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Jonathan C. Gold. *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Pandita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet.* Albany: SUNY Press, 2007. 279 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-7165-4; $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7914-7166-1.

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A Gateway to Sakya Pandita's Gateway of Learning: Jonathan Gold's Comparative Study of a Tibetan Buddhist "Classic of World Literature"

Jonathan C. Gold's *The Dharma's Gatekeepers* is a study of the thirteenth-century Tibetan classic of scholastic literature, the "Gateway to Learning" (*Mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*, henceforth *Gateway*) of Sakya Pandita. Sa-pan (as this famous scholar is typically called) is a major figure in Tibetan history, and his writings are fundamental to Tibet's literary, scholastic, and religious development, particularly insofar as these involve the Indian antecedents of Tibet's Buddhist traditions. He also played a crucial role in Yuan dynasty politics thanks to his connections to powerful Mongol rulers. Gold balances a detailed examination of Sa-pan's distinctly Tibetan subject matter with an effort to show the *Gateway* to be a "classic of world literature" (p. ix). This claim of far-reaching relevance comes as a surprise at first, and readers beginning the book may wonder whether Gold will be able to support it; to an impressive extent, he succeeds.

In marked contrast to the tendency to isolate Tibetan studies unnaturally from other, nonreligious fields of learning, Gold presents Sa-pan's views on scholarship in the context of the "wider philosophical study of language, translation, interpretation, and the functions of communities of learning," drawing Sa-pan into conversation with thinkers beyond his immediate historical and geographic milieu (p. ix). In doing so, Gold at once elucidates Sa-pan's work as it relates to Tibetan Buddhist thought, and reveals its relevance to broader intellectual concerns, both historical and contemporary. Gold begins his comparative effort by calling on medieval scholars, continuing on to much more far-reaching and contemporary points of comparison. He also suggests ways in which the *Gateway* might be as relevant to the modern Western academy as it was to Sa-pan's immediate setting; in the process, he prompts the reader to ask whether Western academics are inclined to reflect as incisively on their own scholastic projects as Sa-pan reflected on his.

Gold offers the reader a wide range of insight into the *Gateway*, concerning issues from the general cultural context to the subtleties of Sa-pan's personal rhetorical agenda. Sa-pan's work is concerned with the nature of translation, and with the movement of Buddhist thought through diverse cultures and languages. It offers a hermeneutic theory to cope with the Buddhist tradition's potentially perplexing diversity of doctrine and practice. Ultimately aiming for nothing short of the perfection of knowledge (equivalent in the Buddhist context to enlightenment and Buddhahood), the *Gateway* claims to carry on the scholastic practices and goals of the Buddhist Sangha in India. In this way Sa-pan draws his readership into the virtual extended community of the original "pure" Indian Buddhist community. Sa-pan's unified curriculum thus represented an attempt to transplant the classical Indian Buddhist system of learning to Tibet in a move that Gold views as definitively conservative, taking Sa-pan and his cohort to represent the "Neoconservative Movement." Gold portrays this group as countering what they believed to be corrupt innovations in Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. Sa-pan's model also sets up the Buddha as the ultimate scholar, thereby suggesting that progress on the intellectual path, if adhered to correctly (i.e., according to Sa-pan's directives), is the same as progress on the path to enlightenment.

According to Gold, Sa-pan's keen focus on literary arts and grammar reflects the view that a grammatical analysis of Buddhist teachings is the best means of analyzing the Buddha's intentions. This necessitated his focus on Sanskrit learning, since it allowed access to the original, authentic Indian teachings. The ambitious curriculum Sa-pan designed was never fully implemented, not even at his home monastery in Sakya. Nevertheless, Sa-pan's curriculum became a key model for Bud-

dhist monastic education, and Gold credits him with having consolidated the study of the five Buddhist sciences (*pañcavidyā*)–linguistic science, logical science, medical science, the science of fine arts and crafts, and dharma or "inner science"–across Tibet. Gold also directly attributes Sa-pan's successful alliance with the Mongol court to the widespread reputation that writings like the *Gateway* had earned him as a great scholar.

While acknowledging the unique characteristics of Sa-pan's interests and closely considering the thirteenth-century Central Asian setting in which he lived and wrote, Gold plants the *Gateway* in a broader historical setting by suggesting comparisons between Sa-pan's work and the projects of medieval scholars, such as the Persian Al-Ghazali and China's Zhu Xi, as well as the translators of the King James Bible. Gold does not pursue these comparisons very far, but he does pointedly ask whether biblical translators and Sa-pan might represent a "transcultural nexus of religious conservatism, scholarly and literary expertise, and royal patronage of translation" (p. 148). The basic point of these comparisons, for Gold, is that despite extreme differences in context, elite intellectual communities use similar methods in their efforts to establish a "hegemony of interpretation" (p. 149).

This general claim may seem somewhat obvious, but Gold is breaking new ground by plotting out these specific examples for investigation. Sa-pan asserts that a scholar must attain comprehensive knowledge (which in the Buddhist context is understood in terms of the omniscience that goes with enlightenment) in order to be a legitimate authority on any subject. This claim might be alienating to readers who do not relate to the goal of Buddhahood as a scholarly pursuit; but by equating Sa-pan's view with the claims of thinkers in better-known times and places, such as biblical translators, Gold helps the reader relate to Sa-pan's project in familiar terms, while pointing out ways in which we might better understand the familiar through Sa-pan's insights.

Gold also indicates similarities with more contemporary thinkers and issues. These parallels are perhaps more central to the book's agenda, as Gold endeavors to show how remarkably relevant Sa-pan can be for scholars today. Gold's parallel study of Sa-pan and Ferdinand de Saussure is particularly compelling in this regard. Following the Tibetan studies scholar Georges Dreyfus, Gold notes a likeness between Sa-pan's and Saussure's linguistic lexicon–particularly with regard to Saussure's concepts of the signifier, signified, and sign, considered vis-à-vis Sa-pan's treatment of a comparable triad that Gold translates as involving the "to be said," the "sayable," and "saying" (p. 50). Gold suggests parallel reasons for the use of these terms. Thus, Saussure distinguished between linguistic utterances as involving the "concept" denoted for the mind, and the "sound image" that characterizes the external expression; similarly, Gold tells us that a primary concern of Sa-pan's interest in grammar involves his goal of shifting awareness away from the sounds of words to the conceptual representations elicited thereby, and of thus understanding all linguistic terms in conceptual, not extramental form.

Gold further maintains that these two thinkers were alike in their view that words are basically arbitrary, but fixed by convention. The Buddha's own words are no different from other, less significant words in this regard. Therefore, one of Sa-pan's driving thoughts is that a scholar must be expert in linguistics and grammar in order to be able to approach the true meaning of the conventional expressions of the Buddha's teachings. Thanks to this aspect of Gold's efforts, his book elucidates an aspect of Sa-pan's thought that many contemporary Western readers might otherwise find inaccessible or simply overlook.

The Dharma's Gatekeepers strikes an impressive balance. Gold details the very specific concerns of a thirteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist scholar driven to maintain traditions adopted from ancient India. In the process, he casts light on currently debated issues in translation, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and authority, as well as on the complex identities of academic institutions and the meaning of the intellectual life in general. Gold includes his translation of the most relevant sections of Sa-pan's text in an appendix, so interested readers can have more direct access to Sa-pan's writing. Gold supports his claims about Sa-pan's work with well-timed reflection on more contemporary Western thinkers and theory. He makes some bold moves in the comparisons he suggests, and some readers might find that he does not pursue these comparisons fully enough, or adequately address the basic differences in the intellectual contexts he draws on. However, Gold succeeds in making Sa-pan's work accessible and makes a convincing preliminary case for the value of comparison, leaving open doorways for related projects.

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