of Ba.” This moves away from the narrative of the Dba’ bzhed proper but provides useful information regarding the later Testimony of Ba tradition on this important figure.

The dispute between those who believed in an instantaneous approach to enlightenment and those who advocated a gradual path that led step-by-step to realisation belongs to the main narrative of the Testimony of Ba in all its known versions. As the text declares in its opening lines, the core of the story concerns the first appearance and establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. Such a narrative could not but describe the construction of the Bsam yas temple and the institution of the Buddhist saṃgha. Therefore, the kind of dharma and the monastic traditions that were adopted—as well as the reasons for their adoption—were unavoidable subjects of discussion. However, it is unclear when the debate came to be part of this narrative. The patchwork nature of this section of the narrative makes it improbable that the earliest compilers of the Testimony had a ready-made description of the debate on which they could draw. Despite the philosophical nature of the discussion, the debate has a strong political dimension, which suggests that compilers and redactors of the Testimony created an account that was inflected by their own positions, interests and agendas. The Dba’ bzhed compilers must have arranged the sources at their disposal—in addition to what they knew—in a way that was conducive to their point of view. That the debate was put together on the basis of different records is reasonably evident. The ‘bricks’ used to form the structure are clear, yet their arrangement reveals a number of ‘weak points’ in the fabric suggesting that the compilers were not completely free in their choice of material and that some of their sources might have contained unwelcome information.2

2 In the field of Buddhist studies, one of the first to speak of authorship as the ability to assemble new structures from old building
The following pages seek to identify as many building blocks as possible to see how and why they were brought together and to explain, moreover, the different understanding of the parts that have emerged over time. In doing this, I will follow the sequence of debate events. Table 5.1 below aims to identify the main sections of the debate and it provides a guide to the discussion that follows. The events that lead to the debate are numbered 1 to 6 in the table; for the sake of convenience I refer to these as the ‘introduction to the debate.’

**Table 5.1: Key episodes of the debate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Heshang Moheyan arrives in Tibet</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conflict between Moheyan’s followers and Śāntarakṣita’s followers</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The king summons Ye shes dbang po back from his retreat</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Ye shes dbang po recites Śāntarakṣita’s prophecy</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Kamalaśīla is summoned to Tibet</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Moheyan and his disciples prepare for the debate. They study the <em>Prajñāpāramitā sūtra</em> in one hundred thousand verses and reject the <em>Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The king opens the debate stating the reasons why the debate was held</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Moheyan speaks (3rd <em>Bhāvanākrama</em> + unidentified passage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kamalaśīla speaks (3rd <em>Bhāvanākrama</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The king opens the discussion to the followers of the two factions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sang shi speaks (historical/doctrinal remarks + summary of the Six Perfections + remarks on the instantaneous and gradual approaches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs speaks (remarks on the instantaneous and gradual approaches + <em>Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra</em> + a final attack to the instantaneous approach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The king proclaims the gradualists to be victorious</td>
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</tbody>
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**Introduction to the Debate**

The narrative of the debate starts after the account of the construction of Bsam yas and settlements for the sponsorship of the monks; this results in Ye shes dbang po’s meditative retreat in Lho brag. The text states that most monks at that time became followers of a Chinese master named Heshang Moheyan. Moheyan—according to the *Testimony*—teaches a doctrine based on absence of dualistic thought and the instantaneous attainment of nirvāṇa. This doctrinal position disagrees with that of the Indian side, put forward by Śāntarakṣita, and endorsed by the king, which asserts that nirvāṇa can be achieved only through gradual stages. As friction between these two parties increases, the followers of Moheyan cause disturbances by self-harming and threatening violence against those following the gradual path.

The king then calls Ye shes dbang po—who has gone into retreat—to solve the conflict. The latter, though unwilling to interrupt his meditation, eventually agrees to return. Once he arrives, he reprimands the king for not being able to sort out the matter on his own. Ye shes dbang po then recites the last words Śāntarakṣita pronounced before his death. These announce that during the last five hundred years of the dharma disagreements were bound to arise among the Buddhist saṅgha. At that time Śāntarakṣita’s disciple Kamalaśīla should be summoned to correct the monks who have gone astray. Śāntarakṣita’s words therefore link the well-known theory of the last five hundred years of the Buddha dharma on earth—believed to have been first pronounced by the Buddha himself—to the present disagreement between Indian and Chinese monks in Tibet. In this way, the text prepares the stage for the debate and confers on it a higher significance.

While Kamalaśīla is being fetched from Nepal, Ye shes dbang po explains the gradualist approach to the king who in turn proclaims Ye shes dbang po his spiritual teacher. The followers of the instantaneous path lock themselves in the Bsam gtan gling to study the *Prajñāpāramitā* in a hundred thousand verses in preparation for the debate. The best study to date on the development of the theory of the last five hundred years of the doctrine is Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, Calif: Asian Humanities Press, 1992). It would be difficult, however, to understand which source the *Dhaṭ bzhed* used for Śāntarakṣita’s prophecy as there is no specific detail in the story to link it to a particular account concerning the last five hundred years of the dharma. A discussion concerning the five-hundred years prophecy in this context can be found in Chapter 6 in this volume.
for the debate. The text explicitly says they set aside the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.

**The Debate**

The debate starts with the instantaneous and gradualist parties entering the temple; the king sitting in the centre, the instantaneous party on the right and the gradualists on the left. The main followers of Heshang Moheyan and Kamalaśīla are introduced. Heshang’s disciples are: Jomo Byang chub, Sru Yang dag and the monk Lang Ka. Kamalaśīla’s disciples are Dba’ Dpal dbyangs, Dba’ Rad na and “a few ordained monks” (dge slong mi mang ba zhig). A garland is presented to Heshang and Kamalaśīla. The king opens the discussion by explaining that the debate is held because disagreement has arisen between the followers of the Indian master and those of the Chinese master.

The first to speak is Heshang Moheyan. His speech spans from folio 20v, line 2 to folio 20v, line 5. Fleming Faber first recognised that the Heshang’s words come from Kamalaśīla’s third *Bhāvanākrama*. In fact, the passage from folio 20v line 2 to folio 20v, line 4 corresponds quite closely to the third *Bhāvanākrama*’s passage stretching from 122r:1 to 122r:2. This section of the *Bhāvanākrama* discusses the wrong views professed by “someone” (gang zhig) but it is uncertain whether Kamalaśīla wrote it after the debate—and therefore gives us Kamalaśīla’s understanding of Moheyan’s view—or if the compiler of the *Dba’ bzhed* put these words in Moheyan’s mouth. The final passage of Moheyan’s speech in the *Dba’ bzhed* (20v:4–20v:5) is not attested in Kamalaśīla’s work. This runs as follows: “For the intelligent, purified in previous births, virtuous and sinful deeds obscure [the mind] equally, just as the sky is obscured equally by black and white clouds. Those who do not do anything, do not conceptualise and do not focus, they instantaneously attain the level similar to the tenth stage [on the path of enlightenment].” The source of this passage is not known but these words are found in both SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3 and Dpa’ bo Gsugs lag phreng ba’s *Chos byung mkhas pa’i dga’ ston* (SBA 1980).

There are minor differences between the version of the *Bhāvanākrama* that is found nowadays in the *Bka’ gyur* and the version quoted in the *Dba’ bzhed*. Thus, it could be surmised that the compiler of the latter text was in possession of a different copy of *Bhāvanākrama* than the one now available. However, it is noteworthy that, among the different versions found in the *Testimony*, the *Dba’ bzhed* is closest to the *Bhāvanākrama* as presently preserved. It would be difficult to decide whether the last sentences of Heshang Moheyan (cited in the previous paragraph) appeared in an earlier version of the *Bhāvanākrama*—now lost but available to the compiler of the *Dba’ bzhed*—or whether the compiler, having copied the relevant section of the *Bhāvanākrama*, decided to supplement it by adding words attributed to Heshang that he had heard or read. The latter hypothesis (i.e. that the compiler added material) gains extra weight when we consider that some Tibetan texts connected with Moheyan and his instantaneous approach were created by assembling passages from the *Bhāvanākrama* and words attributed to him found in Dunhuang manuscripts. However, I was unable to locate this passage in the Dunhuang materials, so the source remains unknown for the present.

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5 *Dba’* 2000, 20r:1.

6 Faber “Council,” 49. Faber refers to the Sba bzhed-s he had at his disposal, but as the two quotations are very similar his remarks also apply to the *Dba’ bzhed*; see also Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *Dba’ bzhed: the Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha’s Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 81, n. 313.


8 Bsgom pa’i rim pa 122r:1.

9 The translations in this chapter follow that by Gonkatsang and Wil- lis in Part Two of this volume.

10 This sentence is subject to a slight variation in SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980. While *Dba’* 2000, 20v:6 records that the clouds obscure the sky (nam mkha’), SBA 1961.1–2, 58,6, SBA 1982.1–3, 68,18 and SBA 1980, 383,2 record that the clouds obscure the sun (nyi ma). As the later versions of the *Testimony* of Ba had a larger diffusion than the *Dba’ bzhed* ever did, almost all the subsequent texts quoting this passage have the sun rather than the sky. A couple of exceptions are Bu ston’s *chos byung* and Padma dkar po’s *Phyag rgya*; Padma po’s *man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba’i gan mdoz* in Gsung ’bum Padma Dkar po. Darjeeling: Kargyud sungrab nyamso khang, 1973–1974, vol. 21, 331: 5). The structure of this sentence in the *Bu ston* *chos byung* and the *Dba’ bzhed* is too different to suppose any relationship between the two, but Pad ma dkar po’s sentence is very close to the *Dba’ bzhed*’s. However, as the rest of the debate does not match—and sun and sky are easily interchangeable—it is impossible to say if Padma dkar po had access to a version of the *Testimony* of Ba closer to the *Dba’ bzhed* or it was more simply Padma dkar po’s emendation.

After the Chinese monk has made his statement, Kamalaśīla replies (20v:6–22r:5). This section corresponds to 122:3–125:2 of the third Bhāvanākrama and consists of Kamalaśīla’s answer to the wrong views of an unnamed opponent.12 Thus, except for the last passage of Heshang’s speech, the compiler of the Dba’ bzhed copied the whole section from the Bhāvanākrama, i.e. the wrong thesis and the correct thesis. Kamalaśīla’s speech and the Bhāvanākrama run closely parallel, although two quotations from the Gayāśīrṣa and the Tathāgathaguhya sūtra reported in the Bhāvanākrama do not appear in the Dba’ bzhed.13 Again, the question remains whether the Dba’ bzhed was quoting an earlier version of the Bhāvanākrama (which did not contain these quotations) or, more simply, the compiler decided not to include the quotations. If the first case, it would suggest that Kamalaśīla, or some later compilers of the Bhāvanākrama, added the quotations at a later phase after finding scriptural corroboration for these arguments. If the second, the Dba’ bzhed compiler either wished to shorten Kamalaśīla’s speech (which is disproportionately long compared with that of Moheyan) or preferred not to make Kamalaśīla explicitly quote other texts during his speech.

Changing Speakers and Changing Positions

When the representative of the two factions end their presentations, the king opens up the debate to include the leading disciples of the instantaneous and gradual approach. Only two people speak, but the names of those two people change depending on which version of the Testimony of Ba we read. In DBA’ 2000 and SBA 1961.1–2, these are Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs, while in SBA 1982.1–3 and Gtṣug lag phreng ba’s SBA 1980, Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po speak. It should be noted that neither Sang shi nor Ye shes dbang po appear among the disciples who followed the two masters at the beginning of the debate, either in the Dba’ bzhed or in SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3.14 The only exception is Gtṣug lag phreng ba’s SBA 1980, which replaces the usual Dba’ Ratna or Sba Ratna with Ye shes dbang po.15 Table 5.2 below first compares the names of Moheyan’s and Kamalaśīla’s followers in the different exemplars of the Testimony of Ba, and then compares them with the names of the people who eventually spoke at the debate.

Sang shi appears, though there is no mention of him in the lists of the two masters’ disciples.16 He commences his talk by giving a short recapitulation of the Six Perfections (pāramitā)—dāna, śīla, kṣānti, virya, dhyāna and prajñā—after which he comments on the formation of new schools after the death of the Buddha.

Sang shi’s intervention is somewhat peculiar. Earlier scholars, who had only later versions of the Testimony to guide them, agreed on the basis of his speech that Sang shi or Dpal dbyangs (depending on the version) was on the side of the gradualists. However, there is enough evidence to suppose that originally Sang shi’s argument was either on the side of Moheyan or that it represented a more moderate and conciliatory group. Several points suggest this. For example, we know from the introduction to the debate that the proponents of the instantaneous party spent two months reading the Shes rab ‘bum in preparation. Therefore, we would expect them

12 Bṣgom pa’i rim pa, 122:1. A few folios below, Kamalaśīla says that those who claim that nirvāṇa is obtained without practising generosity and so forth are accepting the view of the Ājīvaka but whether he is referring to some Indian Buddhist scholar who propounded this Ājīvaka view or to the Chinese monk is unclear. Bṣgom pa’i rim pa 127:5: yang dge ba la sogs pa’i las ci yang mi bya’o zhes zer ba de ni de skad smra bas las zad nas grol bar ‘gyur ro zhes mu steig can kun tu tshol ba’i smra ba khas blangs par ‘gyur ro. As Ruegg notices the term “Ājīvaka” in the Tibetan version of the Bhāvanākrama is translated “mu steig can kun tu tshol ba”; Ruegg, Buddha-Nature, 142, n. 271.

13 A few sentences are also missing in Kamalaśīla’s speech in the Dba’ bzhed, mainly where he references the two quotations. The quotations are found in the Bhāvanākrama, 122:5–7. Both the translations of the Gayāśīrṣa and the Tathāgataguhya sūtra are found in the Bka’ ‘gyur. According to the colophons of these two texts, the Gayāśīrṣa and the Tathāgataguhya sūtra were translated during the first diffusion by the famous translator and compiler of the Mahāvyutpatti, Ye shes sde. The colophon of the Gayāśīrṣa also gives the name of the Indian master Surendrabodhi, who also was involved in the compilation of the Mahāvyutpatti and whose duty was to correct the translations made by Ye shes sde and the other Tibetan translators. The passage of the Gayāśīrṣa quoted in the Bhāvanākrama is to be found in Ga yā mgo’i ri’i mdo: Bka’ ‘gyur (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang chen mo, 1733), vol. 49, 575r7 and 576r1 (CA, 288v:7 and 289r:1). The very short passage quoted by Kamalaśīla from the Tathāgataguhya sūtra finds an approximate parallel in De bzhin gshegs pa’i gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa bstan pa’i mdo: Bka’ ‘gyur (Sde dge par khang chen mo, 1733), vol. 39, 207r:6–5 (KA, 103r:5–6).

14 SBA 1961.1–2, 57r:2–5; SBA 1982.1–3, 67r:8–12.


16 One could argue that the compiler of the text confused Dba’ Rad na with ‘Ba’ Sang shi, as at the end of the Testimony we find Rad na called ‘Ba’ Rad na. However, this does not seem to be the case, since Rad na’s clan name is only spelled ‘Ba’ instead of Dba’ in the Zas gtid appendix (25v:6). There is no confusion with regard to Dba’ Ratna’s clan name in the main text of the Dba’ bzhed. For a discussion on the names see below.
Table 5.2: List of Heshang’s and Kamalaśīla’s disciples as given in the introduction to the debate and list of the people who intervened in the debate after Moheyan and Kamalaśīla’s speeches

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moheyan’s disciples</strong></td>
<td>Jo mo Byang chub</td>
<td>Jo mo Byang chub rje</td>
<td>Jo mo Byang chub</td>
<td>Jo mo Byang chub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sru Yang dag</td>
<td>Sru Yang dag</td>
<td>Bsrul Yang dag</td>
<td>Sru Yangdag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lang ka</td>
<td>Lang+ga</td>
<td>Lang+ka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kamalaśīla’s disciples</strong></td>
<td>Dba’ Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Sba Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Rba Dpal dbyangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dba’ Rad na</td>
<td>Bai to tsa na</td>
<td>Bai ro tsa na</td>
<td>Bai ro tsa na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unnamed ordained monks</td>
<td>Rat+na</td>
<td>Sba Rat+na</td>
<td>Ye shes dbang po</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speakers at the debate</strong></td>
<td>Sang shi</td>
<td>Sang shi</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Ye shes dbang po</td>
<td>Ye shes dbang po</td>
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to use aspects of this text to substantiate their point of view.

The way Sang shi presents the Prajñāpāramitā echoes what we know of Heshang Moheyan’s teachings: Sang shi’s explanation of the Six Perfections is that each of the Perfections is in its highest form when the practitioner is able to go beyond the dichotomy of that Perfection and its reverse. Later texts, including SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3 slightly modify the text so that Sang shi seems to claim that what he said about the Perfections represents the wrong view of the Heshang, and not his own. This is clear if we look at the first few words of Sang shi’s speech. The Dba’ bzhed simply starts with “rgya’i cig car ‘jug cing rim gyis sbyor ba ...” (“The Chinese instantaneous entrance and the application through stages ...”). In SBA 1961.1-2 Sang shi is still the speaker, but the beginning of his speech slightly changes: “rgya’i ltar na cig car ‘jug cing rims gyis sbyongs mchis ...” (“According to the Chinese there are the simultaneous entrance and the application through stages ...”). SBA 1982.1-3 puts these words into the mouth of Dpal dbyangs and the following speech of Dpal dbyangs is then pronounced by Ye shes dbang po. To make even clearer that Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs are on the gradualist side, SBA 1982.1-3 begins with khyed rgya’i bzhed pa (“You, holders of the Chinese [position]”).

17 The beginning of Sang shi’s talk affects the reading of the whole speech, so it is worthwhile to look at it a bit more closely. SBA 1982.1–3, 709–10 says: khyed rgya’i bzhed pa ltar na/ cig char ‘jug cing rim gyis sbyong mchi na/ pha rol tu phyin pa ‘dzin pa ma mchis pa’i slad du ... . After this sentence, the explanation of the Six Perfections begins. As the first words directly address the Heshang’s party, it is clear that “because you do not even understand the Prajñāpāramitā (pha rol tu phyin pa ‘dzin pa ma mchis pa’i slad du) refers to them. The result is that the following explanation of the pāramitā-s reports Moheyan’s mistaken understanding of the Six Perfections. The Dba’ bzhed (22r:6) only reports: rgya’i cig car ‘jug cing rim gyis sbyor ba mchi [ba]/ pha rol du phyin pa drug kyang ‘dzin pa ma mchis pa’i phyir ... . If we were reading presupposing that, as Moheyan spoke first at the debate, so his disciple was the first to speak after the king opened the discussion to the others, we could easily read this sentence “because you [gradualists] do not even understand the Prajñāpāramitā” and then the natural explanation of the real, correct meaning of the Perfections, i.e. Moheyan’s view explained by one of his disciples. The reasons why this second option is more plausible are discussed below but it is clear from this that, if Sang shi was reporting the Heshang’s wrong reading of the pāramitā-s, he should have at least ended his speech by giving the right reading or a remark of some sort. Instead, after this lengthy exposition (of theoretically wrong views) he drops the subject without any criticism and picks up another theme.


19 Bu ston’s account is different from the others, and slightly closer to Gtsug lag phreng ba’s narration. For example, where the Testimony of Ba tradition says: “if [you] do not even understand the Six Perfections ...” Both Bu ston and Gtsug lag phreng ba supplement the sentence by adding that, according to the Chinese, the Six Perfections should be understood as their reverse (... pha rol tu phyin pa drug mi mthun phyogs las gsags par gsung te). Then Gtsug lag phreng ba goes on to give the shortened explanation of the Six Perfections that we find in the Sba bzhed-s. Bu ston, on the other hand, explains his statement further by taking as an example the Perfection of generosity and saying that this concept holds true also for the other Perfections rather than discussing the other five Perfections individually. According to him: “Highest Charity is thus viewed only as the absence of greediness. The fact of abstaining from every kind of attachment is clear from this that, if Sang shi was reporting the Heshang’s wrong reading of the Six Perfections...” Both Bu ston and Gtsug lag phreng ba supplement the sentence by adding that, according to the Chinese, the Six Perfections should be understood as their reverse (... pha rol tu phyin pa drug mi mthun phyogs las gsags par gsung te). Then Gtsug lag phreng ba goes on to give the shortened explanation of the Six Perfections that we find in the Sba bzhed-s. Bu ston, on the other hand, explains his statement further by taking as an example the Perfection of generosity and saying that this concept holds true also for the other Perfections rather than discussing the other five Perfections individually. According to him: “Highest Charity is thus viewed only as the absence of greediness. The fact of abstaining from every kind of attachment is clear from this that, if Sang shi was reporting the Heshang’s wrong reading of the Six Perfections...” Both Bu ston and Gtsug lag phreng ba supplement the sentence by adding that, according to the Chinese, the Six Perfections should be understood as their reverse (... pha rol tu phyin pa drug mi mthun phyogs las gsags par gsung te).
speak instead of Sang shi. It also includes Ye shes dbang po in the list of Kamalaśīla’s disciples. Besides distanc- ing the speaker from the Chinese side, SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980, by naming the Chinese at the beginning of the speech, are able to attribute to them the wrong understanding of the pāramitā-s that follows. Compared to the Dba’ bzhed, the later versions give a truncated explanation of the Perfections so that the Chinese reading of the pāramitā-s becomes a mere negation of the Perfection in question. Thus, generosity is simply giving up craving; forbearance is the mere lack of wrath; diligence is the lack of laziness and so forth. This is not the case with the Dba’ bzhed, where the explanation of each Perfection is elaborated on, and it is said that is that the best form of generosity, forbearance etc., is the one that transcends that Perfection and its reverse. At the end, Sang shi (or Dpal dbyangs) does not attempt, even briefly, to correct the Chinese wrong understanding of the Perfections, but goes on explaining how the schools formed after the death of the Buddha. Thus, although SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980 are similar in wording to the Dba’ bzhed, their meaning changes.

In his closing remarks, Sang shi seems to propose that both the approaches—gradual and instantaneous—are genuine methods to reaching enlightenment. By comparing the emergence of the three Mādhyamika schools with that of the sudden and gradual approaches, he appears to grant orthodoxy to both. The reason that is given for the appearance of all these schools is that the best form of the Buddha left his disciples without anyone who could clarify their doubts and keep the sangha united. As already noted, the purport of this claim is not very different from what we find in Śāntarakṣita’s prophecy about the degeneration of the dharma during the last five hundred years. Yet here, Sang shi presents the issue in a more positive light. What Śāntarakṣita announces as a quarrel among Buddhists—in which one side is irrevocably wrong and the other right—Sang shi explains as the formation of different schools, all tending to the right end.

Finally, Sang shi’s assertion (and in other versions that of Dpal dbyangs) that the “goal is one” for both the gradualist and instantaneous schools is afterwards contradicted by Dpal dbyangs (and in other versions Ye shes dbang po) who asserts most clearly that “the instantaneous entrance and the application through gradual stages, these two should be spoken of distinctly” and a few lines later: “the two paths, gradualist and instantaneous, are totally different.” The words of Dpal dbyangs, when read after Sang shi’s, as they appear in the text, sound like an attack on Sang shi’s position. This would not make sense, of course, if Sang shi was putting forward a gradualist position.

In terms of general structure, Sang shi’s intervention fits more appropriately if it stands on the Chinese side; the king opens the debate to the teachers; the instantaneous side speaks; the gradualist side responds; the king then opens the debate to the disciples; the instantaneous side speaks; and the gradualist side responds. The fact that Sang shi does not appear among the disciples of either party introduced at the beginning of the debate is somewhat peculiar. It may suggest either that the writer was not inclined to class Sang shi on the Heshang’s side, or that Sang shi was above factionalism. On the contrary, Dpal dbyangs—who speaks after Sang shi—is introduced as Kamalaśīla’s disciple.

Further complexities: Sang Shi in the Testament of Ba

The Dba’ bzhed does not provide any information on Sang shi’s background. He appears first as one of the ministers who are sent to investigate Śāntarakṣita’s intentions and then he becomes one of the most prominent delegates in the China expedition. SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980, however, give an interesting history of Sang shi’s origin. Here he is presented as the son of a Chinese envoy named ‘Ba’ De’u who is in Tibet during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan’s father, Khri Lde gtsug btsan. ‘Ba’ De’u leaves his son in Tibet as companion to the young prince. Sang shi is thus able to speak both Chinese and Tibetan and for this reason is sent to China to look for the dharma. In SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3 Sang shi goes on two expeditions to China, rather than just one. The first is during the reign of Khri Lde gtsug btsan and the second—which happens at the time of Khri Srong lde

21 SBA 1980, 381:6–7 (see Table 5.2 above). Bu ston does not name the disciples at all. Instead he reports a list of text titles that Heshang Moheyan wrote at the time when he was preparing for the debate (Chos kyi ’byung gnas, 887:5–6).
this way he could first be presented as someone with mod-

Sang shi with the key figures of the gradualist school. In

transcription of the narrative, redactors tried to associate

interviewed Śāntarakṣita. Although at this point only

that Sang shi was not originally one of the ministers who

are the names of the second and third ministers together

with the words “you three ministers.” It is clear therefore

that three ministers are sent. The BL fragment also contains this story but the section of the manuscript

that should include the names of the ministers is missing.

Sam van Schaik and Kazushi Iwao, however, counting the

number of syllables that could be missing from the folio

reporting the story in question, show that the Dba’ bzshed

contains many more syllables than the missing section of

the BL fragment. They thus suggest that what is missing

are the names of the second and third ministers together

with the words “you three ministers.” It is clear therefore

that Sang shi was not originally one of the ministers who

interviewed Śāntarakṣita. Although at this point only

speculation is possible, it seems that, in the process of

transcription of the narrative, redactors tried to associate

Sang shi with the key figures of the gradualist school. In

this way he could first be presented as someone with mod-

erate feelings concerning the dispute between Moheyan

and Kamalaśīla, and then as a proponent of the gradual-

ist school, until his name was displaced by that of Dpal

dbyangs.25

Some scholars have proposed that the exchange of

Sang shi for Dpal dbyangs in the debate was caused by the

fact that the identity of Sang shi throughout the text is

unclear, and that sometimes he was identified with Dpal

dbyangs.26 There is no doubt that a number of misiden-

tifications occurred during the transmission of this text,

which eventually led to the replacement of Sang shi with

Dpal dbyangs. The source of the problem was the insertion

of a certain Sang shi ta among the names of the first Tibet-

ans who learned Sanskrit and/or took monastic vows. This

Sang shi ta —according to SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and

several other later sources—took the ordained name Dpal

dbyangs. Thus, when Sang shi was equated with Sang shi

ta, Sang shi’s ordained name also became Dpal dbyangs.

The narrative concerning the establishment of the Tibetan

sangha is reported in many chos ’byung and it is subject to

a number of variations. Beside Sang shi ta, the identities

of many other characters and their presence or absence in

the narrative, varies from text to text. The number of lists

reciting the names of the first ordained Tibetans increased

to the point that some authors—unable to choose among

so many different narratives—found it expedient to

include more than one list in their histories. Although the

Testimony of Ba is the locus classicus for this narrative, and

many later chos ’byung drew their accounts from this tra-

dition, it is equally true that later versions of the Sba/Rba

bzshed were informed by outside narratives.27 How much

other sources were responsible for the final identification

of Sang shi, Sang shi ta and Dpal dbyangs is difficult to

determine. Yet, even if one could trace the source of this

identification it would not necessarily mean that the same

source would be responsible for the substitution of dis-

cussants in the debate. At present I shall mainly deal with


say concerning Sang shi/ Sang shi ta’s identity. Table 5.3

below keeps track of the following discussion. To simplify

a complex situation, I only look at the names that are

of interest for Sang shi ta’s identification, and thus this

table cannot be used for any comparative study about the

names of the first Tibetans who learned Sanskrit and/or

took monastic vows.28 Everything added in curly brackets

is found as gloss in the text.

SBA 1961.1–2 refers to a person named Sba Khri bzher

sang shi ta, who learned Sanskrit,29 and to a ’Ba’ Khri bzher

sang shi ta, who became a monk.30 These two—despite the

discrepancy in the clan name—are understood to be the

same person.

SBA 1961.1–2’s list of the first Tibetans who

took monastic vows runs as follows: Sba Gsal snang, ’Ba’

Khri zher sang shi ta, Vairocana, son of Pa gor Na ’dod,

Ngan lam Rgyal ba mcphog yangs, Sma A tsa ra Rin chen

24 See Sam van Schaik and Kazushi Iwao, “Fragments of the ‘Testa-

ment of Ba’ from Dunhuang,” Journal of the American Royal Society

128, no 3 (2008): 683. On this point see also Chapter 3 in this volume.

25 It is also possible that Sang shi acted only as the translator and
did not express his own opinion at the debate, but the present text
does not give any evidence to support this turn of events.

26 See Wangdu and Diemberger, dBa’ bzshed, 83, n. 318;

27 On this point, see Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, “Some Remarks on

the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston Rin chen grub’s Chos
’byung, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet,” Revue d’études


28 For a more inclusive discussion, see van der Kuijp, “Some Re-
marks” (especially pp. 182–89) and Tucci, Buddhist Minor Texts II,
13–15.

29 SBA 1961.1–2, 50.3.

30 SBA 1961.1–2, 51.1–2.
mchog and La gsun Rgyal ba'i byang chub.\textsuperscript{31} At the end of the list, the text reports that they received the ordained names of Ye shes dbang po, Dpal dbyangs, and so forth (la sogs pa). Therefore, if the identification is one-to-one, Ye shes dbang po and Dpal dbyangs would be the ordained names of Sba Gsal snang and 'Ba'/Sba Khri bzher sang shi ta respectively. All the sources agree that Ye shes dbang po was the name of Dba' Gsal snang after ordination, thus it would make sense if Sang shi ta's ordained name was Dpal dbyangs. In this way, SBA 1961.1–2 equates Sba/'Ba' Khris bzhed sang shi ta with Dpal dbyangs. If the compiler of SBA 1961.1–2 understood this Sang shi ta to be none other than 'Ba' Sang shi, the son of the Chinese envoy, the identification Sang shi = Dpal dbyangs would be accomplished. Yet, SBA 1961.1–2 does not mistake Sang shi ta for Sang shi and—like the Dba' bzhed—has Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs as two different individuals speaking at the debate.

\textsuperscript{31} SBA 1961.1–2, 51.1–4.

\textbf{Table 5.3: Sang shi ta, Dpal dbyangs and Ratna's names in DBA' 2000, SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980's quotation of the Rba bzhed che ba}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among the Tibetans who learned Sanskrit</td>
<td>No Sang shi ta</td>
<td>Sba Khris bzhed sang shi ta</td>
<td>Ratna, son of Sba Rma gzigs (also known as Khris bzhed), was also known as Sang shi ta son of Sba Khri bzher</td>
<td>Rba Khris bzhed Sangs shi ta son of Rba Khris bzhed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Tibetan to become a monk</td>
<td>No Sang shi ta</td>
<td>'Ba' Khris bzhed becomes known as 'Ba' Ratna</td>
<td>Sba (also known as Sang shi ta) Khris bzhed took the ordained name Sba Dpal dbyangs. He also becomes known as Sba Ratna</td>
<td>Rba Khris bzhed took the ordained name Dpal dbyangs. He also becomes known as Rba Ratna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the list of the ordained men (sad mi)</td>
<td>only two names are given and none of them is connected with Sang shi ta</td>
<td>Sba Khris bzhed Sang shi ta: ordained name Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Sba Khris bzhed</td>
<td>No Sang shi and no Ratna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamalaśīla’s disciples (for a complete list see Table 5.2)</td>
<td>Dba’ Dpal dbyangs and Dba’ Rad na</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs and Ratna</td>
<td>Sba Dpal dbyangs and Sba Ratna (Ye shes dbang po)</td>
<td>Rba Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussants at the debate</td>
<td>Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po</td>
<td>Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SBA 1982.1–3, in its list of the Tibetans who learn Śāntarakṣita’s language, also has a Sang shi ta but he is not named ‘Ba’ Khris bzher sang shi ta as in SBA 1961.1–2. Instead it is said that Sba Khris bzher is the father of Sang shi ta, so that instead of one person (Sba Khris bzher sang shi ta) we have two: ‘Ba’ Khris bzher and his son, Sang shi ta.\textsuperscript{32} Here Sang shi ta is also identified with Ratna, who is said to be the son of Sba Rma gzigs. However, if Ratna and Sang shi ta were the same person, they could not be born from two different fathers. Thus, a note was added, in parentheses and in a smaller font, claiming that Sba Rma gzigs was also known as Khris bzher. In this way, Sba Khris bzher and Sba Rma gzigs become the same person in order to identify Sang shi ta with Ratna.

One cannot be surprised that the annotator decided to identify the two fathers. It is curious that the main text, while claiming Ratna and Sang shi to be the same person,

\textsuperscript{32} SBA 1982.1–3, 58.7–8 reads: sba rma gzigs [khris bzher yang zer] kyi bu rat+ Nar/ sba khris bzher gyi bu sang shi ta yang zer ba ...
specified that they were the sons of two different fathers. As their names appear in a list, it would seem logical to speculate that in an earlier version the two names were distinct, and only later someone modified the text in order to identify them.33

Below, on the same page, the text states that a certain Sba Khri gzigs was the first Tibetan to be ordained and that his name as a monk was Sba Dpal dbyangs. The king was so happy about his ordination that he proclaimed him to be the jewel of Tibet and bestowed on him the name Ratna. Thus he came to be known as Sba Ratna.34 Another gloss informs us that this Sba Khri gzigs is none other than Sang shi ta. As previously noted, the text claims that the son of Sba Rma gzigs was a certain Sba Ratna, who was also named Sang shi ta. The annotator could not but assume that this Sba Ratna was the above-mentioned Ratna, son of Sba Rma gzigs and therefore Sang shi ta himself. Interestingly, SBA 1961.1–2 has a virtually identical passage, recognising ‘Ba’ Khri gzigs as the first Tibetan to be ordained—and uses almost the same words as SBA 1982.1–3—but Dpal dbyangs does not feature in it: ‘Ba’ Khri gzigs is only given the name Ratna by the king and no further identification takes place.35 Thus, although SBA 1961.1–2 still identifies Khri bzher sang shi ta with Dpal dbyangs, it draws a distinction between Sang shi ta/Dpal dbyangs and ‘Ba’ Khri gzigs/Ratna. SBA 1982.1–3, on the other hand, goes a step further and identifies Sang shi ta with Dpal dbyangs and Sba Khri gzigs.

On the next page, SBA 1982.1–3 lists the Tibetans who received ordination after Ratna.36 It runs as follows: Sba Gsal snang, Sba Khri bzher, Vairocana, son of Pa gor Na ‘dod, Ngan lam Rgyal ba mchog dbyangs, Rma A tsa ra Rin chen mchog, La gsum Rgyal ba’i byang chub. This—contrary to SBA 1961.1–2 and most other texts37—only reports one of the ordained names, Ye shes dbang po. Again if the reference is one-to-one, Ye shes dbang po is the name assigned to the first of the list: Sba Gsal snang.38 Thus, while SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1980 give also Dpal dbyangs as the ordained name of the second Tibetan in the list, SBA 1982.1–3 gives only one. It is logical to conclude that the name Dpal dbyangs was omitted because the text had already assigned it to Sba Khri gzigs Ratna/Sang shi. As SBA 1961.1–2 does not contain the passage that gives to Sba Ratna the name Dpal dbyangs—and this story is not recounted in Bu ston—this was probably an interpolation. In fact, not only do most sources report two of the ordained names (Ye shes dbang po and Dpal dbyangs) and not just one, but Sba Khri bzher, when understood to be the father of Sang shi ta, as in this case, does not take monastic vows. Sba Khri bzher is listed as one of the Tibetans who became monks only when his name is one and the same with Sang shi ta’s, i. e. when he is Sba Khri bzher sang shi ta.

These interpolations created inconsistencies that the person who wrote the annotations—probably Mgon po rgyal mchab (on whom, see Chapter 1 above)—tried to smooth out. He did so by adding glosses that kept track of the different names that were assigned to each character, and also sometimes by writing longer annotations that explained difficult points. SBA 1982.1–3 already has Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po speaking at the debate. It also identifies Sba Ratna with Sang shi ta and both with Dpal dbyangs. Thus, it is possible that even before glosses were added, the equation Sang shi = Sang shi ta = Dpal dbyangs had already taken place. However, the main text does not explicitly say that the Chinese Sang shi is Sba Sang shi ta. It is the annotator that, drawing his own conclusions from the text, in a longer note declares

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33 This impression is reinforced by the way the text was typed. Although the grammatical structure is clear, the names of Ratna and Sang shi are divided by a shad, giving the impression that once these were two separate individuals and that, instead of the terminative particle at the end of Ratna’s name and yang zer ba de at the end of Sang shi’s name, there were only two dang-s.

34 SBA 1982.1–3, 58.18–23.


SBA 1982.1–3 reads: btub bam sad par bya gsungs nas skad lobs pa tsho las thog mar bod la dad pa che ba’i sba [sang shi ta yang zer] khri gzigs dge slong byas ma thag tu mtshan sba dpal db-yangs su btags/ mgon par shes pa lnga dang ldan pas/ btsan po dgyes te de’i zhabs spyi or blangs te khyod bod kyi rin po che yin no zhes bka’ bstsal nas mtshan kyang Sba rat+Na zhes btags te ...

SBA 1961.1–2 reads: btub bam sad par bya gsung nas/ bod la dad pa che ba’i khri gzigs dge slong byas ma thag tu mgon par shes pa dang ldan pas/ btsan po dgyes te de’i zhabs spyi or blang nas khyod bod kyi rat+na yin no ces bka’ bstsal bas ming kyang sba rat+na ces btags te ... .

Bu ston has an even shorter version of this episode, and calls Sba Khri gzigs, Bya Khri gzigs. It only says: mkhan po bo d’hi satwas byas nas tog mar bya khri gzigs rab tu phyung bas mgon shes lnga dang ldan par gyur te (Bu stonchos ’byung, 885:4). He is not exactly the author of this account however, as before he clearly says that he is reporting what he has heard from other sources.
that Sang shi ta is a Chinese name and thus implicitly identifies the two. This annotation reads: 39

Sba Dpal dbyangs was called Sang shi ta in Chinese; some say that Sang shi ta was the son of Khri bzher. Sba Gsal snang was [Ye shes dbang po's] name when a layman, after he had developed an enlightened frame of mind and took monastic vows, the preceptor Bodhisatva named him Ye shes dbang po ... 40

Thus, it is certain that the annotator at least understood Dpal dbyangs and Sang shi to be interchangeable, and also that he made a one-to one association between the names in the list of ordained monks and the examples of ordination names given after it (Sba Gsal snang = Ye shes dbang po). 41

The idea that originally there was no identification of Sba Ratna with Sang shi and Dpal dbyangs seems also to find some corroboration in the subsequent narrative. In SBA 1982.1–3’s account of Heshang Moheyan’s arrival in Tibet, it is said that at that time only a few Tibetans continued studying with Śāntarakṣita. Three names are given: Sba Ratna, Vairocana and Dpal dbyangs. 42 Thus, here the main text distinguishes between Sba Ratna and Dpal dbyangs. However, the annotator realised that if Sba Ratna was Dpal dbyangs he could not be named twice in the list and so added “Ye shes dbang po” next to Sba Ratna’s name in order to identify the two. 43 This further identification complicated matters rather than simplifying them, being in stark contrast with the narrative of the main text, which clearly states that Ye shes dbang po was the ordained name of Sba Gsal snang. Moreover, given the previous identification of Sba Ratna with Dpal dbyangs it is evident that the scenario here proposed by the annotator is unfeasible: how could Sba Ratna/ Sang shi/ Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po be the same person and be consistently treated as two different men in the main narrative? A plausible reason why the annotator might have identified Sba Ratna with Ye shes dbang po at this point is because Dpal dbyangs and Ye shes dbang po were already the two people who, according to the main text, spoke at the debate in favour of the gradual approach. It was thus logical to find them among the students who were loyal to Śāntarakṣita.

We know that SBA 1982.1–3 was compiled by collating three different manuscripts, but it is not possible—in its present typed format—to distinguish if one, two or more hands wrote the annotations or even if these two sections (the ordained men and the Heshang’s arrival in Tibet until the end of the debate) were drawn from two different sources that contained two different sets of annotations. Yet, before drawing any conclusion from this one needs to address a problem that lies even deeper than the appended annotations. This is the fact that earlier annotations/interpolations were included into what is now the main text of SBA 1982.1–3. The section that identifies Ratna with Sang shi ta, but attributes to them different fathers, and the section that identifies Sba Ratna with Dpal dbyangs, which is not found in SBA 1961.1–2, appear in the main body of SBA 1982.1–3 but they do not fit with the overall narrative. Thus we see (at least) two layers of annotations/interpolations, one hidden and one overt. 44

It is probable that the ‘original’ ‘ordained men’ (sad mi) section in SBA 1982.1–3 did not identify Sba Ratna with Sang shi, and thus presented them as the sons of two different fathers: Sba Rma gzigs and Sba Khri bzher. Like in SBA 1961.1–2, Sba Ratna’s name as a layman was Sba Khri gzigs; he was the first Tibetan who received ordination. It is also possible that this earlier recension of SBA 1982.1–3, after listing the Tibetans who took monastic vows after Ratna, provided two (rather than one) ordained names the sad mi received, i.e. Ye shes dbang po and Dpal dbyangs. If this were the case, Dpal dbyangs would be the ordained name of the second name in the list Sba Khri bzher (Sang shi’s father) who is the second in the list. However, this sounds improbable. It is more likely that the text, at that stage, instead of Sba Khri bzher, had either “Sba Khri bzher kyi bu Sang shi ta” or even “Sba Khri bzher sang shi ta”; thus recognising Dpal dbyangs as the ordained name of Sang shi ta but not linking these two names to those of Sba Ratna/ Sba Khri gzigs. When Moheyan came to Tibet three people...

39 SBA 1982.1–3, 59.6–8. van der Kuijip, “Some Remarks,” 158–59 notes this gloss and translates it. I have reformulated his translation in order to emphasise that, at least on this occasion, the annotator seems to have distinguished between Dpal dbyangs and Gsal snang. However, the sentence is open to interpretation. For the Tibetan, see the footnote below.

40 SBA 1982.1–3, 59.6–10: sba dpal dbyangs la rgya nag skad sang shi ta zer/ ta la khri bzher gyi bu sang shi ta zer/ sba gsal snang skya ba’i dus ming/ de nas smsis bskyed zhus nas dang rab tu byung nas ming ye shes dbang po slob dpon bod+hi satwas btags ... 41 However, the remark “some (la la) allege that Sang shi ta was the son of Khri bzher” is baffling because this is exactly how SBA 1982.1–3 presents these two people. van der Kuijip noted that the Dba’ bzhed contains a similar account concerning the time of the sad mi’s ordination; van der Kuijip, “Some Remarks,” 159, n. 89. In the Dba’ bzhed, this passage is found at DBA’ 2000, 17r:5–17v:5.

42 SBA 1982.1–3, 64.15–18.

43 SBA 1982.1–3, 64.16–17: sba rat+Na [ye shes dbang po] dang/ bai+* ro tsa na dang/ dpal dbyangs la sogs nyung shas gcig bo d+hi satwa’i chos slob.

44 The hands that wrote these two layers of annotations could also easily be more than two.
remained faithful to the gradualist side: Sba Ratna, Vairocana and Sba Dpal dbyangs, and these three are exactly the same people who are listed as Kamalaśīla’s disciples at the beginning of the debate. According to this ‘earlier’ reading, this situation presents no difficulties: Sba Ratna is not Dpal dbyangs/ Sang shi ta and thus the narration proceeds smoothly. Dpal dbyangs, as one of the ordained men and loyal to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, naturally speaks in favour of the gradualist side at the debate.

At a later stage, interpolations found their way into the main text: Sba Khri gzigs Ratna was identified with Sang shi ta and then with Dpal dbyangs. Dpal dbyangs was then omitted from the list of ordained names because Ratna/ Sang shi ta had already been identified with him. Yet, the section concerning Śāntarakṣita’s three faithful students—Sba Ratna, Vairocana and Dpal dbyangs—was left unchanged although problematic since at that point Ratna and Dpal dbyangs had already been equated. The same thing happened for the list of Kamalaśīla’s disciples, where again these two were written down as two different individuals. Hence, we can think of at least two scenarios: 1. the copies of the Testimony that the editor assembled did not agree concerning these people’s identities and the editor simply reported them as he found them trying to reconcile them through his annotations; 2. some of the annotations do not belong to the editor but were found in the manuscript he copied and he left them as glosses to the main text.

As the number of texts that discussed the early spread of the dharma increased, confusion about the identity of Sang shi ta (and several other characters of the narrative) became greater. For example, Mkhas pa Lde’u in the Sang shi (and several other characters of the narrative) increased, confusion about the identity of the dharma the main text.

The long citation from this manuscript is very similar to both SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3, but there is no doubt that the manuscript Gtsug lag phreng ba was consulting was, in this case, closer to SBA 1982.1–3. This quotation is once again the famous passage concerning the Tibetans who learned Sanskrit, the first who took monastic vows and the subsequent list of sad mi. The quotation is faithful to SBA 1982.1–3 in all salient points and, in short, it presents Sba Khri gzigs sang shi ta as the son of Rba Khri bzher and identifies him with Dpal dbyangs and Rba Ratna. The only difference of any consequence is that Sba’/Ba’ Khri bzher is omitted in SBA 1980’s list of sad mi.

Gtsug lag phreng ba’s comments follow the quotation. According to him, the report of these events is corrupted. His first example of such corruption is that someone (including the extended version of the Sba bzched he had just cited) claimed that Sang shi, the Chinese dancing child, was named Rba Sang shi and that someone even said that he was one and the same as Rba Ratna, the son of Rba Khri bzher. Gtsug lag phreng ba rightly remarks that, as Sang shi was the son of a Chinese envoy, he could

45 Bu ston, who does not identify Sba Ratna with Dpal dbyangs, writes that the Tibetans who continued studying with Śāntarakṣita after Moheyyan’s arrival were Dpal dbyangs and Rba Ratna, but omits Vairocana (Bu ston chos ’byung, 887:2).
46 Tucci attributed the addition of two people in Bu ston’s list of the first Tibetans to be tried for ordination to political reasons; Tucci, Minor Buddhist Texts II, 16. van der Kuijp demonstrated that these additions were already attested in older texts and there was therefore no political motivation behind it. See van der Kuijp, “Some Remarks,” 174–189.
47 Mkhas pa lde’us mdzad pa’i rgya bod kyi chos ’byung rgyas pa in Rgya bod kyi chos ’byung pa (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1987), 302:7–8.
48 SBA 1980, 355:3–356:3, which is then followed by Gtsug lag phreng ba’s comment.
49 However, Gtsug lag phreng ba had access to more than one version of the Sba/Rba bzched. This can also be easily deduced from the fact that Gtsug lag phreng ba previously quotes from a Rba bzched ’bring pa, SBA 1980, 356:6. Yet, the following quotation from the large Rba bzched is closer in five points to SBA 1982.1–3: One is that there is a section reporting the invitation of twelve Sarvāstivāda monks to Tibet, which in SBA 1961.1–2 comes later in the narrative than in SBA 1982.1–3 and Gtsug lag phreng ba has it at the same point as SBA 1982.1–3. The second is that he identifies Khri bzher as the father of Sang shi ta and not Sang shi ta himself as SBA 1961.2–3 does. The third point concerns the already discussed passage where the first monk Ratna is identified with Dpal dbyangs. As discussed above, SBA 1961.1–2 does not contain this passage, while Gtsug lag phreng ba includes it, even if only to criticise it later as spurious. The fourth point is that, because Gtsug lag phreng ba’s quotation like SBA 1982.1–3 identifies Dpal dbyangs with Ratna with Gtsug lag phreng ba, Dpal dbyangs is then omitted from the list of ordained names that the sad mi received. Fifth, both SBA 1982.1–3 (58:21–23) and SBA 1980 (356:1–2), in reporting the story of how Ratna got his name from the king, have the king say that Khri gzigs is the “rin po che” of Tibet and so he was given the name “Ratna” In SBA 1961.1–2 (50:14–15), instead, the shift from the Tibetan word and its Sanskrit equivalent to the name is lost as both instances are documented as “Ratna.” Except for these five points, however, SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3 are more closely related to each other than to SBA 1980.
50 SBA 1980, 356:4 (for the Tibetan, see the footnote below).
Serena Biondo

not be a descendant of the Rba’ clan. He also points out that Rba Khri gzigs could not be named Bya Khri gzigs, as many people spelled his name.53 He then shows how the names of certain individuals in the list of sad mi had been modified and how sometimes people were added to it, referring more specifically to some mistakes that he had found in Bu ston’schos ’byung.52 Later on, he also claims that there was a certain amount of confusion about Sba Ratna’s identity, and that some believed him to be Ye shes dbang po.54 Bu ston does not seem to connect these two characters, and although Gtsug lag phreng ba might have referred to what he found written in other texts, the identification of Sba Ratna with Ye shes dbang po reminds one of the annotation in SBA 1982.1–3. Thus, it is possible that the gloss next to Sba Ratna’s name was there by the middle of the sixteenth century, or even earlier.

Although Gtsug lag phreng ba was aware that the identification of Sang shi with Sang shi ta was wrong, in the version of the debate he had at his disposal, Dpal dbyangs already takes Sang shi’s place.55 SBA 1980 follows SBA 1982.1–3 in this, and starts what was Sang shi’s speech with the words: “khyed rgya’i bzhed pa ltar na ...” It is possible that in the sixteenth century, sources mostly agreed that these two were the interlocutors at the debate and Sang shi’s speech had already been established to be on the gradualist side.

The Dba’ bzhed narrative of these events is much shorter and simplified. Interestingly, as in the later redaction of SBA 1982.1–3 the first monk to be ordained takes the name Dba’ Dpal dbyangs.56 SBA 1980 follows SBA 1982.1–3 in this, and says that this person’s name before ordination was Dba’ Dpal dbyangs. The version of SBA 1982.1–3 the first monk to be ordained takes Dba’ bzhed’s name was there by the middle of the annotation in SBA 1982.1–3. Thus, it is possible that the gloss next to Sba Ratna’s name was there by the middle of the sixteenth century, or even earlier.

Although Gtsug lag phreng ba was aware that the identification of Sang shi with Sang shi ta was wrong, in the version of the debate he had at his disposal, Dpal dbyangs already takes Sang shi’s place.54 SBA 1980 follows SBA 1982.1–3 in this, and starts what was Sang shi’s speech with the words: “khyed rgya’i bzhed pa ltar na ...” It is possible that in the sixteenth century, sources mostly agreed that these two were the interlocutors at the debate and Sang shi’s speech had already been established to be on the gradualist side.

The Dba’ bzhed narrative of these events is much shorter and simplified. Interestingly, as in the later redaction of SBA 1982.1–3 the first monk to be ordained takes the name Dba’ Dpal dbyangs. The Dba’ bzhed, however, says that this person’s name before ordination was Dba’ Lha btsan and not Ratna or Khri gzigs.55 Two folios below, the Dba’ bzhed reports that Dba’ Gsals snang took monastic vows and the name Ye shes dbang po was bestowed on him.56 Later, the Dba’ bzhed relates that among the people who were taught Sanskrit, such as Mchims legs gzigs etc., only some eventually learned it. These were: Śākyaprabha son of Mchims Anu, Vairocana son of Pa ‘or Na ‘dod, Rad na (i. e. Ratna) son of Dba’ Rma gzigs, Lha bu son of Zhang Nya bzang, Bse btsan and Shud pu Khong slesbs. Finally, it remarks that: “The son of Dba’ Rma gzigs was given the name Rad na (i.e Ratna) upon his ordination.”57 The Testimony of Ba versions therefore have many points in common: with some spelling variation, Śākyaprabha, Vairocana, Rad na and Shud pu khing slesbs also appear in SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1961.1–2. SBA 1982.1–3 also agrees with the Dba’ bzhed in reporting that Ratna’s father was named Dba’ Rma gzigs; and in relating that Mchims Legs bzang (i. e. Dba’ bzhed’s Mchims Legs legs gzigs) did not learn Sanskrit. Yet, the Dba’ bzhed mentions no Sang shi ta, no Sba Khri bzher and does not identify Dpal dbyangs either with Ratna or Sang shi ta/ Khri gzigs.

It is unclear on which sources SBA 1961.1–2 and SBA 1982.1–3 drew for depicting Sang shi ta and all the other characters that do not feature in the Dba’ bzhed. Considering that SBA 1961.1–2 does not replace Sang shi with Dpal dbyangs—although Sang shi ta features in the narrative of the sad mi—we can conclude that originally the inclusion of Sang shi ta in the Testimony of Ba had nothing to do with the debate. The identification happened later in the history of transmission of SBA 1982.1–3.

One question remains: why all this confusion about Sang shi’s affiliation with the Chinese side? Sang shi plays an important role in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet.58 In the Dba’ bzhed, he is one of the ministers who goes to China to meet master Kim and the Chinese emperor. In the later Testimony of Ba tradition, he is the son of a Chinese envoy and he is also the person who introduces Buddhism to king Khri Srong lde btsan. Throughout the narratives he is crucial to the king’s decision to adopt Buddhism and he carries out tasks that are necessary to achieve this end. Sang shi could not be on the side of the

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51 On this see van der Kuijp “Some Remarks,” 171; SBA 1980, 356:4–5: ‘di dag du yi ge ma dag pa ’phel ba las sngar gyi rgya phrug gar mkhan de la yang rba sang shi zhes bris pa sogs snang ya+ng rba rat+na ni rba khri bzher gyi bur bshad la rgya phrug sang shi ni rgyag nag gi pho nya’i bu yin pas rba’rus su mi ’ong la/ yang bya khri gzigs ces bris pa du ma yod kyang yi ge nyams pa ste rues de gnis kyi gzi mtshun mi srid to.

52 Gtsug lag phreng ba in this case does not blame Bu ston for the mistakes in the text; he rather hypothesises that these were added at the time of carving the woodblocks for the printing of the chos ’byung. SBA 1980, 356:6–7 reads: bu ston chos byung du’ang par brko das zhugs dag pas nyams pas yin nam ... This section has been already analysed by van der Kuijp, see “Some Remarks,” 172–174. See also Tuucci, Minor Buddhist Texts II, 20–21.


57 DBA’ 2000, 17r:6–17v:3. It is interesting that the monk who acted as a preceptor for the second set of ordinations in the Dba’ bzhed is a certain Dba’ Rin po che, which seems to refer to Dba’ Ratna who is introduced two lines above. This recalls SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1980’s double rendering of his name in Sanskrit and Tibetan (see footnote 48, above). In this instance, SBA 1961.1–2, 51.10–11 refers to this person as “Sba Rat+na” rather than “Rin po che.”

58 See DBA’ 2000, 25r:1–3: “Whereas the dharma could not be established during the reign of the five previous kings, the davaputra Khri Iden btsan, Acarya Bodhisatva, Dba’ Ye Shes dbang po and ’Ba’ Sang shi—those four—established seats for the triple gem (and) the noble holy dharma was propagated widely in the region of Tibet.”
defeated Chinese, so he could only take the stance of the winners in the debate. Thus, it is possible that successive compilers of the *Testimony of Ba* progressively distanced Sang shi from the Chinese side, which in some textual traditions somehow resulted in the replacement of Sang shi with Ye shes dbang po.

**Dpal dbyangs and the Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra**

After Sang shi’s speech, Dpal dbyangs intervenes by saying that the gradual and instantaneous approaches should be spoken of distinctly, thus replying to Sang shi’s last sentence. Then, after having emphasized this point through metaphors, he starts with an exposition of the stages of the *bodhisatva* path (23r:3–23v:6). This section is extracted from the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*—the text that Heshang Moheyan and his followers had dismissed during their preparation for the debate in preference for the *Shes rab ‘bum*. 59 At the end of this quotation Dpal dbyangs attacks the instantaneous approach directly, asserting that they lack scriptural knowledge and that a person who follows their path is unable to help himself, let alone others. As Moheyan and his followers are unable to answer Dpal dbyangs, the gradualists win the debate by quoting the very text the Chinese monk had rejected.

The quotation from the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* is curtailed in the following versions of the *Testimony*. Only a few sentences remain of the quotation found in the *Dba’ bzhed* (folio 23r line 4 to folio 23v, line 6). This makes the link between the introduction of the debate and the debate itself less evident. The reason for shortening the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*’s quotation in the later versions of the *Testimony of Ba* is unclear. 60 We can only assume that the importance given to the philosophical dispute decreased as time passed.

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59 See *Mdo sde dgongs pa nges ‘gyel (Ārya-saṃdhi-nirmocana-sūtra)* in *Bka’ gyur* (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang chen mo, 1733), vol. 49. The quotation from this *sūtra* runs from pp. 79:6 to 81:4. Although the quotation is mostly linear and the two works are very close in wording, it should be noted that the person who wrote this section of the *Dba’ bzhed* did not copy it completely from the *sūtra*. The *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* uses a very repetitive structure when writing about the ten *bodhisatva* stages, which the writer of the *Dba’ bzhed* curtailed probably for the sake of space. In his *Bhāvanākrama*, Kamalaśīla often quotes the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, however, this specific quotation does not feature in his text.

60 For connections between the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* and Atiśa, the *Bka’ dam pas* and later *Tsong kha pa* see Alex Wayman, “Doctrinal Disputes.”

**Final Remarks**

This overview shows that the debate—like the rest of the *Testimony* and the majority of Tibetan Buddhist texts—was created by combining a variety of sources and that much thought was given to the assemblage of the units. Each string that we find in the Introduction to the debate is tied to a section of the debate itself. Śāntarakṣita’s prophecy is picked up by Sang shi’s view of school formation. The *Shes rab ‘bum* studied by the instantaneous party is then quoted in Sang shi’s speech. The *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, dismissed by the instantaneous party, is then picked up by Dpal dbyangs who wins the debate by quoting from it.

As the transcription of the *Dba’ bzhed* in Part Two of this volume shows, the scribe does not seem much interested in the philosophical dispute. That he was copying the debate from a parent manuscript is evident from the number of mistakes that he makes in transcribing the text. Twice he copied the wrong sentence because the passage that he was supposed to write started with the same word as the next sentence. 61 Thus, we can conclude that he did not know the source by heart and that he was not writing under dictation. Therefore, although it seems likely that the *Dba’ bzhed* compiler had some sort of agency over the text, by adding bits and pieces he found useful into the main narrative, it is improbable that he assembled the debate narrative. He simply copied it.

David Seyfort Ruegg identified one interesting clue about the date of the compilation of the debate. 62 Since the third of the three Mādhyamika schools mentioned in Sang shi’s speech originated in Tibet through the work of Pa tshab Nyi ma grags—who was born around 1055—the text could not have been written before the eleventh or twelfth century. As the writer of the manuscript of the *Dba’ bzhed* does not seem to be the person who collated the text part, we may conclude that the manuscript he was drawing from (or even a progenitor of the manuscript he was drawing from) was probably written around or after the eleventh or twelfth century. The original narrative must have looked similar to what we read in the *Dba’ bzhed* today although some points might have been added or cut during the transmission and copying of the text after the twelfth century.

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