

PARTICIPLES AND VERBAL NOUNS

The extent to which the Tibetan language bears the influence of Sanskrit cannot be overstated, and central to understanding this point is knowledge of the role of the past passive participle in Sanskrit. A “past passive participle,” simply stated, is a derived form of a verb that expresses a past action in relation to an object. It is often used as an adjective, but more importantly, in Sanskrit, it can function in place of a verb. The same holds true in Tibetan.

Wilson describes this difference in usage in terms of “open” verbs (participles that indicate verbal activity within a sentence) and “final” verbs (verbs that terminate sentences; cf. Wilson, 129–130); in Tibetan, the participle is formed with the lexical suffix particles ལ་ and ལ་ (Wilson, 167ff). It is important to note that the formation of a participle is identical to that of a verbal noun. In both cases, a verb receives the addition of a lexical suffix particle—either ལ་ or ལ་—and its meaning is differentiated by verb tense or sometimes only context.

As one way of making an indirect statement, such a statement need not contain a referential noun (in English, such is rendered with a subordinate clause introduced by the relative pronoun “that”). In Tibetan, these occur in the form of a participle, such as བྱེད་ལ་ with ཡིན་ or ཟིན་. For example,

ས་བརྩ་ལ་ལ་ཡོངས་སྤྱོད་མེད་ལ་ཟིན།

It is not that there are no thorough purifiers on the tenth ground.

and with the inceptive form (see below) of the verb ཡིན་, ལགས་,

དེ་ཆོ་ངེས་འབྱུང་སྤྱིས་ལ་ལགས།

which can be rendered in English literally as “Then, [this] is [the start of] the generation of renunciation” or more colloquially—making reference to the past tense of the verb གྱི་—as “Then, renunciation has been generated.”

The use of the participle form of a verb often occurs in lieu of discrete sentence forms—that is, in what would be considered a “run-on” sentence in English. For example, stringing several participial phrases together—often used as nominalized subjects in a list—gives rise to sentences like,

མེ་ཉླ་འབྲས་ལུ་ཇི་སྟེད་ཡོད་ལ་དང་། སྤྲན་གྱི་ནམ་ལ་གང་དག་ཡོད་ལ་དང་། འཇིག་
རྟེན་རིན་ཆེན་ཇི་སྟེད་ཡོད་ལ་དང་། ...

Whatever flowers and fruits exist, and any kinds of medicine that exist, and precious things existing in the world, ...