“Two Truths” (*satyadvaya*) in the *dBu ma bden gnyis* (*Satyadvayavibhaṅga*) of the Bon Religion

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1. Introduction

The idea of “two truths” (*satyadvaya*, *bden gnyis*), which is emphasized in Buddhism, also exists in the Bon religion. In this article, as a part of the study of the idea of “two truths” of the Bon religion, I take up the *dBu ma bden gnyis kyi gzhung* (*BonBD*) written by Yar me Shes rab ’od zer (1058-1132¹⁾). There is its commentary by a Bon authority, mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356-1415) and it is quoted in the *Bon sgo gsal byed* (*BGSB*) by Tre ston rGyal mtshan dpal (14c). Accordingly we can understand that the *BonBD* is an important treatise in the Bon religion concerning the idea of “two truths”. I outline the idea of “two truths” in the *BonBD* as follows:

2. “Two truths” (*satyadvaya*, *bden gnyis*)

On the “two truths”, the *BonBD* provides the following explanation:

“Two truths which eliminate the disease of adherence to the existence”²⁾

“All manifest “principles” (*dharma*) exist as two truths”³⁾

3. The subject of understanding the appearance

There are four subjects of understanding the appearance, and they are as follows:

(1) “sufferer of eye disease” (*mig skyon can*) sees everything as double.⁴⁾

(2) “ordinary person” (*so so ’i skye bo*) sees various things and becomes attached to them.⁵⁾

(3) “wisdom attained later” (*rjes shes*) understands that the appearance is like an illusion and false.⁶⁾

(4) “meditative equilibrium of buddha” (*sangs rgyas kyi mnyam bzhaḡ*) does not have any discursiveness nor has it any cognition.⁷⁾

4. “Convention” (*saṃvṛti*, *kun rdzob*)

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According to the *BonBD*, “the definition of “conventional truth”(samvṛtisatya) is the appearance of the objects which do not [truly] exist”.⁸⁾ With regard to its etymology, the *BonBD* explains that “because it is an existence that by nature is covered by imagination, it is [the conventional] truth”.⁹⁾

On the classification of “convention”, the *BonBD* explains “we admit that there are two “conventions”, namely the pure [convention] and the impure [convention]. [The impure convention:] they consider all “principles” of the “wheel of life” (*samsāra*), namely various objects and subjects of cognition, as “truth” (*satya*) according to its appearance, and [its essence] is covered. [The pure convention: wisdom attained later] understands that the appearance is like a dream and an illusion, and objects are not covered [by imagination]. As far as the “impure convention”, there are two types. Namely they are the “false [convention]” and the “true [convention]”. [The “false convention”:] a sufferer of an eye disease, who sees everything as double, has falsehood in both his sensory organ and the objects he perceives. [When he is] compared to someone who does not possess falsehood, [his objects are] designated as the “false [convention]”. The “true convention” is what those who do not have defiled sensory organs, namely the people of the world grasp.”¹⁰⁾

The classification of “convention” is as follows:

- “convention” (*kun rdzob*)
 - “pure convention” (*dag pa kun rdzob*)
 - “impure convention” (*ma dag kun rdzob*)
 - “true convention” (*yang dag kun rdzob*)
 - “false convention” (*log pa kun rdzob*)

The correspondence between the conventions and the subjects of understanding appearance is as follows:

- (1) “sufferer of eye disease”: “false convention”
- (2) “ordinary person”: “real convention”
- (3) “wisdom attained later”: “pure convention”
- (4) “meditative equilibrium of *buddha*”: no correspondence

5. “Absolute”(paramārtha, don dam)

According to the *BonBD*, “the definition of the “absolute” is to be severed [and do not exist], but [as a linguistic expression it is explained as] being divorced from discursive

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ideas”.¹¹⁾

With regard to its etymology, the *BonBD* explains that “[the “absolute” is] an object and an excellent one at that, or an object of excellent [wisdom]”¹²⁾. *BonBD* adopts the two interpretations, *karmadhāraya* and *tatpuruṣa*, but not the interpretation of *bahuvrīhi* which is adopted as the third interpretation by Bhāviveka.

On the classification of the “absolute”, *BonBD* explains that “the “absolute” is separated from discursive ideas and is not established as [an object]. [Its] number and classification are severed [and do not exist]. The teacher preached [the “absolute”] by [referring to its] numbers and similar examples and characterizing terms according to [the levels of] his disciples’ thought”.¹³⁾ The *BonBD* does not allow for the classification of the “absolute”, [as it recognizes] only a single “absolute”.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I outlined the structure of “two truths” of *BonBD*, as a part of study of “two truths” of the Bon religion. In other texts (e.g. *BGSB*), a different structure of “two truths” exists. It is my hope that the structures of “two truths” seen in those texts are clarified in future research.

Generally we accept that the Bon religion adopted a lot from the structure of ideas found in Buddhism and built its own structure of ideas. Then which idea of “two truths” in Buddhism did they adopt? In order to solve this problem, we need to compare the ideas of “two truths” of Buddhism and those of the Bon religion in detail.

<Abbreviation>

BGSB *Bon sgo gsal byed* of Tre ston rGyal mtshan dpal, ed. Mimaki and Samten (2007).

BonBD *dBu ma bden gnyis kyi gzhung* of Yar me (Me ston) Shes rab ‘od zer, *Sa lam rnam ‘byed ‘phrul sgron rtsa ‘grel theg chen gzhi lam ‘bras bu rtsa ‘grel dbu ma rtsa ‘grel skor gyi gsungs pod bzhungs*, vol. 2 (Kha), Kathumandu, 1991, Text No. Cha (10 p.). (*dBu ma bden gnyis kyi gzhung* edited by Yam Lama and Samtin Jansin (read Sangye Tenzin and Samten Gyaltzen), Delhi, 1961)

BonBDG *Theg pa chen po dBu ma bden gnyis kyi ‘grel ba* of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Sa lam rnam ‘byed ‘phrul sgron rtsa ‘grel theg chen gzhi lam ‘bras bu rtsa ‘grel dbu ma rtsa ‘grel skor gyi gsungs pod bzhungs*, vol. 2 (Kha), Kathumandu, 1991, Text No. Ja (45 p.).

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- 1) Martin (2001, pp. 75-76) suggests that the dates (1058-1132) presented by Kværne (1971, p. 230) should be pushed forward one cycle to (1118-1192). Since I have not done a thorough examination of all the documents, I will not take up this issue at this time.
 - 2) dngos por ‘dzin pa’i nad sel ba’i // bden pa rnam gnyis (*BonBD1b1*)
 - 3) snang ba’i bon rnams kun // bden pa gnyis su rnam par gnas // (*BonBD1b2*)
 - 4) mig skyon can la mig yor snang // (*BonBD1b4*)
 - 5) byis pa so so’i skye bo la // sna tshogs snang zhing bden par zhen // (*BonBD1b3*)
 - 6) dam pa’i rjes shes snang ba rnams // sgyu ma bzhin du rdzun par rtogs // (*BonBD1b3-4*)
 - 7) sangs rgyas dam pa’i mnyam bzhag la // spros med cir yang mthong mi ‘gyur // (*BonBD1b4*)
 - 8) kun rdzob bden pa’i mtshan nyid ni // yod pa ma yin don snang ba’o // (*BonBD2a5-b1*)
 - 9) kun tu brtags pas sgrib par byed // mtshan ma’i dngos pos bden pa ‘o // (*BonBD2a1*)
 - 10) kun rdzob dbye ba gnyis su ‘dod // dag pa dang ni ma dag pa’o // sna tshogs gzung ‘dzin ‘khor ba’i bon // snang bzhin bden mtshong ‘grib par byed // snang ba rmi lam sgyu ma bzhin // der mthong don la ‘grib mi ‘gyur // ma dag kun rdzob rnam gnyis te // log pa dang ni yang dag go // mig skyon can la mig yor sogs // dbang po yul la skyon ldan pa // skyon med la ltos log par bzhag // yul dang dbang po ma bsad pas // ‘jig rten pa yis gang bzung ba // de ni yang dag kun rdzob yin // (*BonBD2a2-4*)
 - 11) don dam mtshan nyid rnam par chad // ‘on kyang spros pa rnams dang bral (*BonBD2b1*)
 - 12) don yin dam pa yin pa ‘am // dam pa rnams kyi yul yin la // (*BonBD2a1*)
 - 13) don dam spros pa rnams dang bral // cir yang grub pa med pa la // grangs dang dbye ba rnam par chad // grangs dang mthun pa’i dpe dag dang // mtshon pa’i tshig gis gdul bya yi // bsam pa dang sbyar ston pas gsungs // (*BonBD2a4-5*)

<key words> satyadvaya, paramārtha, samvṛti, bden gnyis, don dam, kun rdzob, dag pa kun rdzob, ma dag kun rdzob, yang dag kun rdzob, log pa kun rdzob, Yar me shes rab ‘od zer, mNyang med Shes rab rgyal mtshan

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