

Introduction on Jang Gunchoe

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Jang-Gun-Choies or the extensive winter debate was held every winter for a month at a place called Jang which lays on the South Western part of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. This is a debate session in which mainly the students (monks) of Sera, Drepung and Gadhen - the three great monastic universities - and students from other non-sectarian schools engage in debate on philosophical treatises of Valid Cognition through intensive investigation. Long ago in India, there came a student of Acharya Vasubandhu named Acharya Dignaga, who was popularly known for his knowledge in the science of logic more than his master. For the purpose of fully understanding all the aspects of the teachings of Lord Buddha on The Base, The Path and The Fruition by the future beings, whose power of wisdom to understand is weak, Acharya Dignana developed the intention of putting all the various pramana texts composed till then to facilitate in understanding teachings of Buddha into a Compendium. He started with the following appraisal-prayer of Compendium of Valid Cognition, as follows:

I pay homage to the Buddha, Shasta, Tathagat,

To compose this text--The Compendium of Valid Cognition, with the intention to benefit all sentient beings,

When Dignana wrote these introductory verses on a slate, there arose a light which gave luminosity to the whole world, the earth shook and a great sound was heard. The Tirthika Krishna Muni Raja, through the power of his clairvoyance, examined by which force the great sound was produced. He understood that loud sound was produced because of the composition of verses by Acharya Dignaga. So when Acharya Dignaga set out to seek alms, the Tirthika came by the power of his magic and twice erased the verses. Then Acharya Dignaga wrote the following verse along with the introductory verses of the Compendium of Valid Cognition,

*If you are erasing this as a fun and trick, please stop it;
If you are doing this with a desire for debate with me,
Show yourself (to me) face to face and we shall debate.*

And then Acharya went out for alms. Tirthika came there in Acharya's absence, saw the verses and he stayed there with the desire for debate. In the actual debate Acharya Dignaga defeated the Tirthika three times, and when the Acharya told him to enter and follow Buddhism he got enraged with anger. In a fit of anger, Tirthika sprinkled a powder of recited-mantras at Acharya Dignaga, which burned Acharya's belongings and robes. As Acharya recited an anti-burning mantra and went into meditation his body got no injuries. That incident with the Tirthika saddened Acharya Dignaga a lot and he thought:

If i have no potentiality to benefit even a single sentient being, how can I be able to work for the welfare of all sentient beings.

While thinking so, Acharya tossed the slate on which the verses were written high up in the sky and decided to give up Bodhicitta and work for self liberation when it descends and hits the ground. However, the slate did not fall down to the ground. When Acharya looked up in the sky he saw Lord Manjushri holding the slate in the air and Manjushri prophesied thus to him:

Son! Don't be depressed. Because an encounter with the lower people generates bad wisdom; I know, the hosts of Tirthikas would not be able to harm this text of yours; Until you attain the enlightenment I will be your teacher; In the future, this text of yours would become the sole eye for all beings.

After that Acharya Dignaga completed the Compendium of Valid Cognition with great zeal and courage and gave eye of wisdom to beings.

The slate which was tossed into the sky by Acharya Dignaga fell with auspicious signs at a place called Jang in Tibet, and the Compendium of Valid Cognition has been widely beneficial to that special place. The Jang Gunchoe debate or the Jang Winter Debate Session, which spread or started from that place is to study on the texts of Valid Cognition and it is a session with special blessing power. In the words of Great Jamgon Lama Tsongkhapa:

*Its meaning is expounded this way;
By Lord Manjushri to Acharya Dignaga orally implored thus:
You should really compose this text because
This will be an eye for all sentient beings in the future.*

Unlike other debate sessions Jang winter debate session is special, because during this session the texts of Commentary on Valid Cognition and Compendium of Valid Cognition, which is like a key to understand the essential full meaning of Eighty Four Thousand Heaps of Doctrine taught by Buddha Shakyamuni are studied. The Commentary on Valid Cognition and Compendium of Valid Cognition are important texts composed 1500 years before by Acharya Dignaga and Acharya Dharmakirti of Nalanda University. The Compendium of Valid Cognition has six chapters or divisions and the Commentary on Valid Cognition has four chapters or divisions.

The special purpose of studying these two texts is, if one studies these two texts it will facilitate to understand well all the meanings of texts from both Mahayana and Hinayana Schools.

To explain briefly our traditional modes of studying these texts; to study through the system of Tib. rGal-bTag (in this procedure something is established or refuted through the investigation of cross-question-answer during the debate.) This system was introduced eight hundred years ago by a Tibetan scholar Cha-pa-Choskyi-Senge. Another system is, out of two monk students, one asks questions while standing and the other provides answers while seated. This is called Accompany-of-Defender-Challenger

(Tib. rTsod-Zldha.) The entire strength of the students in a class assembles together and debate by asking questions and answers. This is called 'establishing a thesis in class' (Tib. Zin-Gra-Dham-bCha.) Answering and questioning in the assembly of all the monks is called the Great Establishing Thesis (Tib. Dam-Cha-chenmo.) During these debate procedures, even if one cannot involve in asking questions and answering, if with faith and sense of rejoicing just merely listening to others questions and answers will improve one's own wisdom and lay predisposition in the great Buddhist philosophy texts. The significance of clapping hands and tapping the feet hard on the ground while asking questions and answering is:

By clapping the palm of right hand on the palm of left hand, the right hand signifies wisdom which is like wielding sword of Manjushri and left hand signifies one's ignorance filled in it. Clapping is done simultaneously while asking questions to signify eradication of ignorance in the left hand by the wisdom sword of the right hand. To signify complete eradication of such ignorance forever, the questioner hits his foot on the ground simultaneously while asking questions. If the students engage in debate in such procedure, it will amass auspicious coincidences for reducing one's own ignorance. Moreover, HH the Dalai Lama too emphatically advises to organise Jang Gunchoe debate, which is the mode of study through logic.