Bu ston’s Doubts about the Authenticity of the *Vinaya-saṃgraha*

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1. Introduction  No one could doubt that Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364) played an important role in the history of Tibetan Buddhism in various regards. He is probably most recognized for his great influence on the traditions of textual arrangement and transmission. For example, he is well known as an early compiler of a large collection of translated scholarly works, which he designated as bsTan ’gyur. It is also well known that he compiled detailed catalogues of various Buddhist texts more than once. 1) The erudite results of Bu ston’s monumental labors indicate that he had extensive knowledge of Buddhist texts. Without a doubt, he was well versed in a series of vinaya texts introduced into Tibet from India that modern scholars collectively refer to as the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya (MSV). The Collected Works of Bu ston (ed. Lokesh Chandra, 28 parts [New Delhi: IAIC, 1965–1971]), for example, includes at least eight works primarily concerning the MSV and related Indian texts. 2) The ’Dul ba spyi’i rnam par gzhag pa ’dul ba rin po ché’i mdzes rgyan (’Dul spyi) is one of the eight works. 3) In this 70-folio work, as Maeda 2001 notes, Bu ston provides a brief overview of the MSV and related Indian texts. Among his series of overviews, that of the Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga may be the most well known. Ever since C. Vogel 1985: 110 noted that Bu ston suspected that the text belonged to a non-Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition, the significance of this suspicion has been questioned. 4) As is indicated by the case of the Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga, Bu ston’s overviews are worthy of attention, not only because they provide helpful outlines of the MSV and related Indian texts, and insight into their circulation and transmission in Tibet, but also because they contain Bu ston’s thought-provoking opinions on the MSV tradition. Another example of such a case will be quoted and discussed here. It is Bu ston’s overview of the *Vinaya-saṃgraha*.

2. Bu ston’s Overview of the *Vinaya-saṃgraha*  The *Vinaya-saṃgraha* is a
handbook of the MSV attributed to Viśeṣamitra. The only detail we know about him is that he lived no later than the 7th century CE. This handbook was transmitted into both Chinese and Tibetan cultural areas. It seems, however, that Buddhists in the two areas had conflicting attitudes toward the handbook. Yijing (635–713), the Chinese pilgrim who transmitted and translated it, valued it highly, as did some Japanese monks about 1000 years later. On the other hand, it seems to have been largely ignored in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. There seems to be little, if any, evidence that the Vinaya-saṃgraha was intensively studied by Tibetan to the same degree as other MSV handbooks, such as Guṇaprabha’s Vinaya-sūtra (VS), and Viśākhadeva’s Vinayakārikā. It is uncertain why or since when the text has been so unappealing to Tibetan. Bu ston’s overview of the Vinaya-saṃgraha in his ‘Dul spyi, however, may provide a clue, since he doubts the authenticity of the Vinaya-saṃgraha:

The Vinaya-saṃgraha, a commentary of the Prātimokṣa-[sūtra] in 15 bam po, was made by Ācārya Viśeṣamitra. It is a translation by Vairocana(-rakṣita), rGyal ba shes rab, and Shākya bshes gnyen. Because there are many passages in this [work] that conflict with [those in] the Vinaya of Four Parts (= the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya) and the Vinaya-sūtra—such as (1) although the abandoning of the training (Skt. śikṣā-pratyākṣa, -pratyākhyāna) is valid, the saṃvara is not given up, (2) the occurrence of a Pārājika offense to one who has stolen from the Uttarakurus, (3) a novice[-to-be]'s taking formal possession of a bowl and a robe, (4) [a monk’s] falling on his knee towards monks worthy of respect serves to show his reverence to them, (5) [the validity of] the formal recognition [of a place] as a kitchen (Skt. *kalpika-śālā) by a formal recognition by a monk of weak disposition or of little intelligence—[this work] appears to have been made by one who confused [Mūlasarvāstivādin doctrine with] another school’s doctrine, or who was not familiar with the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya. Therefore, you should not confide in this [work].

The above Bu ston’s description is too compact to understand immediately. Moreover, it includes several technical vinaya terms, which may mislead those who are unfamiliar with vinaya texts. Its purpose, however, is virtually certain: Bu ston claims that the Vinaya-saṃgraha is not trustworthy because it includes at least five passages—numbered (1) to (5) in the text and translation—that, he asserts, contradict the MSV and the VS and are therefore problematic. Here, we may immediately recognize the fact that the Vinaya-saṃgraha was clearly rejected by an influential monk in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the middle of the 14th century. To determine whether his rejection is reasonable or not, however, requires some examination. It may only be regarded as
reasonable if the exact same five passages Bu ston noted appear in the *Vinaya-saṃgraha* and are firmly dismissed or completely absent in the MSV and the VS. Certainly, passages (3), (4), and (5) seem to meet these criteria. Taking formal possession of a bowl and robes is one of the ritual acts that must be performed by a candidate during the ordination ceremony. The MSV stipulates that a novice performs it in the process of becoming a monk, and the VS appears to be in agreement. The *Vinaya-saṃgraha*, however, suggests that it must be performed not by one who is already a novice, but by one who is in the process of becoming a novice. If this is the point that Bu ston notes in passage (3), it may be possible to regard his suggestion as reasonable. That is, passage (3) seems to exist exclusively in the *Vinaya-saṃgraha*, as Bu ston suggests. Likewise, the passages that undoubtedly correspond to (4) and (5) are found in either Chinese or Tibetan, or in both versions of the *Vinaya-saṃgraha* that have come down to us, and, as far as I have researched, do not appear in the current versions of the MSV or the VS where the proper manners of showing reverence are regulated and where the formal ways of establishing a monastic kitchen are defined, respectively. It may be safe to say, therefore, that both (4) and (5) are also unique to the *Vinaya-saṃgraha*. Thus, Bu ston’s claim appears to be well supported in the case of passages (3), (4), and (5). The situations regarding the other two passages (1) and (2), however, appear to disagree with Bu ston’s assertion, as discussed below.

**3. Inspection of the Two Passages** Passage (1) refers to the relationship between abandoning the training and giving up *samvara*. Both are technical phrases and may require some explanation. Abandoning the training is established in the rule of celibacy (the first Pārājika) as a way for monks to avoid breaking the rule. Even if they have sexual intercourse, they are not accused of transgression of the rule as long as they declare that they have abandoned the training just before they have sex. This is because the declaration gives rise to the renouncement of monkhood; it turns monks back into laymen, i.e., those who are not bound by the monastic rules. *Samvara*, though it is scarcely mentioned in the MSV, seems to refer to what we may translate as “self-restraint,” which serves to prevent sinful actions and is something monks, without a doubt, should always possess. Given that abandoning the training essentially means the loss of monkhood, it would naturally appear that abandoning the training is closely linked to giving up *samvara*. One of the auto-commentaries on the VS, for example,
specifically explains that the former entails the latter. If the Vinaya-saṃgītaka, therefore, refers to the two as unlinked, just as Bu ston suggests, it is reasonable that his puzzlement led him to doubt the authenticity of the text in its entirety. As far as I have researched, however, such a reference is not found in the Vinaya-saṃgītaka. It explains, on the contrary, that abandoning the training and giving up saṃvara are virtually the same in the following:

In regard to the expression “without abandoning the training,” it means that [the monk] does not give up saṃvara by the conditions for giving up saṃvara. There are four conditions: abandoning the training, occurrence of two sexes, cessation of the root of merit, and death.

It is obvious that the relationship between abandoning the training and giving up saṃvara is explained here. Since there seems to be no other passage in which both abandoning the training and giving up saṃvara are mentioned together in the Vinaya-saṃgītaka, the passage quoted above is most likely the one Bu ston refers to in his first passage. These two passages, however, have opposite meanings. In the Vinaya-saṃgītaka, abandoning the training is explained as a cause for giving up saṃvara. On the other hand, Bu ston suggests in passage (1) that the Vinaya-saṃgītaka refers to abandoning the training as NOT linked to giving up saṃvara. Here we may observe a discrepancy between what Bu ston suggests about the Vinaya-saṃgītaka in his 'Dul spyi and what is actually seen in the current versions of the Vinaya-saṃgītaka.

Let us now look at passage (2). The problem with Bu ston’s criticism of the Vinaya-saṃgītaka based on passage (2) may be more conspicuous than that based on passage (1). It is not only because such a passage does not appear in the Vinaya-saṃgītaka, but because it includes an explanation that suggests that the monks are free from any grave faults, even if they steal something from the Uttarakurus:

Since there is no possession [of anything] in Uttarakuru, there is no stealing.

The passage above suggests that the Vinaya-saṃgītaka supports the viewpoint that no one could possess anything in Uttarakuru, a sort of utopia where people semi-permanently lead happy and comfortable lives without any evil thoughts or actions, such as killing or stealing, and therefore, stealing would never occur. This viewpoint is presumably shared by both the MSV and the VS, since they include almost the exact
same passages. More importantly, the viewpoint would perhaps most naturally suggest that the offense of stealing, i.e., the Pārājika offense, does not apply to those who have stolen from the Uttarakurus. In fact, the MSV explicitly defines such monks as being not Pārājika but Śthūlātyaya offenders (see n. 22 above). In any case, it is clear that there is little difference between the Vinaya-saṃgraha and the VS in regard to the perception of monks stealing from the Uttarakurus. Again, we see that Bu ston’s rejection of the Vinaya-saṃgraha based on passage (2) seems to be unsupported.

4. Conclusion After inspecting the five passages that, in his 'Dul spyi, Bu ston suggests appear exclusively in the Vinaya-saṃgraha, I have found that his suggestions do not always hold true. This result might be explained by at least three possibilities. First, Bu ston might not have read the Vinaya-saṃgraha carefully enough. Second, the texts of 'Dul spyi might have changed somewhat through transmission before coming down to us. Consequently the version currently available may differ to some extent from the original version that Bu ston wrote in 1357. Third, more than one version of the Tibetan translation of the Vinaya-saṃgraha may have circulated, and the version that Bu ston read could have been different from the one we have today. This may be most likely, since it may be further supported by two facts: the Chinese translation of the Vinaya-saṃgraha is noted for having circulated in two versions, 14 and 20 juan versions, the latter of which is no longer available, and Bu ston refers to the Vinaya-saṃgraha as 15 bam po in his 'Dul spyi, whereas the text that we now have consists of 13 bam po. There seems to be no doubt, in any case, that Bu ston’s brief overview of the Vinaya-saṃgraha is an interesting account that provides us with further evidence of the unpopularity of the Vinaya-saṃgraha in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. It also prompts us to consider the credibility of Bu ston’s works that are extant and available to us and suggests multiple circulations or transmissions of the Vinaya-saṃgraha.

* I wish to thank Profs. Miyazaki Izumi 宮崎泉 and Shayne Clarke, Dr. Petra Kieffer-Pülz for many useful comments. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Kadoya Warren for English check.

Notes
Bibliography


(Indebted to JSPS for Grant-in-Aid [14J08294])

**Key words** Bu ston, Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya, Vinaya-saṃgraha, saṃvara

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