

MIPHAM'S
BEACON OF CERTAINTY

*Illuminating the View of Dzogchen,
the Great Perfection*

By John W. Pettit



Wisdom Publications • Boston

3. *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: An Overview*

3.1 Historical and Philosophical Dimensions of Buddhism

GENERALLY SPEAKING, in Buddhism the possibility of freedom is predicated on the possibility of enlightenment, and enlightenment is predicated on the possibility of knowing ultimate reality—so to know what is ultimately true or real is to be enlightened and free. In this respect all traditions of Buddhism are essentially in agreement. However, Buddhist philosophical schools have different conceptions of what constitutes ultimate reality, and thus have developed diverse philosophical interpretations of ultimate reality and practical approaches to freedom, which are understood to be the most appropriate means for knowing reality.

Buddhist scriptures (sūtras) do not necessarily appear to convey a consistent, unified philosophical vision. The Buddha appears to have taught in different ways on different occasions. Thus the sūtras, with their diverse content, form the basis of a long and complex history of Buddhist philosophy in India and Tibet. The sūtras are reckoned by later tradition as belonging to different *yānas*, or soteriological conveyances—the Hīnayāna (“Small Vehicle”) or the Mahāyāna (“Great Vehicle”). The adherents of the Mahāyāna sūtras distinguished themselves from the Hīnayāna by espousing different ideals of enlightenment, different emphases in ethical orientation, and a more radical formulation of the nature of ultimate truth. The Mahāyāna scriptures teach several distinct ways of understanding the nature of ultimate reality. This led to the development of the different trends of Buddhist critical philosophy, which were eventually translated and propagated in Tibet.

The doctrines of Buddhist esotericism, or tantra, developed more or less simultaneously with the Mahāyāna. Tantric texts and traditions are based upon special methodological approaches to cultivating Buddhist philosophy as a lived experience; to some extent they also elaborate the theories developed by critical philosophy. The teachings of tantra were understood to be a distinct vehicle, the Vajrayāna, distinct from the Vehicle of Philosophical Dialectics (**lakṣaṇayāna*, *mishan nyid kyi theg pa*, lit. “vehicle of [philosophical] definitions”), which emphasizes rational analysis instead of the direct approaches to gnosis taught in the tantras. Though Tibet’s most influential philosopher, Tsongkhapa, developed an interpretation that assumes that the philosophical views of sūtra and tantra are the same, other scholars such as Mipham differentiate the sūtras and tantras with respect to view as well as method (*upāya*).

These viewpoints are explored in greater detail in the following sections. Having introduced the basic elements of Indian Buddhist tradition, my discussion will consider the sūtras, commentators, and treatises (*śāstras*) that are most important for understanding Mipham and the philosophers who influenced him. In particular, section 3.5.2 concerns the Nyingma tradition's understanding of the tantric philosophical view (*darśana*), and how the Nyingma differs from the Gelug in this respect. For present purposes, the details of tantric method are of less concern and will be considered briefly; the tantric methods unique to the Nyingma school will be discussed in the following chapter in sections 4.2.2.2–4.2.2.4.

3.2 Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna

The historical Buddha Śākyamuni lived for eighty-one years sometime in the fourth or fifth centuries B.C.E., according to modern chronologies devised on the basis of textual, epigraphical, and archeological evidence. He was a prince named Siddhārtha in the Śākya kingdom in what is now northeastern Nepal. The future Buddha renounced kingship, studied a number of religious doctrines and yogic techniques under the famous teachers of his time, and then wandered alone to discover the truth for himself. He practiced various austerities and meditated until he reached the state of supreme freedom, or nirvāṇa. According to a passage in the *Lalitavistara* that Tibetans often quote from memory, when the Buddha reached enlightenment he thought to himself:

Profound, peaceful, immaculate, luminous, and unfabricated:
Such an ambrosial Dharma have I found!
If I try to teach it, nobody will understand,
So not speaking, I shall stay in the forest.¹⁴⁷

Not long thereafter the Buddha was entreated by the god Brahmā to reveal his Dharma. To some ascetic companions he first taught the four sublime truths (*āryasatya*): the fact of suffering (*duḥkha*), its origin (*samudaya*), its cessation (*nirodha*), and the way to cessation (*mārga*). During the Buddha's life, a large following of monks (*bhikṣu*) and lay devotees (*upāsaka*) developed. The Buddha and his disciples traveled widely, teaching and meditating, thus planting the seeds for the flowering of the Buddhist religion under the patronage of King Aśoka (died c. 230 B.C.E.). The Buddha is noteworthy among founders of world religions in his insistence that he was not the first to discover his truth, or Dharma, nor the last.

This much of the history of early Buddhism is agreed upon by the various traditions of Buddhism throughout Asia. Also agreed is that the interpretation of the monastic rules (*vinaya*) laid down by the Buddha, as well as the philosophical implications of his various teachings, especially that of selflessness (*anātman*),

led to the development of diverse philosophical schools before the common era. Paul Williams (1989b) has pointed out that Buddhism was, and continues to be, a religion bound by a moral unity in spite of its ethical and philosophical evolution. Buddhists all accept that the world of cyclic rebirth (*samsāra*) is marked by impermanence (*anitya*), selflessness (*anātman*), and suffering (*duḥkha*), and that the cause of suffering can be identified and terminated through the practice of the Buddhist path. Nonetheless, as new philosophical interpretations and practical innovations developed, the classificatory schema of different *yānas* appeared in the attempt to better understand the connections among the different philosophical views, ethical concepts, and spiritual ideals of Indian Buddhism.

The spiritual ideal of early traditions of Buddhism was the arhat, a saint who has extinguished all emotions of attachment, aversion, and misknowledge and thus ended the round of rebirth. Arhatship is reached through the renunciation of negative actions, the cultivation of wholesome attitudes, and by understanding the nature of things—as impermanent (*anitya*), selfless (*anātman*), and unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*). The arhat continues to be the spiritual ideal in Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka and Thailand, that follow the Theravāda, or Tradition of Elders. Theravāda tradition maintains—and not without reason—that it is the form of Buddhism that most closely resembles that of early Buddhism. Among the elders (Skt. *sthāvirā*, Pali *thera*) of early Buddhist tradition were many revered arhats, on whose authority the teachings of the Buddha were maintained and codified, forming the basis for what is preserved today as the Pali language canon of Theravādan Buddhism.

An arhat is distinct from a buddha, who throughout innumerable lifetimes strove, as a bodhisattva or “enlightening being,” to achieve perfect, omniscient buddhahood for the sake of liberating all beings. For Theravāda Buddhists the ideal of buddhahood is something to be pursued only by a small number of persons, as it is most difficult to reach. By contrast, anyone with diligence can reach the arhat’s state of nirvāṇa within several lifetimes.

Around the first century C.E. a new development began to take place in Indian Buddhism, later known as the Mahāyāna or Great Vehicle. Followers of this school no longer accepted the arhat as the principal ideal of Buddhist practice. Instead they exalted the bodhisattva, who like the historical Buddha strives to attain enlightenment over many lifetimes for the sake of others. *Hīna* means small, inferior, deficient, or defective. *Hīnayāna* is the term used by Mahāyānists, sometimes disparagingly, to differentiate their tradition from those Buddhists who do not explicitly seek enlightenment for the sake of liberating all beings.¹⁴⁸

In spite of the smug sense of superiority over the Hīnayāna that some Mahāyāna scriptures express, historical evidence suggests that monks who adhered to one or the other of these ideals lived peacefully together, and for the most part maintained the same, or at least compatible, forms of moral discipline. Mahāyāna Buddhism does not have a strong historical claim for representing the explicit teaching of the historical Buddha; its scriptures evince a gradual development of

doctrines over several hundred years. However, the basic concepts of Mahāyāna, such as the bodhisattva ethic, emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and the recognition of a distinction between buddhahood and arhatship as spiritual ideals, are known from the earliest sources available in the Pali canon. This suggests that Mahāyāna was not simply an accretion of fabricated doctrines, as it is sometimes accused of being, but has a strong connection with the teachings of Buddha himself.

According to Tibetan commentators, Hīnayāna practitioners cultivate the wisdom of selflessness mainly with respect to persons (*pudgalanairātmya*, *gang zag gi bdag med*), and the ethical precepts they follow are primarily negative, that is, the avoidance of the ten nonvirtuous actions. These are: three of body—murder, theft, and sexual misconduct; four of speech—falsehood, slander, irresponsible chatter, and verbal abuse; and three of mind—covetousness, vindictiveness, and wrong views.¹⁴⁹ According to Mahāyāna, the Hīnayāna is a vehicle for the enlightenment of two kinds of persons: those who listen to and follow the Buddha's teaching (*śrāvaka*) and become arhats, and individualist seekers (*pratyekabuddha*) who discover nirvāṇa without encountering the institutional Dharma teaching. Thus many Mahāyāna scriptures mention two lower vehicles, the Śrāvakayāna and the Pratyekabuddhayāna. In Mahāyāna the wisdom of phenomenal selflessness (*dharmanairātmya*) is emphasized. The bodhisattva seeks explicitly to realize the emptiness of all phenomena, not just of the illusion of personal self, which is one phenomenon among many. According to most commentators, this emphasis on realizing the nature of all phenomena is essential to the attainment of omniscience in buddhahood.

The ethical foundation of a bodhisattva's path to enlightenment is great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) for all sentient beings. Arhats possess compassion but not great compassion and thus effect only their own liberation. The bodhisattva's ethics includes avoidance of the ten nonvirtues, but mainly emphasizes the six consummate virtues or perfections (*pāramitā*)—generosity (*dāna*), ethics (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), effort (*vīrya*), meditative concentration (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). It is said that a bodhisattva must practice these virtues for three incalculable aeons (*asamkhyeyakalpa*).

The bodhisattva's intention to achieve full enlightenment and its practical application as the six perfections are the motivational and applied aspects, respectively, of the *bodhicitta* or "mind of enlightenment." Based on the attitude of *bodhicitta*, ordinary virtues become extraordinary because of the motive to benefit of all beings, and because of the philosophical outlook of perfect wisdom, which does not adhere to the dichotomy of self and other. Though the ethical principles emphasized by Mahāyāna Buddhism are not unknown in Hīnayāna, they are not taught as "perfections." In this respect, the Mahāyāna is sometimes distinguished as the *Pāramitāyāna*, or Vehicle of Transcendental Perfections. Mahāyāna philosophical view and ethics are thus considered inclusive of those of the Hīnayāna, but greater in scope.

By applying him- or herself to the first five perfections, a bodhisattva accu-

mulates merit (*kuśala*), and by the last, wisdom (*jñāna*). These are said to be the causes, respectively, for the attainment of a buddha's form bodies (*rūpakāyāḥ*) and wisdom body (*dharmakāya*). The form bodies of a buddha are the *nirmāṇakāya*, the emanation body, which appears in the perceptions of ordinary beings, and the *saṃbhogakāya*, or body of beatific vision, which appears in the sublime vision of arhats and bodhisattvas. Generally speaking, the *saṃbhogakāya* is the type of buddha manifestation referred to in the visionary passages of Mahāyāna sūtras. The *dharmakāya* is the actual wisdom mind of a buddha, which knows all phenomena in their true nature as well as their diversity (*yathāyavān*). It is also described as the wisdom comprising the cessation of emotional afflictions (*kleśa*) and mis-knowledge (*avidyā*).

An important feature of Mahāyāna scriptures is the prominence of semihistorical or mythical buddhas and bodhisattvas. Among the more famous bodhisattvas are Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, who appear as disciples of the Buddha in various Mahāyāna scriptures. Mahāyāna scriptures also refer to buddhas in other universes, such as Buddha Amitābha, whose paradise is described in the *Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtras*. Mythical buddhas and bodhisattvas became popular objects of devotional worship, and confident faith (*śraddhā*) was thus an essential factor in Mahāyāna Buddhist practice. The special practices taught in Mahāyāna scriptures include elaborate visualized meditations of mythical buddhas and their paradises, repetition of prayers and mystic formulae (*mantra* and *dhāraṇī*), the worship of *stūpas* or reliquaries, and the ritual worship of certain sūtras such as the *Lotus* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*).

Such typically Mahāyānist practices find numerous precedents in the traditions of early Buddhism as preserved in the Pali canon. They also prefigure the developments of the Buddhist tantras. The various innovations of philosophy and practice in Indian Buddhism were, in all likelihood, not perceived as heretical in their incipient phases. The fact that different Buddhist traditions possess strong "family resemblances" (if not perfect compatibility in all respects) suggests a process of gradual development. Vehement disagreement between different religious and philosophical traditions in Buddhism has generally emerged only after a basis of difference—scriptures, practices, treatises, etc.—has become the focus of interpretations that differ from received tradition. Such variant interpretations in turn provide the basis for the evolution of new traditions.

3.3 Important Teachings of Mahāyāna Scriptures

3.3.1 Prajñāpāramitā

The earliest discernible type of Mahāyāna sūtra, and in many ways the most characteristic, is the Prajñāpāramitā, or Perfection of Wisdom, which began to emerge about 100 B.C.E. The emphasis of the Prajñāpāramitā genre is the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all things (*dharmāḥ*)—their lack of intrinsic, substantial reality—and the implication of the realization of that emptiness, which is the extraordi-

nary wisdom (*prajñā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and ability (*bāla*) acquired by the bodhisattva on the path to full enlightenment.

The Prajñāpāramitā scriptures collapse the dichotomies and assumptions of conventional expression in the nature of the ultimate, including the very notion of enlightenment itself:

Subhuti: Even Nirvana, I say, is like a magical illusion, is like a dream.
How much more so anything else!

Gods: Even Nirvana, Holy Subhuti, you say is like an illusion, is like a dream?

Subhuti: Even if perchance there could be anything more distinguished, of that too I would say it is like an illusion, like a dream.⁵⁰

The quintessential formula of the Prajñāpāramitā is found in the *Heart Sūtra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra*): "Form is empty, emptiness is form; form is not other than emptiness, emptiness not other than form." Various ways of interpreting this statement are found in the commentarial literature of India, Tibet, China, and Japan. All would seem to agree that the statement expresses the highest wisdom of the Buddha, who realizes emptiness as identical with the causally originated (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and illusory (*mayopama*) nature of things. Emptiness also means that all phenomena (*dharmāḥ*) are nonarisen (*anutpāda*), not destroyed (*anuccheda*), unfabricated (*asaṃskṛta*), wishless (*anabhisamskara*), signless (*alakṣya*), and so on.

Though the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras represent a significant innovation in style as well as content over earlier materials, it may be impossible to judge whether or not the philosophical and ethical emphases of the Prajñāpāramitā represent actual teachings of the Buddha. There is, in any case, no reason to exclude the possibility that, like the sūtras of the Pali canon, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras were compiled at least in part from oral traditions. Moreover, the Prajñāpāramitā's most important concept, śūnyatā, is not unknown in the Pali literature (as *suññatā*).

Early followers of Mahāyāna considered their scriptures to be authentic teachings of the Buddha, a claim that was not acceptable to large segments of the Buddhist community. In the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the Buddha's audience is portrayed as consisting primarily of bodhisattvas, and, not infrequently, the bodhisattvas themselves deliver the teaching. In the scriptures of early Buddhist traditions, as preserved in the Pali canon, the Buddha himself usually addresses monks, and the arhat ideal is emphasized. According to Mahāyāna scriptures, bodhisattvas are supposed to have spiritual faculties superior to those of śrāvakas, so the Buddha taught a special doctrine suited to them, the Prajñāpāramitā. Perhaps to account for the absence of its teachings in scriptural collections already in existence, Prajñāpāramitā scriptures introduced the distinction of different "revolutions" of the "Dharma wheel" (*dharmacakraparivartana*), according to which the Prajñāpāramitā is the subject of a second and more profound phase of

teachings than those given by the Buddha earlier in his teaching career. In this way the Prajñāpāramitā literature provided a built-in defense against critics who objected to its brand of teaching, which was unfamiliar to them.

The sūtras discussed in the following section show that the distinction of two revolutions is not merely a polemical device. It reflects the distinction between relative and ultimate truth, which is essential to Mahāyāna philosophy and has played an important role in the development of Buddhist hermeneutics.

3.3.2. The *Samdhinirmocana* and the “Essence Sūtras”

The Prajñāpāramitā literature and its philosophical approach were supplemented by later developments that introduced more positive expressions of the nature of the ultimate reality. These include sūtras that teach Mentalism (*cittamātra*)—that everything is mind—and those that some Tibetans call “Essence Sūtras” (*snying po'i mdo*), which teach the innate buddha essence (*tathāgatagarbha*).¹⁵¹ Mentalism and the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* are the most important developments in Mahāyāna sūtras after the Prajñāpāramitā.

The most important of the Mentalist scriptures for Tibetan commentators is the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* or *Sūtra Elucidating the [Buddha's] Intention*. It is an essential source for understanding the developments of the Mentalist philosophy of the Buddhist commentators Asaṅga and Vasubandhu and the distinction between provisional (*neyārtha*, *drang don*) and definitive (*nītārtha*, *nges don*) teachings in Buddhist hermeneutics.

Early Buddhist tradition had used the “Dharma wheel” metaphor to refer to the Buddha's act of teaching. For example, the image of a wheel was used before anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha became common. In the Prajñāpāramitā this metaphor was used to distinguish two different levels of teaching and the Prajñāpāramitā's superior profundity. The *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* is a *locus classicus* of the idea of three successive “turnings” of the wheel of Dharma, each one of increasing profundity, as a classificatory scheme for Buddhist scriptures. The Prajñāpāramitā literature had distinguished itself from earlier scriptures as a second and more profound phase of turning. In addition to introducing the three-turning model, the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* claims to epitomize the last phase as the most profound expression of the Buddha's doctrine.¹⁵² The teachings of the second turning, the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* advises, were not definitive (*nītārtha*) but required interpretation (*neyārtha*).

According to the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, the most explicit and definitive understanding of reality is conveyed not only by the dichotomy of “form” and “emptiness,” but also with reference to the “three natures” (*trisvabhāva*). The three-nature theory is held to be the quintessential teaching of the third turning. The first of the three natures is projection (*parikalpita*). Projection is the process of imagination that labels and constructs the multifarious deceptions of *saṃsāra*. What exists in truth is confused with deluded perceptions, as in mistaking a coil

of rope for a snake. The second nature is relativity (*paratantra*). Relativity is what does exist—that is, a rope, in spite of our misperception of a snake. The third nature is perfection (*pariniṣpanna*), the fact that projection does not exist in relativity. Perfection is realized through meditation that eliminates all forms of projection, resulting in the realization of the fundamental coalescence of subjective perceiver and objective fact. Thus the three natures provide the philosophical basis for Buddhist Mentalism (*cittamātra*), which holds that relativity exists as mind (*citta*), while dualistic appearances of subjective mind and objective phenomena are unreal. It is significant that the theory of three natures is also found in a Prajñāpāramitā text, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, in the “Chapter Requested by Maitreya.” This indicates that the philosophical views later considered paradigmatic for the “third turning” were known early in the development of Mahāyāna scriptures,¹⁵³ and that Bodhisattva Maitreya was associated with Mentalist trends some time prior to the appearance of Mentalist texts attributed to him and commented on by Asaṅga.

The Essence Sūtras, of which the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādasūtra*, and the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* are probably the most famous, teach that all beings possess the essence of buddhahood (*tathāgatagarbha*). One of the earliest scriptures of this type is aptly named the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*. It teaches that the wisdom (*jñāna*) and bodies (*kāya*) of enlightenment are present in sentient beings, but are obscured by emotional afflictions (*kleśa*).¹⁵⁴ Thus, the Buddha's teaching serves not just to remove defilements, but to render manifest the innate qualities of buddhahood. Buddhahood is thus not understood as a special achievement, distinct from arhatship, which results from the extraordinary practices of bodhisattvas. It is, rather, none other than the original nature of the mind. Other Essence Sūtras elaborate on this theme. The *tathāgatagarbha* is referred to as “self” (*ātman*) in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. It is said to be what the Buddha intended when he taught selflessness (*anātman*). In other words, enlightenment is our true nature. It is pure (*suddha*), blissful (*sukha*), permanent (*nitya*), and self (*ātman*), while the misperception of self in the evanescent flow of ordinary experience is impure (*asuddha*), miserable (*duḥkha*), impermanent (*anitya*), and not really a self (*anātman*).

The *tathāgatagarbha* is also identified with the *dharmakāya*, the wisdom body of the Buddha. It is a radiant (*prabhāsvara*) and pure (*visuddha*) awareness (*jñāna*). In some places the *tathāgatagarbha* is linked with the *ālayavijñāna*,¹⁵⁵ which has led some commentators to classify the scriptures teaching one or another form of proto-Mentalism and the Essence Sūtras together as Mentalist scriptures. The most important feature that they share is the understanding of luminous mind (*prabhāśvaracitta*) or wisdom (*jñāna*) as the ultimate truth. This is arguably equivalent to the Mentalist conception of ultimate reality as perfection (*pariniṣpanna*). Thus, if the essential import of the scriptures of the third turning is considered to be of definitive meaning, the nature of mind—understood as identical to buddha mind—is an ultimate reality.

One implication of tathāgatagarbha theory is that arhatship is not really enlightenment, because, in addition to not being omniscient or fully competent in enlightening others, the arhat has not understood the nature of reality completely. Arhatship is thus understood as a pleasant detour on the way to buddhahood. Likewise, if the existence of tathāgatagarbha means that all beings are destined to buddhahood—as is it usually understood—then the teaching that there are three yānas is a provisional (*neyārtha*) teaching only, because there is only one yāna in the final analysis that leads to unsurpassable enlightenment as a buddha. This idea is most famously expressed in the *Lotus Sūtra*, where yānas are exemplified by several types of lovely carts (*ratha*) promised by a father to lure his children from a burning house. When the children emerge, they find only one type of cart awaits them.

3.3.3. Sources for Buddhist Hermeneutics

In addition to the *Samdhinirmocana* and the Essence Sūtras there are several important sources for understanding the development of Buddhist hermeneutics in Tibet. One important aspect of Indian Buddhist hermeneutics is its use in determining textual authenticity. This will not concern us here because the sources for the rival philosophical interpretations of Tibetan commentators were accepted as valid by all parties involved. For Tibetan philosophers the most crucial issue was how to interpret the various positions of Indian texts as being either definitive in meaning or provisional.

The *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra* is a *locus classicus* for the definitive-provisional distinction, which appears there as one of four “reliances” or “refuges” (*pratisaraṇa*): (i) rely not on the person (*pudgala*), but on the teaching (*dharma*); (ii) rely on the spirit (*artha*), not on the letter (*śabdha*); (iii) rely on scriptures of definite meaning (*nītārtha*), not on those of provisional meaning (*neyārtha*); and (iv) rely on ultimate wisdom (*jñāna*), not on dualistic consciousness (*viññāna*).¹⁵⁶

These four reliances are guidelines for understanding the proper view, meditation, and moral conduct inculcated by Buddhist scriptures. The first is familiar, as it is well known that the Buddha did not encourage his disciples to adhere to his teaching on the basis of personal authority, but by determining the reasonableness and efficacy of the teaching for themselves. The second reliance could be seen as an admonition for those conceited about their learning, or for those confused by the Buddha’s use of different modes of expression to communicate the same point. The third reliance invites any number of different applications, depending on which scriptures one accepts as definitive and provisional, so it is obviously a point requiring clarification. The fourth reliance implies that one should not rest content only with the wisdom arisen from study (*śrutamayīprajñā*) and thoughtful reflection (*cintāmayīprajñā*), but use them as a basis for cultivating the unmediated direct insight achieved by meditating (*bhāvanāmayīprajñā*).

We are left with the question of which teachings are provisional and which are

definitive. Definitive teachings are sometimes considered to be those that may be taken literally without philosophical interpretation; provisional teachings, if taken literally (*yathāruta*), lead to contradiction. Provisional teachings should be understood to have a special purpose (*prayojana*) that their literal content does not indicate, and to be motivated by an implicit intention (*abhiprāya*) on the part of the speaker.

For example, when the Buddha teaches that a person who creates positive karma will enjoy celestial pleasures in a future life, his intention is to encourage renunciation of negative actions and ultimately to convey his realization of enlightenment to the listener. His purpose in speaking as though a particular person exists for whom karma will ripen is to counteract the nihilistic misconception that karma and future lives do not exist at all. It is not that the Buddha is contradicting his teaching of selflessness, which is that no independent person exists. Elsewhere, in addressing someone attached to the prospect of enjoying the fruit of positive merit in future lives, the Buddha might categorically deny a connection between the agent and recipient of karmic effects. Again, his ultimate intention is to liberate the listener; his purpose here would be to counteract the listener's attachment to pleasures and false belief in a "self." If the statement is taken literally, the Buddha would be contradicting his own teaching of the inexorability of cause and effect. Thus, a provisional teaching is motivated by the need to address the particular faults or prejudices of listeners and to skillfully guide them toward correct understanding and liberation.

The *Samdhinirmocana* classifies scriptures as belonging to three "turnings" and declares those sūtras belonging to the last—which in Tibet was held to include those sūtras teaching the Mentalist doctrine, the tathāgatagarbha, and the luminous nature of ultimate mind—to be definitive in meaning. The *Samdhinirmocana* also teaches that the scriptures of the second turning should not be taken literally and are in need of interpretation. However, this way of differentiating provisional and definitive meanings seems incomplete. If a provisional teaching is motivated by an implicit intention, and cannot be taken literally, one may infer that a definitive teaching makes the Buddha's intention explicit and may be understood literally. If the Buddha's teachings are ultimately intended only for the perfect benefit (*niḥśreyas*) of beings, which is enlightenment, and if enlightenment is to be understood as the ultimate nature of reality, then definitive teachings are those that indicate the ultimate nature of reality—that would require the inclusion of sūtras belonging to the second turning. It seems then that the *Samdhinirmocana*'s three-turning classification does not completely explain the criteria for establishing the provisional/definitive distinction. If this distinction is understood with reference to the Buddha's intention, it is the subject of the teaching—conventional or ultimate reality—that provides the key. So what defines ultimate reality must be precisely explicated in order to establish provisional and definitive meanings.

Some sūtras, most notably the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* and the *Samādhirāja*, make the provisional/definitive distinction in this way. The *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* says that sūtras that introduce the path (*mārgāvatārāya*) are provisional in meaning; those that portray the result of the path (*phalāvatārāya*) and those that teach emptiness (*śūnyatā*), signlessness (*animitta*), wishlessness (*apraṇihita*), effortlessness (*anabhisamkāra*), selflessness (*anātman*), etc.—which are attributes and synonyms for ultimate reality—are definitive in meaning. The *Samādhirāja* also indicates that texts teaching śūnyatā are definitive, while those referring to individuals, persons, and so forth are provisional.¹⁵⁷ Thus the teaching of ultimate truth is definitive, and the teaching of conventional truth is provisional. And in the case of the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* and *Samādhirāja* sūtras, the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and equivalent concepts is clearly indicated as the ultimate teaching.

Tibetan responses to the dilemma posed by these different standards for the determination of the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction ran a gamut of possibilities. Tsongkhapa, as Tibet's foremost Mādhyamika commentator, adhered strictly to the guidelines of the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* and *Samādhirāja* sūtras and maintained the teaching of śūnyatā as the ultimate reality and definitive teaching. Mipham, as the foremost philosopher inspired by the spirit of hermeneutical reconciliation of the Ecumenical Movement (*ris med*), incorporated the standards of all three sūtras in his hermeneutics, and maintained that śūnyatā, as well as the teaching of the innate luminosity of mind and the immanent perfection of tathāgata-garbha, were complementary and equally definitive teachings about ultimate reality. The implications of the respective hermeneutics of Tsongkhapa and Mipham are seen throughout their many works on sūtra and tantra, and will be explored in greater detail below in the fifth and sixth chapters.¹⁵⁸

3.4. Traditions of Indian Madhyamaka

The Buddha often referred to his teaching as a “middle path” (*madhyamapratipad*) that avoids the ethical extremes of asceticism and self-indulgence and the philosophical extremes of existence and nonexistence (*bhāvābhava*). The Madhyamaka or “Middle Way school” of the Indian Mahāyāna was a philosophical development of the teachings of the Prajñāpāramitā. The cardinal concept of Madhyamaka is śūnyatā or emptiness, meaning the absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāvatā*). According to Madhyamaka, emptiness is identical in principle with causal relativity (*pratītyasamutpāda*), because a thing that exists inherently cannot be subject to change or have any causal relationship with other things. Conversely, whatever exists dependently is empty, and vice versa. The identity of emptiness and relativity is the correct view that avoids the extremes of eternalist (*śāśvatavāda*) belief in self and nihilistic (*ucchedavāda*) denial of karma and the possibility of enlightenment.

3.4.1. Origins of Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika Madhyamaka

Nāgārjuna (early first millennium C.E.) is considered the founder of the Madhyamaka school. He is also associated with the Prajñāpāramitā literature. Candrakīrti and Asaṅga both mention that Nāgārjuna's most important text, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*) was based upon the Prajñāpāramitā.¹⁵⁹ Legend has it that Nāgārjuna himself brought the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras from the land of the dragons (*nāga*), where they had been entrusted for a time to those mythical beings. Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka is generally understood as a systematic logical exposition of the philosophy of the Prajñāpāramitā.

The terminology employed in the *MMK* suggests that Nāgārjuna was writing for Buddhists and non-Buddhist opponents who did not accept the Prajñāpāramitā conception of śūnyatā.¹⁶⁰ He systematically critiques the Buddhist theories of causes and conditions (*hetupratyaya*), nirvāṇa, and the four noble truths (*caturāryasatya*), as well as other concepts not particularly Buddhist, such as inherent existence (*svabhāva*), and identity and difference. The gist of Nāgārjuna's critique is that neither the ordinary conceptions that are taken for granted in secular discourse nor the hallowed conventions of sacred discourse are tenable if not understood as dependently originated, and thus as empty of inherent existence.

Nāgārjuna's writings became the focus of a distinct Madhyamaka school. Two of his most important commentators, Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka lived around 500 C.E. From the eleventh century onward, Tibetan scholars would consider them the originators of the Consequentialist (**prāsaṅgika*, *thal gyur ba*) and Dogmaticist (**svātantrika*, *rang rgyud pa*) interpretations of Madhyamaka, respectively. Tibetan commentators differentiate the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika approaches in several respects, all of which are related to the methods of argumentation they employ. Ruegg observes that Buddhapālita

...did not make use of independent inferences to establish the Mādhyamika's statements; and he employed the well-established *prasaṅga* method, which points out the necessary but undesired consequence resulting from a thesis or proposition intended to prove something concerning an entity.¹⁶¹

The essence of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka method, then, is to demonstrate the inherent contradictions of an opponent's position, and in so doing implicitly demonstrate that the Madhyamaka position—which is emptiness *cum* relativity—is correct. On the other hand, Ruegg says, Bhāvaviveka

...[t]ook up a position radically opposed to Buddhapālita's on the matter of the logical establishment of the Mādhyamika's philosophical position in general and of the negative statements in particular. In his view the necessary co-ordination with scripture (*āgama*) of an adequate

logical method of reasoning (*yukti*) requires more than *prasaṅga* arguments because, to establish the Mādhyamika's position, there is needed in addition an independent (*svatantra*) inference (*anumāna*), which can also be embodied in a proper "syllogism" (*prayogavākya*). And it is from this characteristic use of a *svatantrānumāna* that Bhāvaviveka's school has received its name of Svāntarika.¹⁶²

According to Bhāvaviveka's method, it is not sufficient merely to disprove the opponent's position on the basis of its internal contradictions. The Mādhyamika philosopher should prove his own position on the basis of a phenomenon (*dharmīn, chos can*) that is commonly established for both the opponent and the Mādhyamika. This means that the Mādhyamika should posit a subject (*dharmīn*) accepted also by the opponent, and establish the probandum (*sādhya-dharma*)—in this case, emptiness—on the basis of a valid logical reason (*hetu*) acceptable for both parties. It is not enough simply to demonstrate the incoherence of the opponent's position. Such an inference is "independent," then, to the extent that the Mādhyamika intends to prove his point directly with his own reasons, and not merely by indirectly disproving the opponent's position. Bhāvaviveka's approach was evidently influenced by the Buddhist logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, whose work is devoted to disproving the mistaken views of opponents as well as to proving the correct views of Buddhists on the basis of a commonly appearing subject.¹⁶³

Among the most important contributions of Bhāvaviveka were his distinction of a conceptual ultimate (*paryāyaparamārtha, rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) and a nonconceptual ultimate (*aparyāyaparamārtha, rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*), and his definition of emptiness as an absolute negation (*prasajyapratishedha, med dgag*). These two ultimates correspond to the way emptiness is known by ordinary and sublime beings, respectively. Emptiness as an absolute negation means that when the object of negation, the false appearance of true existence, is negated, there is nothing implied in its place.

The most important Prāsaṅgika commentator for Tibetan tradition was Candrakīrti (c. 600–650). His verse work, the *Madhyamakāvatāra* together with its own commentary (*bhāṣya*), were written as an introduction to Nāgārjuna's *MMK* on which Candrakīrti also wrote a commentary, the *Prasannapadā*. In the latter text he critiqued Bhāvaviveka's approach and defended Buddhapālita's, arguing that it is not possible for the Mādhyamika to prove his point on the basis of a commonly accepted phenomenon (*dharmīn*); for the opponent will necessarily understand that phenomenon to be truly existent (*satyasiddha*), while the Mādhyamika should not accept that anything truly existent exists. The Mādhyamika should not assent to a common phenomenon or substratum in order to prove his point to the opponent, because that would be tantamount to accepting that the phenomenon perceived by the opponent conventionally exists as it appears, that is, as inherently existent. In so doing, the Mādhyamika would be contradicting his own position.

Other important Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas include Āryadeva, Nāgārjuna's direct disciple, and Śāntideva, the ninth chapter of whose *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is an important source for Tibetan Mādhyamika debates. Mipham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* (NK) commentary on Śāntideva's text generated considerable controversy among both Gelug and Nyingma scholars; some of its important points will be touched upon below.¹⁶⁴

According to the Gelug commentarial tradition, the requirement that autonomous (*svatantra*) syllogisms (*prayogavākya*) be used to edify one's opponent means, in effect, that the Svātantrikas accepted that phenomena are *conventionally*—though not ultimately—established by way of their own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇasiddha*, *rang mtshan gyis grub pa*). Non-Mādhyamikas do not distinguish the merely conventional mode of designation of a thing—which does not in itself involve misperception of inherent existence—from a thing's apparent mode of existence, for example, as inherently existent. To use a commonly apparent object, which is not already understood according to the Mādhyamika system of establishing conventionalities, as a subject (*dharmin*, *chos can*) or basis on which to establish the Mādhyamika position would, in effect, commit the Mādhyamika to accepting the validity of the mode of appearance of a common object.¹⁶⁵ Though Svātantrikas, like all Mādhyamikas, maintain that *ultimately* nothing exists inherently or with respect to its defining characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*), if they accept that things exist conventionally according to their mode of appearance—as inherently existent—then things must be established conventionally according to their unique characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*). Additional evidence for imputing this position to Svātantrika is Bhāvaviveka's definition of conventional truth as that which appears to a conventional validating cognition. What appears for a conventional validating cognition appears to be inherently existent, so this definition implies that Svātantrikas accept that conventionally things exist the way they appear. The Prāsaṅgikas do not accept that the appearance of true existence, establishment by way of own-characteristic (**svalakṣaṇasiddhatva*, *rang mtshan gyis grub pa*), and so forth, are valid even conventionally, so they do not accept that things conventionally exist according to their mode of appearance.

The distinction between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika Mādhyamaka became a very important one for Tibetan scholasticism, especially in the Gelug tradition. Gelug scholars consider the hypothetical acceptance by Svātantrikas of phenomena as conventionally established by way of their own characteristics to be one of the most subtle forms of philosophical dogmatism, and as indicative of the most subtle form of instinctual clinging to inherent existence. Mipham seems to agree that Svātantrikas accept *svalakṣaṇasiddhatva* of phenomena conventionally. However, he considers the subtlety and ease of understanding of their approaches to emptiness and ultimate reality as the most important distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika. Mipham certainly did not think that they were “radically opposed,” as Ruegg has suggested,¹⁶⁶ and as some Gelug commentators maintain. Instead, he sees Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika as complementary

approaches that draw the same conclusions about ultimate concerns,¹⁶⁷ though by different conventional means.

3.4.2. Yogācāra and the Yogācāra Madhyamaka Synthesis

The Yogācāra school is associated with Asaṅga, his teacher Maitreya-nātha, and his brother Vasubandhu (c. 4th–5th centuries C.E.). Though their writings cover a variety of subjects, they are generally associated with the Mentalist (*cittamātra*) trend of Indian philosophy (also known as *Vijñaptimātra* and *Vijñānavāda*), which is based on the principle that “mind is everything.” The writings of Asaṅga *et al.* are sometimes considered by Western scholars as a historical reaction against the apophatic *via negativa* of the Prajñāpāramitā and the Madhyamaka. Tibetans generally understand them as the vast (*rgyas*) elaboration of skillful methods (*upāya*, *thabs*), complementing the profound (*zab*) insight of the Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka.

Maitreya-nātha was the author of five important texts, the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*, the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, the *Abhisamayālamkāra*, and the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. According to legend this Maitreya was none other than the eponymous teacher of Śākyamuni Buddha and the future buddha of this world, who taught Asaṅga when he took a visionary trip to Maitreya’s abode, the Tuṣita heaven. Maitreya’s texts, and those that Asaṅga and Vasubandhu based upon them, revolutionized the history of Buddhist philosophy. They are widely studied in the scholastic curriculum of Tibetan monasteries and are referred as the “Five Dharma Texts of Maitreya” (*byams chos sde lnga*). In Tibet the *Abhisamayālamkāra* and *Ratnagotravibhāga* have been particularly influential.¹⁶⁸ The *Abhisamayālamkāra* is a source for understanding the paths (*mārga*, *lam*), levels (*bhūmi*, *sa*), and realizations (*abhisamaya*, *mngon rtogs*) of the Mahāyāna, and is the focus of the scholastic study of Prajñāpāramitā, while the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is an important source for various approaches to Buddhist hermeneutics, to be discussed in detail below.¹⁶⁹

Whether these five seminal texts can be considered to belong to a “Yogācāra school” is more or less problematic, depending on how the tenets of that school are defined. The *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*, and *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* elucidate the theory and practice of the path with reference to the basic concepts of Mentalism, such as the three natures and the ultimate existence of mind, and elaborate a system of eight consciousnesses, including the ālayavijñāna. Since they explain the metaphysics of experience according to Mentalism, these texts can be called Mentalist treatises, and because they also teach the psychology of ordinary as well as yogic and meditative experience, they may be called Yogācāra treatises. Yogācāra texts are based principally on the teachings of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.

The philosophical views of the *Abhisamayālamkāra* and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* have been variously interpreted by Tibetan commentators as Mentalist, Svātantrika

Madhyamaka, Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, or some combination.¹⁷⁰ Regardless of which philosophical school Tibetan commentators assign them to, the Five Dharma Texts of Maitreya and the numerous commentaries and original works of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu collectively added a new dimension to the world of Indian Mahāyāna philosophy. In addition to systematizing and clarifying the Mentalist philosophy taught in the sūtras, they provided a rich and detailed map of all levels of experience, from the ordinary to the sublime.

The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is said in Tibetan tradition to teach the “hidden meaning of Prajñāpāramitā” (*sher phyin sbas don*). It is a systematic exposition of the modes of realization (*abhisamaya*, *mngon rtogs*) achieved on the paths (*mārga*, *lam*) and in full enlightenment. Commentators on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* have explained that its various categories elucidating the basis, path, and result of enlightenment should be understood in terms of five paths: accumulation (*sambhāramārga*, *tshogs lam*), preparation (*prayogamārga*, *sbyor lam*), vision (*darśanamārga*, *mtshong lam*), meditation (*bhāvanāmārga*, *bsgom lam*), and nonlearning (*aśaikṣamārga*, *mi slob lam*). The first two paths are those of ordinary persons (*prthagjana*, *so so'i skye bo*), those who have not realized emptiness directly.

Ordinary persons must accumulate merit and prepare the mind through discriminating wisdom in order to reach the path of vision, where emptiness is perceived directly. Someone who has perceived emptiness directly is called a sublime being (*āryajana*, *'phags pa'i skye bo*) and, in the Mahāyāna context, is a sublime bodhisattva (*āryabodhisattva*, *byang 'phags*). Subsequently, the realization of emptiness is deepened, and in the Mahāyāna, an *āryabodhisattva* gradually masters the practice of ethical perfections (*pāramitā*). The culmination of these paths, nonlearning, is not really a path but the full result of the previous paths. In the Hīnayāna the stage of nonlearning is arhatship, and in the Mahāyāna, buddhahood.

Because ordinary and sublime beings have very different ways of perceiving things, the distinction between them is crucial in determining proper methods of meditation, which is the subject of the third and fourth topics of Mipham's *Beacon* and of Tsongkhapa's chapter on insight (*vipaśyanā*, *lhag mthong*) in his *LRC*. The essential difference between them is that ordinary beings experience nearly everything through the mediation of concepts, while sublime beings who have direct realization of emptiness *cum* relativity experience things primarily through direct perception.

Ruegg (1969, 1989) and Hookham (1991) have drawn attention to the crucial importance of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* for understanding Tibetan philosophical traditions. The *Ratnagotravibhāga*'s importance hinges upon its role as a liminal text bridging sūtra and tantra.¹⁷¹ It systematically discusses the most important principle underlying tantra—the tathāgatagarbha as a primordial state—while purporting also to represent the final intention of the sūtras. Many Tibetan authors, including Tsongkhapa's disciple rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen, interpret the *Ratnagotravibhāga* as expressing the Prāsaṅgika view. These authors do not agree, however, on whether the teaching of the immanence of the qualities (*guṇa*,

yon tan) of buddhahood in the tathāgatagarbha should be taken literally. rGyal tshab understands the immanence of qualities to mean the nature of emptiness, which has the potential to manifest any possibility, while the dialectical-philosophical and tantric interpretations of the Nyingma understand this immanence literally, as the coalescence of enlightened attributes and the wisdom of the realization of emptiness in the original state.

The Yogācāra Madhyamaka is generally considered to have been founded by Śāntarakṣita, who also brought the scholastic tradition of Indian Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century. The most important extant Mādhyamika text of Śāntarakṣita is his *Madhyamakālamkāra*. Like Bhāvaviveka and other Svātantrikas, Śāntarakṣita incorporates concepts and methods of Buddhist logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa*) into his systematization of Mādhyamika thought; he also incorporated the Mentalism of the Yogācāra school.

Like the Yogācāra philosophers, Śāntarakṣita holds that, conventionally speaking, the mind and its contents are not separable.¹⁷² Like other Mādhyamikas, he maintains that the mind, like all other phenomena, is empty and does not ultimately exist. Thus, in the final analysis, Śāntarakṣita's view of emptiness is the same as that of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. Like Bhāvaviveka, his logical method invokes autonomous syllogisms and emphasizes the logical establishment of conceptually formulated emptiness, the conceptual ultimate (*paryāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs pa'i don dam*), which is conventionally "true" or "correct" in the sense that it is the antidote for the misconception of inherent existence. This type of emptiness is also known as a "conformative ultimate" (*mtshun pa'i don dam*), because it conforms to the nature of the nonconceptual emptiness (*aparyāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*), the emptiness realized by buddhas. Because of this affinity with Bhāvaviveka, Śāntarakṣita is usually classified by Tibetan scholars as a "Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika."

Śāntarakṣita's other great work is his *Tattvasaṃgraha*, a mammoth survey of Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophies. In spite of his greatness as a scholar, Śāntarakṣita's works were studied relatively little, due in part to their eclipse by the commentaries of Candrakīrti in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Nonetheless, the *Madhyamakālamkāra* was the subject of one of Mipham's great commentaries. Mipham thought this text was especially important because of its integration of the two major trends of Mahāyāna philosophy, the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka. He also valued its Svātantrika emphasis on establishing the conceptual ultimate (*paryāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs pa'i don dam*), because the conceptual ultimate is easily understood by beginners, and is conducive to understanding the actual or nonconceptual ultimate that, according to Mipham, is the special emphasis of Prāsaṅgika.

3.4.3. Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa

The Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition of *pramāṇa*, or logic and epistemology, began

to develop around the time of Vasubandhu (fourth century), an author of proto-Pramāṇika texts and the celebrated author of the *Abhidharmakośa* and, according to some later traditions, a follower of the Sautrāntika¹⁷³ school before his conversion to Mahāyāna by his brother Asaṅga. According to Tibetan doxographies, the Sautrāntika definition of the two realities (*satya*), the relative (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*), is the philosophical basis of the pramāṇa system of the Buddhist logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. The Sautrāntikas define a relative truth as a permanent phenomenon that is mentally designated—this is a universal, or, as the Tibetans translate it, a “meaning generality” (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, *spyi mtshan*)—while an ultimate truth is an impermanent phenomenon, a unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*, *rang mtshan*). In Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's thought, *svalakṣaṇa* is understood as a momentary phenomenon that is real because it has the power to produce effects (*arthakriyātva*), while general abstractions (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) do not and are considered unreal.

In his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* Dignāga subsumed all possible means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) in direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), whose object is *svalakṣaṇa*, and inference (*anumāna*), which operates mainly on the level of *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. Dharmakīrti was Dignāga's preeminent commentator who developed the latter's theories to a new level of subtlety; Dharmakīrti's most important text is the *Pramāṇavārttika*.

What makes a cognition valid in Dharmakīrti's system is the fact that it refers to something that really exists—*svalakṣaṇas*. In direct perception a real object is present to the senses. In making valid inferences (*anumāna*), like deducing the presence of fire from smoke, a valid sign (*liṅga*, *rtags*) or reason (*hetu*, *rgyu mtshan*), such as an instance of smoke, must be ascertained, and the invariable concomitance (*anvaya*, *rjes khyab*) of the probandum (*sādhya*, *sgrub bya*) in the presence of the sign or reason for its inference must also be established. Given that smoke is never present without fire, one must either directly perceive smoke, or correctly infer on the basis of other direct evidence that smoke exists, in order to infer the presence of fire. In either case, direct perception of *svalakṣaṇas* is essential to valid cognition. In philosophical debate the efficacy of this type of reasoning presumes that the sign or reason is perceptible to both parties, and that the concomitance of the sign and probandum are likewise established.

The innovation of Dharmakīrti's contemporary Bhāvaviveka was to use Dharmakīrti's method of formal syllogisms in the service of establishing the Mādhyamika viewpoint, also incorporated by Śāntarakṣita in his synthesis of Svātantrika and Yogācāra conventions. Bhāvaviveka, like Dharmakīrti, held that conventional and ultimate reality are both known by valid cognitions. This idea was generally embraced by Tibetan Mādhyamikas, though as already indicated, Bhāvaviveka's understanding of conventional valid cognition is somewhat problematic in the context of Mādhyamika philosophy. Though Bhāvaviveka did not assert the ultimate true existence of the objects of conventional valid cognition by way of unique characteristics (**svalakṣaṇasiddha*, *rang mtshan gyis grub pa*), as did Dhar-

makīrti, according to some commentators he effectively committed himself to accepting the *conventional* true existence of things by way of unique characters as a result of his incorporation of *pramāṇa* categories and methods. The position that valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) refers to truly existent characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) was unacceptable for Candrakīrti, but he did accept that conventionally there are valid cognitions. In his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti distinguishes between a cognition being valid because it accords with conventional discourse, and cognition being valid because it correctly realizes the nature of things. The former, a valid cognition of conventional reality, is considered valid to the extent that it does not contradict what is generally known to be true in the world. Nonetheless, it is necessarily mistaken about the way in which its objects exist, because those conventional objects falsely appear to be truly existent. An ultimate valid cognition, on the other hand, realizes emptiness, wherein the mode of appearance and actual nature of the object of valid cognition are the same. In spite of their very different systems of differentiating the two realities, the Mādhyamikas as well as Dharmakīrti seem to agree about the limitations of inferential reasoning in realizing the ultimate. A quote attributed to Dharmakīrti in Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* reads,

One who wants to look for reality (*de nyid, tattva*) should not rely on the syllogisms of inferential reasoning; [reality] is experienced through meditating properly, but not through its self-cognition [*rang rig, svasamvitti*]. The essential meaning of reality is not experienced through inference; by relying upon a good teacher and meditating, it will be experienced. When your own school and others are seen to have settled on a wrong course, and even resent you [for disagreeing], you should teach inferential reasoning.¹⁷⁴

To rephrase Kant's dictum, one might say that for Dharmakīrti the purpose of reason is to make way for direct perception. Likewise, in his *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* Bhāvaviveka says,

In fact logicians (*tārkika*) who give priority to inference (*anumāna*) as a *pramāṇa* cannot by analysis (*vitarka*) and deliberation (*vicāra*) come to know the utterly transcendent reality (*atīparokṣatattva*), the buddha body (*buddhakāya*) or gnosis (*jñāna*), since [inference only provides] a knowledge of confined outlook (*arvāgdarśana*).

The sun is not accessible to blind people,
Heaven is not accessible to wicked people,
The real, and ideal to be realized,
Is not accessible to logicians.¹⁷⁵

Samvyaavahārikapramāṇa, or conventional valid cognition, as understood by Dharmakīrti in his *Pramāṇaviniścaya* is primarily motivated by the fact that “with respect to ordinary (means of) cognition stupid non-Buddhists are misleading people”¹⁷⁶ However, this does not mean that inferential valid cognitions serve only to refute other people’s misconceptions. The first chapter (according to some redactions) of Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika* is dedicated to the role of inference in self-edification (*svārthānumāna*). What seems to be implied here is that, soteriologically speaking, inference should be applied to knowing ultimate reality. A *paramārthikapramāṇa*, according to Dharmakīrti, is beyond “theoretical and emotional disturbances” and is the product of contemplation on the universal features of things.¹⁷⁷ This means that the intrinsic identity (*svalakṣaṇa*) of a thing, or of a fundamental aspect of reality such as impermanence, is realized directly by first contemplating a general image (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) of it unwaveringly. The viability of a general image, such as *śūnyatā*, in serving as a meditative support for direct perception of reality would depend upon prior ascertainment of its validity through proper inference. The implication is that it is not inference *per se*, but what we make of it, that is significant in the gnoseological domain.

This explains the emphasis in Svātantrika Madhyamaka on the distinction between a conceptually formulated ultimate (*paryāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) and a nonconceptual one (*aparyāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*).¹⁷⁸ Bhāvaviveka and other Svātantrikas implicitly accepted that, conventionally speaking, phenomena possess unique characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*). This would include the ultimate nature of phenomena, emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which is established in conventional discourse, and which thus conventionally exists. Accordingly, the contemplation of the abstract concept (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) of emptiness, which is the conceptually formulated ultimate defined as the absolute negation of true existence, leads to a direct, nonconceptual perception of emptiness. The importance of this distinction will be considered further in section 5.3, and in the specific context of Tsongkhapa’s and Mipham’s systems, in sections 6.3–7.

3.5. Vajrayāna: Buddhist Tantra

3.5.1. Indian Origins

The Vajrayāna is the tradition of liberative techniques (*upāya*) taught in the texts of the Buddhist tantras. Its methods are ethically and philosophically grounded in Mahāyāna principles. Tantric techniques are supposed to reveal the indestructible (*vajra*) nature of reality, which is the same as innate enlightenment (*tathāgatagarbha*). In Tibetan commentarial traditions, Vajrayāna is synonymous with *Tantrayāna* (*rgyud kyi theg pa*) and *Mantrayāna* (*sngags kyi theg pa*). Another synonym used frequently by Tibetan authors is “Fruitional Vehicle” (**phalayāna*, *'bras bu'i theg pa*).¹⁷⁹

The historical origins of Tantrism are obscure, though certain themes of tantra—erotic, ritualistic, mythical, and philosophical—are as old as Indic culture

ings of the ūr-Mādhyamikas Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, the Yogācāra Madhyamaka system seems to be more important.³¹⁵

4.3.2. The Rise of Scholasticism

In Tibet the dialectical criticism of the Madhyamaka, the logic and epistemology of the Pramāṇa, and the esoteric mysticism of the tantras were all embraced and formed the basic material for new Buddhist traditions. Though this process had begun in the eighth century, scholasticism did not blossom until the eleventh century, when the earlier Nyingma traditions were joined by new streams of Indo-Tibetan tradition—later known as the Sakya, Kagyu, and Kadam.³¹⁶ Each of these had its great exponents, usually combining the lifestyles of the monk-scholar and yogi, who clarified the philosophical views of their respective schools through teaching, debating and writing, and meditation practice. All of these authors sought, in one way or another, to situate the theory and practice of Vajrayāna within dialectical-philosophical discourse and vice versa. Such persons were Rong zom Paṇḍita and Klong chen rab 'byams among the Nyingmapas, Sakya Paṇḍita among the Sakyapas (sa skya pa), Atiśa³¹⁷ and 'Brom ston pa (1003–1064) among the Kadampas, sGam po pa (1079–1153),³¹⁸ Mi bskyod rdor rje,³¹⁹ and Padma dkar po³²⁰ among the Kagyupas, and Tsongkhapa (1357–1419),³²¹ reviver of the Kadampa lineage, whose tradition would later be known as the “Virtuous Tradition,” or Gelug (dge lugs).

The work of all these scholars as well as Mipham's should be understood in the context of Mahāyāna philosophical systems as studied in Tibetan philosophical colleges (*bshad grwa*). The main subjects studied there are logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*), the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*, *phar phyin*), the Middle Way (*madhyamaka*, *dbu ma*), monastic discipline (*vinaya*, *'dul ba*), and Buddhist psychology and cosmology (*abhidharma*, *chos mngon pa*) according to the celebrated treatise of Vasubandhu, the *Abhidharmakośa* (*Chos mngon pa mdzod*), and its commentaries. There is a Tibetan commentarial genre, the monastic college textbook (*yig cha*), of which the Gelug school has the most extensive collection. These texts serve to introduce students to the important topics of their courses of study. Some Gelug yig cha are summaries of Tsongkhapa's teachings. The divergent interpretations of these yig cha are hotly debated by Gelugpa monks from different monasteries, or between different colleges of the same monastery. With the exception of *pramāṇa*, for which students generally prepare by studying “collected topics” (*bsdud grwa*), “types of mind” (*blo rigs*), and “types of evidence” (*rtags rigs*)³²² in their various compilations by Tibetan authors, the study of these subjects proceeds for the most part on the basis of original Indian texts, together with their Indian and Tibetan commentaries.³²³

The order in which these scholastic subjects are studied in different monasteries and traditions varies. Madhyamaka or Prajñāpāramitā usually follows Pramāṇa, since logic is considered essential for mastering the various lines of reasoning that

establish emptiness. Forensic debate is an essential part of Tibetan monastic education, and it is especially emphasized in Gelug monasteries. After a number of years, usually not less than ten, philosophical studies may culminate in a degree. In the major Gelug monasteries of central Tibet, this is the *geshe* (*dge bshes*).³²⁴ In other traditions, a scholar may achieve the grade of *khenpo* (*mkhan po*) or monastic preceptor. Technically a *khenpo* (*upadhyāya*) is an abbot and professor of a monastery, but in the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions (as with “*geshe*”) the title functionally means “master philosopher and teacher.” A student of dialectical philosophy may, upon completion of his studies, engage in a second course of study of tantric ritual and meditation, embark on a teaching career, or enter the administration of a monastery. Most of the important figures of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions held either a *geshe* or *khenpo* degree and were accomplished in both scholarship and tantric meditation.

4.3.3. Klong chen rab 'byams

In the life and works of Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1363) the Nyingma traditions of the Great Perfection achieved their finest literary expression. Klong chen pa is best known for his Great Perfection writings, but he was also a great scholar of dialectical philosophy. No Nyingma author has ever surpassed his contribution of outstanding scholarship and superb poetic style. In Klong chen pa, the dialectical philosophical tradition of the Nyingma reached, if not exactly its apogee, then certainly the second of its three greatest pinnacles, flanked by Rong zom Paṇḍita and Mipham. The writings of Klong chen pa are in any case exemplary of the Nyingma scholastic tradition in their comprehensive treatment of both exoteric Buddhism (including dialectics) and Vajrayāna theory and practice, preserving a clear emphasis upon the latter (especially the Great Perfection).

Klong chen pa was born in central Tibet to a family of tantric adepts. From the time he was five his father began teaching him the esoteric practices of the Nyingma tradition. At sixteen he began studying the tantras of the New Translation schools, and by the time he was twenty-one he had received most of the major transmissions of the later translations. At the age of nineteen he began to study the exoteric texts of the sūtra tradition at Sang phu Monastery. Later he would receive important Kagyu teachings from the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rDo rje.

When Klong chen pa was twenty-nine he met Kumāradza, a principal holder of the heart-essence (*snying thig*), the highest teaching of the Great Perfection. He was immediately accepted as his chief disciple and spent about two years with him. Then he left to practice on his own and began to give teachings. Throughout the rest of his life he traveled, taught, and wrote extensively.

Klong chen pa's works include numerous commentaries on various subjects of sūtra and tantra and some of the most exquisite Tibetan poetry ever written. Though he wrote extensively on the tantras of the Nyingmapa and of the schools

of the later translations, as well as on the practices of “exorcism” (*gcod yul*) and “pacification” (*zhi byed*), his greatest volume of work is dedicated to the Great Perfection, especially the heart-essence.³²⁵

Klong chen pa’s writings exhibit a conscientious effort to present the entire Buddhist teaching as a consistent whole. He pays particular attention to the Great Perfection tradition, not only in its practical aspects (which he explores at length), but also in its relation to the other yānas and philosophical systems. Like Rong zom Paṇḍita, Klong chen pa tries to demonstrate the Great Perfection’s superiority in philosophical terms. His discussion of Madhyamaka in the *Yid bzhin mdzod*, for example, seems to support the view of the Great Perfection.³²⁶

In a personal bibliography Klong chen pa lists about 200 titles of works he composed, many of which are now lost. On his works dealing with philosophical dialectics, he says:

On occasion I have written treatises belonging to the vehicle of philosophical dialectics. As a general commentary on the five treatises of Maitreya, there is the *Jewel Staircase Exposition of the Stages and Paths*, root text and commentary; the *Beautiful Light, An Illuminating Exposition of the Main Text of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra*; the *Sprouting Field of Light, Illuminating the Vinayakārikā*; the *Summary of the Three Eastern Svātantrikas*,³²⁷ *The Entrance to Suchness*; the *Summary of Non-Abiding, Clarifying the Essence of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka*; *Introduction to the Differentiation of the Two Realities* and its practical instruction, the *Illumination of the Gradual Path*.³²⁸

He goes on to mention ten more titles, dealing with bodhicitta in its relative (ethical-motivational) and ultimate (gnostic) dimensions. Though Klong chen rab ’byams’s works on the vehicle of philosophical dialectics seem to form the smallest component of his *oeuvre*—he mentions many more titles just on the subjects of song, dance, and poetry—this passage indicates the importance he placed on the study of Madhyamaka. Unfortunately, most if not all of these titles relating to Madhyamaka appear to be lost.

Klong chen rab ’byams’ *Yid bzhin mdzod* (*Wish-fulfilling Treasury, YD*) “provides a summary of the whole range of Buddhist doctrine, and teaches the way of Hearing, Pondering and Meditation upon the doctrine.”³²⁹ It is one of the most important texts for understanding Mipham’s Mādhyamika interpretation, especially for the resolution of the seventh topic—whether Madhyamaka has a position or not (*dbu ma khas len yod dam med*).³³⁰ In the *YD* is Klong chen rab ’byams’ most lengthy discussion of the Prāsaṅgika system available; he considers it the highest system of dialectical philosophy.³³¹ In his comparative philosophical work, the *Grub mtha’ mdzod*,³³² and his Great Perfection treatise, the *Theg mchog mdzod*,³³³ Klong chen pa also affirms the Prāsaṅgika as the highest system of dialectical philosophy.

Nowhere does Klong chen pa espouse the Yogācāra Madhyamaka system of Śāntarakṣita. He also distinguishes between the Mentalist system (*cittamatra*, *sems tsam*) and the mental class (*sems sde*) of the Great Perfection.³³⁴ He does not explore the extrinsic emptiness (*gzhan stong*) concept at all. Klong chen pa must have been aware of the distinction of intrinsic (*rang stong*) and extrinsic emptiness, as the teaching of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) became very famous during his lifetime. It is also significant that Klong chen pa did not write a commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* or on the subject of tathāgatagarbha, even though the synonymous term *bde gzhegs snying po* (*sugatagarbha*) appears frequently in his writings on the Great Perfection. The subject of buddha nature was just starting to become a central polemical issue in Tibetan scholasticism, as attested by the numerous commentaries and interpretations brought to bear on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* by Klong chen pa's contemporaries (especially Bu ston Rin chen 'grub and Dol po pa) and later scholars.³³⁵

In his masterful verse work on the Great Perfection, the *Chos dbyings mdzod*, and in its lengthy *LT* commentary, Klong chen pa compares the Great Perfection and Madhyamaka and notes their similarity on the issue of nonelaboration (*niṣprapañca*, *spros bral*).³³⁶ However, he does not emphasize the unity of purpose or intent (*dgongs don*) of the Great Perfection and other systems, such as Madhyamaka. Mipham's concern with this question seems to have stemmed, as did Rong zom's polemic of the *ThCh*, from the challenge posed later by politically ascendant schools and the critiques of their partisan adherents. In Klong chen rab 'byams' time, in spite of the political turmoil in which he was accidentally involved,³³⁷ *odium theologicum* seems to have been kept at a happy minimum. Apparently he did not have any reason to defend the Great Perfection against philosophical criticism.

Klong chen rab 'byams' polemical asides in the *Seven Treasures* (*mdzod bdun*) are in large part directed to those within the Great Perfection tradition who misinterpret it. In the *CD* he says,

Nowadays, elephant-like meditators who claim to practice Atiyoga
Say that scattered thoughts are the enlightened mind (*bodhicitta*,
byang chub kyi sems).

These deluded ones are utterly benighted

And are far from the meaning of the natural Great Perfection.³³⁸

He also criticizes the "Hashang" or quietist misinterpretation of the Great Perfection:

If, not realizing equalness within self-arising,
One becomes attached to the word "nonduality" and
Feigns confidence in the total absence of imagination,
That is false realization, the dark expanse of ignorance³³⁹ (...)

If [one's meditation] abides without distraction in the expanse
of nonfabrication

Even if memories and thoughts are engaged, it is still the state
of *dharmatā*.

But if one gets entangled in fabrication, even *dharmatā*,

Though nonconceptual and vast like space, is a canopy of
characteristics.

Even if one meditates day and night, there is still attachment
and clinging.

It is the same as the meditation gods, said the Victor.³⁴⁰

In at least one place in the *CD*, Klong chen pa seems to address persons of the dialectical-philosophical (*mtshan nyid pa*) persuasion who do not accept the subitist position of the Great Perfection. The root text reads,

As for "liberation without realization or nonrealization,"

To assert liberation through realization is a major hindrance.

The teaching of Atiyoga that everything is one and equal

Is irrational [according to lower vehicles], but here is quite reasonable.³⁴¹

In his commentary, the *Treasury of Quotations* (*Lung gi gter mdzod, LT*), Klong chen pa explains:

Because all dharmas are liberated from the beginning, there is nothing to liberate through realization now. For, if they are *not* primordially liberated, they cannot be liberated through realization, and if they are [already] liberated [temporally], liberation is not necessary.... To think that one is liberated through introduction [to the nature of the mind] is an erroneous concept. What could bind the essence, which you would then try to liberate? In the state of profound and penetrating awareness that is not established anywhere, realization and what is realized are nondual, so there is nothing to enlighten or liberate. Because it is not made better through realization, nor worse through nonrealization, and is equality, there is no need for adventitious realization, [precisely] because the ultimate *dharmatā* is beyond intellect and is not established as an object of realization. To say "it is realized conventionally" is just the expression of deluded thoughts.³⁴²

Bearing in mind the importance that Buddhist logicians, and those Tibetan philosophers influenced most by them—the Gelugpas—place upon the valid establishment of gradualist conventionalities, it is not hard to imagine their discomfort with the kind of view expressed here. Arguably, however, Klong chen pa was just expressing the experiential implications of emptiness. It might be

said that this and other passages in Great Perfection texts that seem to cast aspersions upon conventional distinctions are echoes of the state of sublime equipoise (*āryasamādhi*, *'phags pa'i mnyam bzhaḡ*), where the inconceivability of the ultimate is uninterrupted by the "yes, but..." voice of conventional understanding.

Like Rong zom Paṇḍita, Klong chen pa qualifies the Great Perfection view with reference to the emptiness (*śūnyatā*, *stong pa nyid*) of Madhyamaka. The *gNas lugs mdzod* (ND) is a treatise on the meditative practice of cutting through (*khregs chod*), the basic practice of the esoteric instruction class of the Great Perfection. It discusses the Great Perfection view under four topics: *med pa* or nonexistence, *phyal ba* or equalness, *lhun grub* or spontaneity, and *gcig bu* or holism (literally, "oneness"). The first of these refers to the nonexistence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*, *rang bzhin med pa*) according to Madhyamaka. The root text reads,

The nature of nonexistence is emptiness of self-existence.
 In the great expanse of enlightened awareness equal to space,
 However things appear, they are without true existence.
 In the womb of the vast realm of space,
 Animate and inanimate beings and the four elements transmute,
 But however they appear, their empty forms are not self-existent;
 Likewise are the dharmas that appear in enlightened awareness.
 Just as magical, illusory reflections appear but
 Are insubstantial and have the nature of emptiness,
 From the very moment of appearance everything that can
 possibly appear
 Does not move from the state of enlightened awareness and is
 insubstantial.
 Just as dreams do not move from the state of sleep
 And from the moment of appearing have no self-existence,
 Phenomenal existence, saṃsāra, and nirvāṇa do not move
 From the sphere of enlightened awareness, having no substantiality
 or characteristics.³⁴³

Great Perfection texts do not emphasize the reasonings that establish emptiness. For example, the point of this passage is essentially that from the perspective of bodhicitta or awareness (*byang chub kyi sems*, *rig pa*), all phenomena are empty, and appear to be insubstantial and illusory. This does not prove that they are empty but merely indicates that in Great Perfection meditation, realization of emptiness is inseparable from the state of awareness. This is essentially the same point Klong chen pa makes in noting the similarity of the Great Perfection and Madhyamaka with respect to the absence of elaboration.

Thus, Klong chen pa's writings touch upon many of the same points that concerned his predecessor Rong zom and the critics of Nyingma whom Rong zom addressed in his writings. It is also evident that Klong chen pa was a serious student

of Madhyamaka and that his Mādhyamika studies contributed significantly to his understanding of the Great Perfection. However, the Mādhyamika philosophical aspects of his Great Perfection texts are just one facet of Klong chen pa's approach to Buddhist study and practice, which was eclectic with a Great Perfection core component. In the centuries following his death, Klong chen rab 'byams' comparative philosophical outlook and religious eclecticism continued to be a salient feature of Nyingma tradition, never more so than in the nineteenth-century Ecumenical Movement (*ris med*).

4.3.4. Nyingma Monasticism and the Ecumenical Movement (*ris med*)

Tsongkhapa revived the Kadam tradition of Atiśa, the eleventh-century Indian master who restored monastic discipline in Tibet, and founded several important monasteries. His tradition, later known as the Gelug, became the dominant school in Central Tibet, and eventually in Tibet at large. The Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) consolidated temporal power under his office and, with it, the power of the Gelug school.³⁴⁴ He was also an important tertön and patron of Nyingma monasteries, which consequently flourished. During the Fifth Dalai Lama's time four important Nyingma monasteries were founded: Kaḥ thog rDo rje gdan (1656), dPal yul (1665), sMin grol gling (1676), and rDzogs chen (1685).³⁴⁵

Though it never flourished to the same degree as that of the Gelug tradition, the development of Nyingma monasticism is one of the most important developments in that school after Klong chen rab 'byams. Scholasticism and monasticism are generally found together in Tibetan culture, and the intellectual traditions of the Nyingmapa developed significantly in these monasteries. Here certain figures stand out, such as mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dBang rgyal (1487–1542), who wrote an exposition of the “three vows”³⁴⁶ (*sdom gsum rnam par nges pa'i bstan bcos*) of the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, with special attention to defending the Great Perfection system against its critics.³⁴⁷ This text was not as controversial as a similar work by Sakya Paṇḍita (the *sDom gsum rab tu dbye ba*),³⁴⁸ but it remains an important text in the curricula of Nyingma monasteries. Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) was a prolific author who wrote an important defense of the Nyingmapa and the Great Perfection, the *Nges don 'brug sgra*.³⁴⁹ Lo chen Dharmasīri (1654–1717) was a great scholar who mastered all the “inner” (Buddhist) and “outer” (worldly) sciences, and fostered the growing monastic trend by ordaining monks and writing about the vinaya.³⁵⁰ Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) was one of the great Nyingma luminaries of the eighteenth century and a forefather of the Ecumenical Movement,³⁵¹ eclipsed only by 'Jigs med gling pa,³⁵² the most important Great Perfection author since Klong chen rab 'byams.³⁵³

The ecumenical “movement” (*ris med*) of the nineteenth century was centered in the royal capital of Derge (*sDe dge*) in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham.³⁵⁴

According to E. Gene Smith, the sectarian conflicts stemming from political and economic ties of different monasteries during the youth of the Derge prince Sa dbang bzang po (b. 1768), ending in his mother's imprisonment, led to his non-sectarian orientation. The royal family history he later wrote is, according to Smith, perhaps the first explicitly nonsectarian Tibetan document, advocating tolerance among different sects.³⁵⁵ In any case ecumenism had long been the rule rather than the exception among eminent Tibetan scholars; references to seeking out Dharma teachings without discriminating (*ris su ma chad par*) among different schools abound in the biographies of Tibetan lamas.

According to Smith, partly as a result of the nonsectarian ethos adopted by the prince, intellectual and spiritual culture flourished at Derge in the nineteenth century. Some of the more noteworthy individuals involved include the extraordinary Nyingma scholars 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899),³⁵⁶ who was the author of a prodigious encyclopedia of Buddhist culture, the *Shes bya kun khyab*, 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen rtse dbang po,³⁵⁷ a prolific tertön and author, their student-colleague Mi pham 'Jam dbyangs rnam rgyal, the tertön mChog 'gyur gling pa (1829–1870), and the famous scholar and Great Perfection master dPal sprul 'Jig med Chos kyi dbang po.

These scholars and their literary *oeuvre* were nothing short of prodigious. Kong sprul's collected works number over ninety volumes; his expertise encompassed every type of artistry and knowledge known in Tibet. Like Kong sprul, mKhyen brtse was a meditation master and redactor of tantric traditions, old and new, and a great tertön as well. mChog 'gyur gling pa was particularly renowned as a tertön and in that capacity collaborated to some extent with Kong sprul and mKhyen brtse. The vast survey of the three yānas of Buddhism, including the Great Perfection, called the *Graded Path: The Essence of Gnosis (lam rim ye shes snying po)*³⁵⁸ was a collaborative effort of the three.

One of the most important contributions of these masters was the compilation of texts from disparate traditions in large collections: such as Kong sprul's *Encyclopedia (Shes bya mdzod)* and *Treasury of Collected Precepts (gDams sngags mdzod)*, mKhyen brtse's *Collection of Tantras (rGyud sde kun btus)*, and mKhyen brtse's student Blo gter dbang po's *Collection of Sādhana (sGrub thabs kun btus)*. These collections facilitated the preservation of rare lineages and underlined the unity of the diverse traditions from which they were drawn.

4.3.5. A Nyingma Philosophy?

What, if anything, unifies the philosophical views of these diverse Nyingma authors? Klong chen pa seems to have followed the Madhyamaka exegetical tradition of the Kadam/Sakya monastery at Sang phu Ne'u thog, where he undertook the bulk of his training in dialectics, though he declares that his solution to the question of "whether Mādhyamikas have a position" is unique.³⁵⁹ Like the vast majority of Sakya scholars, Klong chen pa upheld the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka

as the highest system of the dialectical vehicle. Rong zom also held the Madhyamaka as supreme, though as mentioned above he seems to have had a predilection for the Yogācāra Madhyamaka.³⁶⁰ In his *TJB* he explicitly rejects two faulty positions later ascribed to the gZhan stong pas (exponents of extrinsic emptiness)—namely, asserting the ultimate existence of the buddha bodies and wisdoms, and denigrating conventional phenomena.³⁶¹ By the nineteenth century, in eastern Tibet, many Nyingma monasteries used Gelug scholastic textbooks in their curricula, but many Nyingma scholars of Kham, such as Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu and 'Jam mgon Kong sprul, were gZhan stong pas. Khro shul 'jam rdor mentions that according to some accounts, 'Jig med gling pa accepted the Gelug mode of establishing conventionalities, while Lo chen Dharmaśrī maintained extrinsic emptiness.³⁶² Thus, it is evident that by Mipham's time the Nyingmapas, though unified in their adherence to a core of received Vajrayāna texts and to the ultimate view of the Great Perfection, maintained diverse lineages of interpretation of the dialectical vehicle, especially along the lines of the intrinsic vs. extrinsic emptiness (*rang stong gzhän stong*) distinction.

The flourishing of Nyingma monasticism and *Ris med* in the nineteenth century created the conditions for new commentaries and original works to be written and received by a community. The literary activities of the scholars mentioned here suggest an unparalleled exchange of information among individuals of rare genius. The ostensible reason underlying much of Mipham's writing on both sūtra and tantra was the command of his teacher 'Jam dbyang mkhyen brtse'i dbang po to write "textbooks for our tradition" (*rang lugs kyi yig cha*)—the distinctive feature of which is the Great Perfection system.³⁶³ This can only mean that the texts written as a result of that request, which include his major philosophical commentaries on Indian Madhyamaka, were written to elucidate the unique feature of the Nyingma tantras, namely the Great Perfection. Thus, to the extent that they were intended to prepare students for the Great Perfection, Mipham's dialectical philosophical writings should be read as texts of the Great Perfection tradition.

Traditionally, it is said that the Great Perfection is the pinnacle of vehicles, providing a unified vista of all philosophical systems and spiritual attainments of the various paths.³⁶⁴ It would seem to be in this spirit that the *Ris med* tendency developed. Certainly most if not all the prominent lamas associated with Kong sprul *et al.* in Eastern Tibet were practitioners of the Great Perfection. It may also be that the relatively fluid and decentralized political structures of eastern Tibet inclined the region to religious diversity, and its adepts to eclecticism.³⁶⁵ Cultural and political heterogeneity may be expected to spawn creative innovations.

Mipham's *Beacon* thus exhibits two influences. On the one hand there is the long-standing orientation of Nyingma exegesis toward defining the Great Perfection in terms of, and yet distinct from, other systems—which was, at least in part, a response to polemical critiques issuing from the adherents of those systems. On the other hand, the *Beacon* reflects the cultural and social diversity of

Mipham's life experience, especially in its hermeneutical reconciliation of all systems of sūtra and tantra, culminating in the Great Perfection, in accordance with the ecumenical (*ris med*) approach. It should be emphasized that the comparative and critical dimension of Mipham's philosophical work did not stem from a need to go on the offensive, but, as Mipham himself observed, from the fact that the Nyingma tradition had dwindled in strength and needed to be fortified.³⁶⁶ Like creative philosophers before him such as Atiśa, Sakya Paṇḍita, Tsongkhapa, and Mi bskyod rdo rje, Mipham sought to strengthen the tradition by grounding its mystical Vajrayāna insights in the rational common currency of critical philosophy. As will be seen in the next chapter, Mipham was very much a conciliator of diverse philosophical viewpoints.

because it is not possible to imagine a thing *per se* without objectifying and reifying it as having some kind of *svabhāva*.⁴⁰²

According to Mipham, if the Buddhist logicians' model of negation is applied too rigidly to the Mādhyamika conception of the ultimate, it is difficult to reconcile emptiness as absolute negation and as ultimate reality, with ultimate reality as identity of form and emptiness. Absolute negation is not adequate to understanding the view of Madhyamaka or the Great Perfection for this reason. The definitive meaning of these systems should be determined according to sublime meditative equipoise (*'phags pa'i mnyam bzhas*) not according to the affirmations and negations of the unenlightened mind. Thus, Mipham relies heavily upon the hermeneutical principle (*pratiśaraṇa, rton pa*) of gnosis in defining ultimate reality. According to the dialectical vehicle, even sublime beings (*ārya*)—those who are capable of perceiving emptiness directly in meditation—must alternate between focusing on form and focusing on emptiness; only buddhas can perceive relative and ultimate truth simultaneously. If the highest wisdom sees the two truths as coalescent, and if the ultimate truth is known in highest wisdom, then the ultimate should be defined according to that coalescence.

5.4. The Philosophy of Extrinsic Emptiness

Extrinsic emptiness was the most controversial of philosophical innovations to appear in Tibet. Its first systematizer was Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), a famous scholar and holder of the *Kālacakra* teachings.⁴⁰³ Like Tsongkhapa, Mipham in the *Beacon* faults the gZhan stong pas, exponents of extrinsic emptiness, for failing to properly understand the nature of emptiness.

According to the extrinsic emptiness view, all conventional phenomena are empty of intrinsic reality (*svabhāva*). The ultimate reality (*paramārtha*), however, is not empty of its own essence; it is the supreme emptiness endowed with all characteristics (*stong nyid rnam pa kun ldan*), such as the three bodies (*kāya, sku*) of buddhahood, the ten buddha powers (*daśabala, stobs bcu*), and so forth. Thus, enlightenment is what is real in the ultimate sense and is empty of the relative, impure, conventional phenomena of *saṃsāra*, which are other than it. The emptiness of conventional phenomena in Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka is a different sort of emptiness, called “intrinsic emptiness” (*rang stong*); ordinary appearances are simply deluded fabrications and are devoid of any essence. If their type of emptiness applied to the ultimate, then its manner of appearance as buddha bodies (*kāya, sku*) and gnoses (*jñāna, ye shes*) would also be deceptive (*saṃvṛti, kun rdzob*), that is to say conventional. But that is impossible, because the ultimate reality is what is known by enlightened wisdom, for which deceptive appearances do not exist. For this reason Dol po pa and other gZhan stong pas maintain that the teachings of the “third turning”—especially the tathāgatagarbha—are definitive, while those of the “second turning” are provisional. Generally speaking, the extrinsic emptiness view accepts the orthodox Prāsaṅgika view on

the lack of intrinsic reality (*niḥsvabhāvata*) as it relates to the phenomena of deceptive reality, but relegates it to nondefinitive status as a philosophical view. If emptiness as absolute negation (*prasajyapratishedha*, *med dgag*) were to apply equally to the enlightened state, the gZhan stong pas say, that state would have to be a blank, "dead" emptiness (*bem stong*) devoid of qualities.

In essence, the extrinsic emptiness view is that ultimate reality and its inseparable qualities (enlightened phenomena) exist ultimately, while the deluded appearances of saṃsāra do not exist. Tsongkhapa and subsequent Gelug scholars, as well as the vast majority of Sakyapas, have criticized this position. Whereas the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka holds the two truths to be ultimately the same, the gZhan stong pas' critics say they reify the ultimate reality and deprecate conventional reality, holding them to be mutually exclusive in a manner reminiscent of the dualistic metaphysics of the Sāṃkhya system.⁴⁰⁴

Many prominent Nyingma and Kagyu scholars maintained one degree or another of extrinsic emptiness. A number of the figures associated with *Ris med*—especially Kong sprul and mKhyen brtse—were proponents of extrinsic emptiness. Kong sprul seems to have considered it as the glue that held the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions together.⁴⁰⁵ Others, such as Mipham's teacher dPal sprul Rinpoche and the Sakya lama Blo gter dbang po, were decidedly not gZhan stong pas. Mipham's position is rendered potentially ambiguous by the fact that he criticizes extrinsic emptiness in some places (for example, in the *Beacon*), upholds it in one short text (the *gZhan stong khas len seng ge'i nga ro*),⁴⁰⁶ and incorporates some aspects of it while rejecting others in his short study of tathāgatarbha, the *TTC*.⁴⁰⁷

It seems that extrinsic emptiness is both a product of and a catalyst for ecumenism. One of the appealing features of the extrinsic emptiness theory is that it provides an easy hermeneutical link between sūtra and tantra. The tantras, like the Essence Sūtras and the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, teach the idea of original enlightenment replete with qualities and symbolically imagine that view in meditation practice. Extrinsic emptiness takes the teaching that the ten powers, etc., are inherent in the tathāgatarbha literally, much as the Vajrayāna does when invoking the immanence of enlightenment in the form of deities, maṇḍalas, and miraculous activities. According to Dudjom Rinpoche, the authenticity of extrinsic emptiness is to be ascertained in part by reference to the tantras.⁴⁰⁸ If so, then it is somewhat problematic to claim that extrinsic emptiness is the highest system of the vehicle of philosophical dialectics, as does Dudjom Rinpoche.⁴⁰⁹

Contemporary Nyingma and Kagyu teachers tend to say that Prāsaṅgika is good for study, while extrinsic emptiness is good for practice. This seems to suggest that the validation of extrinsic emptiness is discovered in the pudding of personal experience, and not in the conceptual kitchen utensils used to make it. If this is so, then it is hard to assign extrinsic emptiness purely to the vehicle of philosophical dialectics (*mtshan nyid kyi theg pa*), where conclusions are drawn on the basis of principles accepted by both parties. To extend the gastronomic

metaphor, dialectical philosophy is more like a course in culinary technique, while extrinsic emptiness attempts to be a degree program in home economics, covering all phases of materials, techniques, and finished products. The controversial nature of extrinsic emptiness thus stems in large part from its ambiguous relationship to the mainstream of Indo-Tibetan philosophy, typified by Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. One could even argue that extrinsic emptiness is a “revealed” teaching masquerading as a critical-philosophical system. There is no doubt that Dol po pa based his views in no small part upon the evidence of his own experience.⁴¹⁰

Although the philosophical distinction of extrinsic emptiness versus intrinsic emptiness is a purely Tibetan convention, antecedents for extrinsic emptiness are found in the Pali canon⁴¹¹ as well as Mahāyāna śāstras.⁴¹² The undefiled and ontologically primary status of the tathāgatagarbha is made explicit in śāstras such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and in what Dol po pa refers to as the *snying po'i mdo*, or sūtras that teach the buddha essence.⁴¹³ In the opinion of some Tibetans, extrinsic emptiness is identical with the “Yogācāra Madhyamaka,” or the Madhyamaka of Maitreya-Asaṅga as found in such texts as the *Madhyānta-vibhāṅga*.⁴¹⁴ It should not, however, be confused with Cittamātra or “Mind-only.” According to the extrinsic emptiness interpretation, the position that “everything is mind” is not the intention of Asaṅga and Maitreya, even though such a school of philosophy arose on the basis of their works.⁴¹⁵ Nor should it be confused with the Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka of Śāntarakṣita. Extrinsic emptiness is also referred to as “Great Madhyamaka” (*dbu ma chen po*), a term that appears frequently in Mipham's works. This term can also be misleading, because *dbu ma chen po* does not refer exclusively to extrinsic emptiness. Klong chen pa and Mipham use it to refer to Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, because it emphasizes the nonconceptual ultimate, which they understand as the principle of coalescence. Tsongkhapa also uses this term in passing, for example, in the colophon of his *dBu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*.⁴¹⁶

Neither of Mipham's chief predecessors Klong chen pa and Rong zom Paṇḍita were proponents of extrinsic emptiness. Though Rong zom lived before the intrinsic vs. extrinsic emptiness controversy, he seemed to anticipate its views and reject them.⁴¹⁷ Klong chen pa was a contemporary of Dol po pa, and was certainly familiar with his views, but he maintained the Prāsaṅgika as the highest dialectical system.⁴¹⁸ Mipham, as the student of noteworthy proponents of extrinsic emptiness and as a representative of the philosophical tradition of Klong chen pa and Rong zom, was in a difficult position. On the one hand, he wanted to preserve the crucial position of the gZhan stong pas—and the Great Perfection—that the tathāgatagarbha was intrinsically possessed of the qualities of enlightenment. On the other hand, if these qualities are asserted to exist ultimately, as the gZhan stong pas supposedly maintain, then they would have to be immune to an ultimate analysis (*don dam dpyad bzod*). This would contradict the reasoning of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. Therefore, Mipham used the concept of con-

ventional valid cognition of pure perception in order to validate a type of perceptual content—the spontaneous presence of enlightened qualities in all their diversity for enlightened meditative perception (*'phags pa'i mnyam bzshag*)—that the more austere pramāṇa system of Dharmakīrti, as applied in the Gelug Madhyamaka system, could not accommodate. This interpretation exemplifies how Mipham's thought engages diverse Tibetan scholastic traditions, including that of Tsongkhapa and the Gelugpas, who emphasized the valid cognition of conventionalities. The immanence of buddhahood, though inconceivable in the ultimate sense, should nonetheless (relatively speaking) be validly cognized.

5.5. Mipham's Interpretation of Extrinsic Emptiness and Tathāgatagarbha

Mipham's own interpretation of extrinsic emptiness, and his response to its Gelug critics, are found in his *Lion's Roar Proclaiming Extrinsic Emptiness* (*gZhan stong khas len seng ge'i nga ro, ZT*). This text is somewhat of an anomaly. Nowhere else does Mipham defend extrinsic emptiness, while he rejects it in several places, including the *Beacon* and his short treatise similarly entitled *The Lion's Roar: Extensive Notes on Buddha Nature* (*bDe gshegs snying po stong thun chen mo seng ge'i nga ro, TTC*).⁴¹⁹ Some Nyingma scholars take the *ZT* as evidence that Mipham did in fact accept the philosophical position of extrinsic emptiness, while others such as mDo sngags bstan pa'i nyi ma in the *TGSB* understand him to be a Prāsaṅgika, based on the *Beacon* and Mipham's commentaries on dialectical-philosophical subjects. It has also been suggested that Mipham wrote the *ZT* to fulfill the request of his teacher mKhyen brtse dBang po, who definitely accepted the validity of extrinsic emptiness.⁴²⁰

Though there is no clear consensus in the Nyingma tradition about whether Mipham was a *gZhan stong pa* or not, there is no doubt that the *ZT* is a brilliant defense of extrinsic emptiness and that it employs a number of concepts and strategies found elsewhere in Mipham's original writings, especially in the *TTC*. Mipham's interpretation of the tathāgatagarbha in the *TTC* and elsewhere certainly has an affinity with some aspects of the extrinsic emptiness view. Nonetheless, I am inclined to say that Mipham was not a *gZhan stong pa*, at least not in the way that philosophical view is generally understood by its critics. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion.

For one, the *Beacon* and Mipham's Mādhyamika commentaries clearly indicate Mipham's preference for the Yogācāra Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka interpretations of Śāntarakṣita and Candrakīrti, respectively. If Mipham had been a proponent of extrinsic emptiness, one would expect him to have written more than this short text in its defense. Furthermore, in the *ZT* Mipham nowhere states that extrinsic emptiness is superior to *rang stong* (a.k.a. Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka), a point for which apologists of extrinsic emptiness usually argue strenuously.

The most interesting (though rather indirect) evidence that Mipham did not

stand for a dogmatic extrinsic emptiness position is the fact that the arguments with which he defends it in the *ZT* are for the most part, if not entirely, non-committal.⁴²¹ Many of the arguments in the *ZT* attempt to show that the faults found by Gelugpa critics in the extrinsic emptiness position apply equally to their own Madhyamaka system. While the Gelugpas maintain a verbal distinction between the negandum (true existence) and the basis of negation (*dgag gzhi*), that is, conventional reality—which, Mipham argues, would commit them to the ultimate existence of the basis of negation—the proponents of extrinsic emptiness maintain the absence of the negandum (conventional phenomena) in the basis of negation (ultimate reality), while asserting the presence of enlightened qualities in that ultimate reality. The Gelugpas say that ultimate analysis negates true existence but does not negate the basis of negation and thus assert that “a vase is not empty of being a vase, but is empty of true existence.” The gZhan stong pas likewise say that “the ultimate reality is not empty of being the ultimate reality, but is empty of deceptive reality.” In both cases a reality is established as the absence of a negandum, which does not exist at all, while requiring the true existence of the basis of negation.

The fact that Mipham argues this way does not mean he was a gZhan stong pa, and in fact might imply the opposite. To defend extrinsic emptiness by showing that the accusations of its critics apply equally to the critics themselves hardly constitutes an impassioned argument in favor of extrinsic emptiness. All he has said, in effect, is “if we’re wrong, then you’re also wrong.” That this strategy is noncommittal for Mipham is corroborated by the first topic of the *Beacon*, where Mipham rejects both Gelug Prāsaṅgika and extrinsic emptiness as instances of “verbal” (*tshig*) and “ontological” (*don*) extrinsic emptiness, respectively, and faults them both for failing to establish the coalescence of relative and ultimate truths.⁴²² For the *ZT* to be an unequivocal polemical statement in favor of extrinsic emptiness, it would have to show that the opponent’s position is irrevocably self-contradictory, while his own position, that is, extrinsic emptiness, is not. This is in fact what Mipham tries to do in other texts, such as the *Beacon* and the *MAZL*, when he argues in favor of the Nyingma interpretation of Prāsaṅgika over that of his opponents.

In the *ZT* Mipham interprets the tathāgatagarbha in a way that does not, at first, seem essentially different from the position he posits as the faulty extrinsic emptiness interpretation of tathāgatagarbha in other texts, especially the *TTC*. Whereas the *ZT* pursues the traditional extrinsic emptiness thesis that the ultimate truly exists and is not empty, the *TTC* rejects the statement that buddha qualities ultimately exist and argues that enlightened qualities are inseparable from buddha gnosis, that buddha gnosis is inseparable from the tathāgatagarbha, and that enlightened qualities are therefore inseparable from the tathāgatagarbha. Whether or not this amounts to precisely the same position as that expressed in the *ZT* is not certain, though it is clear that in both the *ZT* and the *TTC* Mipham invokes similar arguments to reject the statements of critics of extrin-

sic emptiness, notwithstanding the fact that he rejects a stereotyped extrinsic emptiness in the latter text. Thus, the *ZT* and (to a lesser extent) the *TTC* might also be understood as attempts at philosophical reconciliation of extrinsic emptiness with mainstream interpretations of Madhyamaka, including his own. In this respect one could say that Mipham was in part, if not exclusively, a *gZhan stong pa*. Whether Mipham's extrinsic emptiness interpretation is representative of other extrinsic emptiness philosophers is an important question that I will not attempt to answer here.

In the *ZT* Mipham invokes another line of reasoning also found in his *TTC*. He says that if extrinsic emptiness asserted the conventionalities of pure perception (which are more or less commensurate with the qualities of buddhahood) to be immune to an ultimate analysis, then they would be liable to the *Prāsaṅgika* critiques of the *Gelugpas*, for whom immunity to ultimate analysis, true establishment, and inherent existence are the same. But, according to Mipham, that is not what the quintessential extrinsic emptiness position—that the ultimate is not empty of itself (*rang stong*) but is empty of deceptive reality (*gzhan stong*)—actually means. The ultimate reality is true and existent to the extent that, as the concordance of the mode of appearance of things and the manner of existence of things (*gnas snang mthun pa*) for enlightened awareness, the way things appear is nondeceptive, hence true. It is empty insofar as false deceptive appearances are absent. Therefore, the true existence of the ultimate with its inseparable enlightened qualities is not understood in the context of ultimate valid cognition, but in the context of the conventional valid cognition of pure perception (*dag pa'i gzigs pa tha snyad dpyod pa'i tshad ma*). Here it should be noted that in this position the ultimate is implicitly defined with respect to enlightened awareness (*jñāna*, *ye shes*) and is understood to be the definitive (*mtshan nyid pa*) or non-conceptual ultimate (*aparyāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*).

Thus, according to the *ZT*, the statement that the ultimate exists and is non-empty is not an assertion of ontological status based on the rational verification (*rigs shes*) of ultimate or true existence—that is, an ultimate validating cognition—but a statement about the phenomenology of pure perception from the perspective of sublime gnosis (*āryajñāna*). Pure conventionality is the objective aspect of sublime gnosis for which the mode of appearance (*snang tshul*) of conventional phenomena and the way those phenomena actually exist (*gnas tshul*) are concordant. This means simply that sublime gnosis perceives things as they are—as the coalescence of formal appearance and emptiness, or as the coalescence of the two truths—but does not perceive impure phenomena, which appear to be truly existent. Thus, the ultimate, *qua* ultimate wisdom, is empty of impure conventionalities.

When sublime gnosis is manifest, the qualities of the ultimate gnosis, or pure conventional phenomena, are invariably present as the coalescence of form and emptiness, while impure appearances of inherent existence are absent. Thus, extrinsic emptiness takes ultimate wisdom, which is devoid of false appearances

but not devoid of pure perceptions and enlightened qualities, as its basis for designating emptiness (*stong gzhi*) and asserts that the ultimate (as gnosis) is empty of something else (*gzhan stong*) but not empty of its own essence (*rang stong*, *rang bzhin gyis stong pa*).

Prāsaṅgika, on the other hand, takes the appearances of conventional phenomena, which falsely appear to be real, as its basis for designating emptiness (*stong gzhi*) and uses logical reasoning to establish the nonexistence of that false mode of appearance in the ultimate nature of emptiness. In Gelug Prāsaṅgika, emptiness as the mere exclusion (*rnam par gcod pa*, *vyavaccheda*, that is, *med dgag*, *prasajyapratishedha*) of that false appearance is understood to be the definitive ultimate (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*), while a wisdom consciousness that perceives it is held to be a conformative or concordant ultimate (*mtshun pa'i don dam*). By proving that the ultimate reality is itself empty of inherent existence, Prāsaṅgika establishes the inseparability of form and emptiness; but it does not elaborate the distinction between pure and impure conventionalities, which is made with reference to sublime and ordinary modes of perception. The *ZT* argues, in effect, that there is no reason why one cannot make this distinction in the Mādhyamika context. Prāsaṅgikas would have no reason to reject the assertion that enlightened awareness is empty of deceptive reality, to the extent that deceptive reality is identical with the false appearance of inherent existence and enlightened awareness is free of false perception. In this respect the Prāsaṅgika or *rang stong* view does not contradict the position of extrinsic emptiness, and it is not difficult to understand why most if not all extrinsic emptiness authors have insisted that their positions do not conflict with Prāsaṅgika.

5.6. Mipham's Position on the Tathāgatagarbha

The tathāgatagarbha concept is a central conundrum for Buddhist hermeneutics. Is it literally true (*nītārtha*)—are all beings actually buddhas?—or is it to be interpreted in some way (*neyārtha*)? Is the teaching of sūtras such as the *Śrīmālādeviśiṣhanādasūtra* and the treatise *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*—that sentient beings already possess the nature of buddhahood—to be accepted without qualification, or is it perhaps a provisional teaching meant to encourage those easily discouraged from the hardships of seeking enlightenment? In the context of the Great Perfection, which emphasizes the original purity of all phenomena in the state of enlightenment, the first interpretation is preferable for Nyingma philosophers.

In his *TTC*, Mipham understands the tathāgatagarbha in a way similar to what the fifteenth-century scholar gSer mdog Paṅ chen Śākya mchog ldan (1427–1508) calls the “tradition of meditative interpretation” (*sgom lugs*) of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*.⁴²³ According to this interpretation, the tathāgatagarbha is none other than natural stainless wisdom (*prakṛtviśuddhajñāna*, *rang bzhin rnam dag gi ye shes*), or the natural luminosity (*prakṛtiprabhāsvara*, *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*) of the mind. Śākya mchog ldan calls the other tradition of interpretation of the

Ratnagotravibhāga the “tradition of study and reflection” (*thos bsam gyi lugs*), which takes the tathāgatagarbha to be the natural purity (*prakṛtviśuddhi*, *rang bzhin rnam dag*) of all phenomena, which is the absolute negation (*prasajya-pratiśedha*, *med dgag*) of inherent existence, or *śūnyatā*.⁴²⁴ This latter interpretation is essentially the same as that of rGyal tshab's *Dar tik*.

According to Śākya mChog ldan these two approaches, based on the principles of “luminosity” and “emptiness,” respectively, are complementary. The Gelug, however, accepts only the latter interpretation of tathāgatagarbha as definitive, and considers the former to be a provisional teaching. This is one of the most crucial points of contention between the Gelug and other schools. For Mipham, though emptiness and luminosity are both definitive and complementary paradigms for the ultimate, luminosity is technically *more* definitive—if indeed the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*, *nges don*) admits of degrees—because it is the experiential domain (*gocara*, *dpkyod yul*) of enlightened beings (*ārya*, *'phags pa*). Emptiness, on the other hand, can be understood by ordinary beings (*prthagjana*, *so so skye bo*) as a conceptual formula.

In the *TTC* Mipham presents an interpretation of the buddha nature that attempts to go beyond the extremes of eternalism (in the Tibetan context, the extrinsic emptiness interpretation of a permanent substantive entity as the ultimate) and nihilism (the Gelug, specifically rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen's, interpretation of tathāgatagarbha as mere emptiness of absolute negation, not possessed of intrinsic qualities). In accordance with the Great Perfection teaching of the immanence of enlightened awareness (*rig pa'i ye shes*), Mipham considers the tathāgatagarbha as already complete and perfect (*yon tan ye ldan*), without asserting the ultimate existence of enlightenment in the manner of the proponents of extrinsic emptiness.

According to the Gelugpas, specifically rGyal tshab in his *Dar tik*, the tathāgatagarbha or buddha essence inherent in every sentient being should be understood as the absolute negation of emptiness (*prasajyapraśedha-śūnyatā*, *med dgag gi stong pa nyid*). It should not be understood as the dharmakāya of the buddhas (which is a resultant state, not an original one) but as the “defiled suchness” (*samalatathatā*) that, if purified, leads to enlightenment.⁴²⁵ Statements to the effect that the qualities of buddhahood are inherent in the tathāgatagarbha are given for those afraid of profound emptiness. This teaching should be understood to mean, in fact, that the nature of sentient beings, insofar as it is emptiness, is capable of manifesting the qualities of enlightenment, provided the purification of defilements and the collection of merits are consummated. Interpreting the meaning of tathāgatagarbha as emptiness in this way accords perfectly with the strict gradualism of Tsongkhapa's approach to philosophical theory (specifically, Prāsaṅgika interpretation) and meditative practice (as exemplified by the *LRC* and the *Ngag rim chen mo*, his treatise on Vajrayana practice).⁴²⁶

Mipham's interpretation in the *TTC* affirms one important aspect of the extrinsic emptiness view, namely, the naturally present qualities of the buddha nature.

However, he qualifies that acceptance with the understanding that these qualities are the spontaneous presence (*anābhoga*, *lhun grub*) or natural display (*rang bzhin gyi risal*) of enlightened awareness. In other words, sublime phenomena are the appearance or conventional aspect of gnosis, just as impure conventional phenomena are the inseparable appearance aspect of deluded perception. The inseparability of form (or appearance) and emptiness applies equally to sublime beings and ordinary beings, but the purity of conventional appearance (*snang tshul*) is determined with respect to the concordance (*mtshun pa*) of the way things appear (*snang tshul*) with their ultimate nature (*gnas tshul*), which is fully possible only for sublime beings.

Thus, saying that sublime qualities manifest spontaneously and without fabrication in the state of sublime gnosis is not the same as saying that pure phenomena or sublime qualities exist inherently or statically in the ultimate sense. The difference between pure and impure phenomena is that pure phenomena are inseparable from the state of gnosis and are thus never apprehended as inherently existent, while impure phenomena always appear to ordinary consciousness as if inherently existent, even if one is aware that their mode of appearance is false. To assert the spontaneous presence of sublime qualities in the state of enlightened wisdom does not commit one to accepting their inherent existence any more than asserting that the natural manifestation of paranormal perceptions (*abhijñā*, *mngon shes*) on the basis of calm abiding meditation (*śamatha*, *zhi gnas*) requires one to accept the truth of their false mode of appearance as inherently existent. If ordinary states of consciousness automatically entail the presence of qualities and abilities that one has not explicitly sought to cultivate, there does not seem to be any *a priori* reason to deny the same relationship between sublime gnosis and the qualities of enlightenment.

While this interpretation deflects one of the main objections of Gelug philosophers—that extrinsic emptiness contradicts the Mādhyamika teaching when it asserts the ultimate existence of enlightened qualities—the essential concomitance of enlightened qualities with the ultimate reality is still incompatible with the Gelug tradition's strictly gradualist paradigm for enlightenment. To begin with, Tsongkhapa accepts only *śūnyatā* as the definitive teaching and ultimate reality. In the context of *sūtra* as well as *tantra*, Gelug philosophers understand the formal or conventional aspects of enlightenment, such as the buddha bodies, the ten powers, and so forth, as the result of the collected merits of a bodhisattva, while the dharmakāya, which is the full realization of emptiness, is the result of the bodhisattva's collection of wisdom. For them it does not make sense to define the ultimate in terms of gnosis (*jñāna*), because gnosis is ultimate only in the sense that it fully realizes the ultimate as emptiness. Gelug philosophers consider gnosis to be a conformative ultimate (*mtshun pa'i don dam*); they do not accept gnosis as a definitive ultimate, which is the position of Mipham and the gZhan stong pas.

The Gelug interpretation of *tantra* conforms to this model as well. It is not so

much a way to uncover an original enlightenment already replete with qualities, but is rather a powerful method for completing the accumulations of merit and wisdom that cause those qualities to arise. The teaching of tathāgatagarbha and its inherent qualities is accordingly understood to refer to our spiritual potentiality and not as a literal statement or ontological position. The tathāgatagarbha is emptiness, and emptiness means that ordinary mind has no inherent existence and thus can develop the qualities of enlightenment.

Mipham's interpretation of extrinsic emptiness might also be understood to imply a theory of tathāgatagarbha as potentiality, since he understands enlightened qualities as the conventional aspect or spontaneous presence of enlightened wisdom, and not as qualities that exist ultimately. However, Mipham does not accept that the formal aspects of enlightenment or the dharmakāya are the results of causes and does maintain a concept of tathāgatagarbha replete with qualities in the *TTC*. This follows from his understanding that ultimate reality—as the coalescence of form and emptiness, which, in the final analysis, is identically understood by Prāsaṅgika, extrinsic emptiness, and the Nyingma tantras—implies the inseparability of the pure conventionalities of enlightenment and sublime gnosis just as much as it implies the infallibility of causal relativity in deceptive reality for ordinary consciousness.

What differentiates the Gelug understanding of extrinsic emptiness from that of Mipham should be understood in terms of what kind of subjectivity (ordinary consciousness or gnosis) is implied in their respective definitions of what is ultimate, and in terms of what kind of validating cognition is understood in defining the relation of ultimate and conventional realities. Gelug Prāsaṅgika defines the ultimate as emptiness with respect to consciousness—that is, emptiness as an absolute negation that is a conceptual ultimate (*paryāyaparamārtha*, *don dam rnam grangs pa*)—while Mipham understands emptiness as the complete absence of conceptual elaboration (*niṣprapañca*, *spros bral*) with respect to sublime gnosis (*aparyāyaparamārtha*, *don dam rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*). Likewise, Gelug Prāsaṅgika makes no distinction between the conventional valid cognitions of sublime and ordinary beings, while Mipham does.

Thus Mipham's position in the *TTC*, as in the *ZT*, is that one can understand the tathāgatagarbha as having inseparable qualities of enlightenment, such as the ten powers of a buddha, without being committed to the eternalistic position that is imputed to extrinsic emptiness by its opponents. This follows from his understanding that the essential teaching of the second and third turnings of the wheel should be understood together, as complementary and definitive presentations of the Buddha's teaching. In the *TTC* he explains:

To posit the beginningless presence of [enlightened qualities] even when one is a sentient being is an inconceivable subject. So even though the Buddha taught his disciples that this is an infallible teaching worthy of confidence, he also told them that it is difficult to understand on

one's own. Because it is a limitlessly profound teaching, small-minded intellectuals have always objected to it with all sorts of rash statements like "then buddhas and sentient beings would have basically the same mind." The *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* says,

The fabricated realm and the definitive ultimate
Are defined by the lack of sameness or difference.
Whoever imagines them to be the same or different
Is possessed of mistaken imagination.⁴²⁷

The essential faculty [of enlightenment], which is the nature of the mind, and the mind that possesses it, do not have to be posited as either the same or different. Although it is not beyond the pale of the abiding nature of reality, it is not contradictory for there to be delusion in [the tathāgatagarbha's] mode of appearance; for otherwise, there would be the faults of no liberation, or the impossibility of anyone being deluded, and so forth. Because its abiding nature and mode of appearance are dissimilar, deluded sentient beings are possible, and their attainment of buddhahood after abandoning delusions on the path is also proven to exist. Although reasoning that investigates the ultimate establishes all dharmas as empty, it doesn't negate the qualities of the buddha nature. Although [the tathāgatagarbha] has the most excellent qualities, this [sūtra] maintains that it is empty. Thus, the teaching of the middle [or second] turning of the wheel that all dharmas of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are empty is likewise taught by this [sūtra], for the buddha nature also has the nature of emptiness.

However, as this teaching of a buddha nature qualified by the inseparable presence of kāyas and gñoses possessed of the nature of emptiness is the intention of the definitive sūtras of the final turning, in just that respect [the final turning] is superior to the middle turning. Praise for the superior meaning of the final turning found in the interpretive commentaries on the sūtras was not stated for all teachings found there [such as the ālayavijñāna and other Mentalist doctrines], but just with respect to the definitive meaning of this teaching of the buddha nature. One can determine this clearly from other sūtras, from the demonstration of the buddha lineage (*gotra, rigs*) as the polishing of a gem, etc.

Therefore, since emptiness as taught in the middle turning of the wheel as well as the kāyas and gñosis taught in the final turning should coalesce as appearance and emptiness, one should just understand [the two turnings] according to the position of the omniscient Klong chen rab 'byams, who considered the definitive texts of the middle and final turnings together, without distinction, as definitive. However, it is not contradictory to take one of these as definitive, the other as provi-

sional. Having combined them and interpreting that sort of buddha nature as a causal continuum, the crucial point of the Vajrayāna is obtained, and one will know that all those teachings of the Buddha converge on a single point. This is because this final significance is the single intention of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, etc., which can be realized in the *Dharmadhātustāva* and the *Bodhicittavivāraṇa*, etc., as well as in the *Uttaratantra* [*Ratnagotravibhāga*]. Moreover, the master Nāgārjuna said,

The sūtras taught by the Buddha
On the subject of emptiness
All counteract negative emotions.
They do not harm that faculty [the potential for enlightenment].

According to this statement, by analyzing with an ultimate analysis, the adamantine significance of the ultimate fruition, the inseparability of the two truths, is the expanse that cannot be divided by intellectual knowledge. So it is not a subject for disputes that refer to the ultimate.⁴²⁸

Mipham's commentator mDo sngags bsTan pa'i nyi ma elucidates Mipham's tathāgatagarbha interpretation in the *TGSB*. Following the *Samdhinirmocana*, the basic criterion for differentiating definitive and provisional scriptures is that provisional scriptures are those that involve some kind of contradiction if they are taken verbatim, and definitive teachings are those that do not.⁴²⁹ He further differentiates scriptures teaching the two truths as those that teach the dichotomy of form and emptiness (*snang stong*), and those that teach the dichotomy of reality and appearance in harmony or disharmony (*gnas snang mthun mi mthun*).⁴³⁰ This latter distinction, he admits, is unusual.⁴³¹ However, it is the proper distinction for understanding how the teaching of buddha nature, endowed with all the characteristics of enlightenment, is to be accepted *verbatim* and as definitive. According to the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and other Mahāyāna texts, emptiness is the object found by investigating the pure conventional nature of things, wherein abiding nature and appearance are harmonious and gnosis is the subject that perceives it. Together, these two are accepted as the ultimate.⁴³² Because the tathāgatagarbha is not devoid of form but comprises all buddha qualities, it cannot be properly established as such by ultimate analysis (*don dam dpyod pa'i tshad ma*), which invariably establishes only emptiness. Thus, the tathāgatagarbha with its many qualities of enlightenment is the object of valid cognition that investigates pure perception (*dag pa'i gzigs pa tha snyad dpyod pa'i tshad ma*). This kind of pure perception is necessary in order to validate the tathāgatagarbha theory as well as the premise of tantra, namely, that all things are divine by nature, without entailing the extrinsic emptiness position. Otherwise these teachings would

be nothing but *neyārtha*, hence intentional and not directly indicative of the qualities of the enlightened state.

It might be objected that if nondual gnosis (*ye shes*) pervades the ultimate wherein the apparent and abiding natures are harmonized, a contradiction is entailed, because a nonduality of subject and object would render meaningless the distinction of "appearance" and "emptiness," as well as the concept of sublime pure perception (*'phags pa'i gzigs snang*). To this I think Mipham could reply to the effect that nondual gnosis is none other than the realization of the emptiness of any dichotomy, such as form and emptiness or apparent and abiding natures, so in this sense appearance (*snang tshul*) and reality (*gnas tshul*) are designated as "harmonious" (*mtshun pa*). In the Gelug system, a buddha's perception has dualistic appearances wherein the apparent aspect of phenomena is seen to be indistinguishable from emptiness, like milk poured into water, without alternating between the two truths. For Mipham such a realization of the coalescence of form and emptiness requires also the coalescence of subject and object, since the dichotomy of subject and object has no more intrinsic reality than the dichotomy of form and emptiness. Therefore, though one speaks of "a buddha's realization" or the "appearance of infinite divinity," these are only conventional designations.

This illustrates how Mipham attempts to reconcile the dialectical and critical approach of scholasticism, with its emphasis on valid cognition and the differentiation of the two truths, with the tathāgatagarbha theory and the Great Perfection, where nonduality and ineffability are often invoked. According to Mipham, the tathāgatagarbha is an object of valid cognition (though not of ordinary dualistic perception) but not ultimate analysis (*rigs shes kyi tshad ma*). Instead, it must be understood in the context of gnosis, where the way things "really" are (devoid of intrinsic reality) and the way they appear (empty-but-apparent) are the same—hence as the conventional valid cognition of sublime beings' perception (*dag pa'i gzigs snang tha snyad dpyod pa'i tshad ma*). Mipham's analysis might not satisfy a demand to prove that enlightenment is *in fact* that way, but it does set clear limits to what ordinary perception can know of enlightenment, without placing enlightenment entirely outside the range of conventional valid cognition.

Both Gelug and Nyingma philosophers agree that relative phenomena and ultimate reality *qua* emptiness are perceived simultaneously in full enlightenment. So the fact that the way things are and the way they appear are in the final analysis identical is also accepted by Gelug philosophers, though in their case it is understood that dualistic perception must also obtain at the level of buddhahood, if we are to speak of buddhas knowing conventional phenomena. If enlightenment is understood as knowing things as they are—wherein the mode of appearance and mode of existence (*gnas tshul* and *snang tshul*) are identical—then, to the extent that the dharmakāya is "what knows," it is at least homologous (*mtshun pa*), if not identical, with what is known. Just as there is no moment at which an ordinary thing misperceived as inherently existent suddenly becomes empty by

virtue of being perceived as empty—because it has never been non-empty—likewise, there is no moment at which an ordinary mind becomes the dharmakāya by virtue of perceiving emptiness, because the ordinary mind has always had the nature of dharmakāya. Dharmakāya is designated with respect to the nature of reality, because it is what knows the nature of reality, just as ordinary mind is designated in relation to ordinary objects. In this sense dharmakāya must be understood as the “nature of mind,” and as the buddha nature replete with qualities, which is not the product of causes and conditions.

ontological extrinsic emptiness (*don gyi gzhan stong*) obtaining with respect to conventional phenomena—which are empty of essence and hence ultimately nonexistent—and the ultimate reality, which is empty of conventional phenomena but not of its own qualities,⁴⁸⁰ and is therefore what exists ultimately.

6.3.1.2. Go ram pa's Analysis of View and Meditation in the *TSB*

Mipham's critiques of Gelug Prāsaṅgika in topics 1, 3, and 4 in the *Beacon* follow closely those of the Sakya scholar Go ram pa bSod nams seng ge (1429–1489) in his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed theg mchog gnad kyi zla zer* (*TSB*). Go ram pa's writings undoubtedly influenced Mipham's thought in the *Beacon* and elsewhere, although Mipham does not explicitly refer to Go ram pa so far as I can determine. It seems reasonable, however, to assume that Mipham encountered Go ram pa's writings in his studies under the Sakya scholars Blo gter dbang po and 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse.

Go ram pa was a student of the famous Sakya teacher, Rong ston Śākya rgyal mtshan (1367–1449). Gelug biographical materials concerning Tsongkhapa's disciple mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang indicate that Rong ston was supposed to have pursued a debate with mKhas grub rje but mysteriously backed out at the last minute. Other accounts suggest that they did in fact debate, but that Rong ston made a poor showing. It also seems that mKhas grub was not well liked in some Sakya colleges for the fierce critiques he launched against the views of certain revered Sakya teachers.⁴⁸¹ Whether or not mKhas grub was the ever-invincible polemicist that Gelug tradition remembers, his writings leave no doubt that he was a scholar and debater of the first order.

The legacy of mKhas grub's zealous attacks on Sakya philosophical positions and his eloquent defense of Tsongkhapa in his *sTong thun chen mo*⁴⁸² set the stage for Go ram pa's fierce critiques of the Gelug system in the *TSB*.⁴⁸³ The fortunes of the Gelug school experienced a meteoric rise during Go ram pa's lifetime, so the Gelugpas were probably perceived to pose both a philosophical challenge and serious competition for aristocratic patronage, which was the economic lifeblood of Tibetan religious traditions.

Although the substance of Mipham's and Go ram pa's critiques of Tsongkhapa and their formulations of Mādhyamika systems are for the most part the same, there is a notable difference in tenor. Go ram pa speaks with the stern voice of a confirmed polemicist and does not shy from accusing his opponents of nihilism and other philosophical sins (for example, *dbu ma chad lta ba* “nihilistic Madhyamaka”). At one point he says that the position that apprehension of the absolute negation of emptiness is not something to be abandoned in vipaśyanā meditation is the “talk of demons” (*bdud kyi tshig*),⁴⁸⁴ and elsewhere says that his enemies have been “seized by demons” (*bdud kyi zin pa*).⁴⁸⁵ In the *Beacon* and Mipham's other works, one finds no such invective. The only position he literally demonizes is the stereotypical “Hashang view.”⁴⁸⁶

6.3.1.2.1 Go ram pa on the Ultimate View

Go ram pa's *TSB* discusses the views of extrinsic emptiness, Tsongkhapa, and the Sakya school at length. The first two he glosses as "*dbu ma rtag lta ba*" and "*dbu ma chad lta ba*," or "eternalist Madhyamaka" and "nihilist Madhyamaka," respectively. The bulk of his discussion is devoted to analyzing and refuting Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Prāsaṅgika, especially the points covered in the *KNG*.

Toward the end of the *TSB* Go ram pa provides a verse summary of the Gelug interpretation of the ultimate view and his critical response:

...Some others say that the great beings who expounded Svātantrika
And the greatest of learned and accomplished ones in Tibet
"Did not understand the important points of Madhyamaka"—
They try to denigrate them in all respects.
They apprehend ultimate reality as the extreme of annihilation,
And denigrate the freedom from the four extremes of elaboration—
The essence of the teaching found in the good texts of Nāgārjuna—
As "the view of the Chinese Hashang."
The conformative ultimate arrived at through logical analysis⁴⁸⁷
They hold to be the definitive ultimate reality.
"To eliminate all clinging to dualistic perception
Is an erroneous concept—abandon this approach," they say....⁴⁸⁸

Thus far, Go ram pa caricatures his Gelug opponents. Next he explains the correct way to understand view and meditate upon it:

The "truth" that is the object of clinging to true existence—
Which is the cause of the suffering of the three worlds of saṃsāra—
When sought with reasoning explained in texts
Is not found, and one develops certainty in the meaning
of emptiness.
By realizing truthlessness, clinging to "I" is eliminated.
By combining this view with the engagement and abandonment
of virtue and vice,
And practicing them integrally,
One will achieve the enlightenment of the Small Vehicle.
But if in the view of accomplishing supreme enlightenment,
One clings to emptiness, one falls into the extreme of nihilism,
So one should eliminate all elaborations of dualistic perception,
Such as empty, non-empty, truth, existence, and nonexistence.
The intellect of an ordinary individual analyzing the nature
of reality
Cannot eliminate the elaboration of the four extremes all at once,

But having eliminated all four in succession,
 And by meditating correctly, the path of vision is reached.
 At that time, the nature of reality free of the four extremes
 And the mind (*blo*) that realizes it become nondual.
 The mind itself dissolved into nonelaboration
 Is conventionally designated as the "view that sees the expanse
 of reality."⁴⁸⁹

In the earlier prose portion of the *TSB* Go ram pa discusses these points in detail. The debate about the "four extremes of elaboration" (**catuṣkoṭi-prapañca*, *mtha' bzhi'i spros pa*) stems from Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the famous statement, *lyod min med min yod med min! l gnyis ga'i bdag nyid min pa'ang min!*—"not existent, not nonexistent, not both existent and nonexistent, and not having the nature of being neither [existent nor nonexistent]."⁴⁹⁰ Tsongkhapa notes that *yod min* (lit. "existing-not") means nonexistent (*med pa*) while *med min* (lit. "not-not-existing") effectively means existent, and accordingly he interprets the first alternative to mean "not existent ultimately" and the second to mean "not nonexistent conventionally."⁴⁹¹ Otherwise, Tsongkhapa claims, this view would be none other than that of the "Chinese Hashang." To empty the mind of all concepts of existence, nonexistence, etc., does not constitute discriminating wisdom (*prajñā*, *shes rab*), which should be acutely aware of what exists and what does not exist. This kind of emptiness is simply a state of unawareness.

In the *LRC* Tsongkhapa expresses the opinion that most traditions in Tibet had deviated to this extreme. What needs to be negated, he asserts, is not all conceptuality whatsoever, but the false apprehension of true existence (*bden 'dzin*). By refuting the object of that mistaken concept and focusing upon its emptiness of true existence, one realizes the nature of reality. Having properly identified the apprehension of true existence, it is readily apparent that there are many concepts (*rtog pa*) that do not involve apprehension of the true existence of self or phenomena. This refutes the position that all concepts are to be refuted.⁴⁹²

Tsongkhapa and Go ram pa evidently understand the relationship between conceptuality and the apprehension of true existence differently. Go ram pa understands conceptuality *ipso facto* as involving apprehension of true existence, whereas Tsongkhapa does not accept that conceptuality is always associated with the apprehension of true existence.⁴⁹³ Go ram pa agrees that the object of the apprehension of true existence must be refuted. But to maintain that the mere absolute negation that is the nonfinding of that object through rational analysis is the definitive ultimate (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*),⁴⁹⁴ and to maintain that clinging to or apprehension of that emptiness is not an object of refutation,⁴⁹⁵ is "alien to the Mādhyamika textual tradition" (*dbu ma'i gzhung lugs las 'das*). Go ram pa quotes several Indian sources that support his contention that a definitive view is beyond verbal-conceptual formulation. The definitive ultimate is realized non-dualistically by sublime beings' meditation (**āryasamāpatti*, *'phags pa'i mnyam*

bzhag). He also quotes Candrakīrti to the effect that deceptive reality (*saṃvṛti*, *kun rdzob*) is the object of false seeing.⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, unlike the emptiness seen directly (*pratyakṣena*, *mngon sum du*) by sublime beings, the emptiness of absolute negation that is ascertained by inferential reasoning (*anumāna*, *rjes dpag*) is just deceptively true.⁴⁹⁷

One might object that in some contexts the ultimate reality is said to be the mere absolute negation of emptiness, and that both realities are posited only by a worldly mind (*'jig rten pa'i blo*)⁴⁹⁸—which seems to imply that it is incorrect to define the ultimate as the object of sublime equipoise. In reply, Go ram pa explains that truthlessness is realized in relation to a mind that apprehends true existence, and the designation of “ultimate reality” there refers to a conceptually formulated ultimate. The reason that designation is made is because its referent, the conceptually formulated ultimate, is the object of a mind that understands (*rtogs*) the nature of reality instead of (lit., “in relation to”—*la ltos par*) apprehending true existence. It is necessary to call the conceptual ultimate “ultimate” because it must be realized prior to realizing the nonconceptual ultimate (*aparyāyaparamārtha*, *nam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*). To claim that a conceptual object, which is apprehended as the absence of true existence by negating true existence, is the definitive ultimate (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*), is to confuse the concept (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, *spyi mtshan*) of the ultimate (a pointing finger) with the ultimate *per se* (the moon).⁴⁹⁹ The implication is that if the conceptual ultimate is designated and accepted with reference to a worldly mind (*'jig rten pa'i blo*), then there is no reason why the nonconceptual, definitive ultimate should not be defined in relation to a nonconceptual mind, which is sublime gnosis.

Thus, Go ram pa does not deny that reasoning and concepts are necessary in realizing the nature of the ultimate. He grants a propaedeutic function to the conceptual formulation of emptiness but does not accept that the Gelug formulation of emptiness as absolute negation qualifies as a definitive ultimate. This follows logically from his assumption that conventional reality is pervaded by conceptuality and that conceptuality is pervaded by ignorance.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, any concept—even a concept of the mere absence of inherent existence—is not a definitive ultimate.

6.3.1.2.2. Go ram pa on Meditative Practice

Go ram pa's critique of Tsongkhapa's approach to meditation is based on the implication that clinging to (*zhen pa*) or apprehending (*'dzin pa*) emptiness is not something to be abandoned. According to Go ram pa, Tsongkhapa reasons that if the apprehension of emptiness is only something to be abandoned, then there is no point in ascertaining it in the first place, as the antidote for apprehending true existence (*bden par 'dzin pa*). Go ram pa counters with several quotations from sūtras and śāstras, such as the famous statement of Nāgārjuna,

The victors have taught emptiness
 To definitely eliminate all views.
 Those who have a view of emptiness
 Are said to be incurable.⁵⁰¹

Go ram pa's imaginary opponent replies, "The meaning of those scriptures is that apprehending emptiness as something true is to be negated, but not that the emptiness that negates truth is something to be negated."⁵⁰² Go ram pa says that if such were the case, then the scriptural references to eliminating "all views" (*dr̥ṣṭi*, *lta ba*) and "all concepts" (*vikalpa*, *rnam rtog*) would be pointless.⁵⁰³ The apprehension of something as truly existent and the apprehension of its emptiness as something truly existent are both only the first of the four possible extremes (*catuṣkoṭi*, *mtha' bzhi*), namely, the extreme of existence. This is why the scriptures refer to all views and also mention the four extremes by name—*yod min med min yod med min!* / *lgyis ka'i bdag nyid min pa'ang min*, etc.⁵⁰⁴ Thus, the statement of the *catuṣkoṭi* would be pointless; to insist that the "view of neither existent nor nonexistent" (*yod min med min kyi lta ba*) is nothing but the view of the Chinese Hashang is, according to Go ram pa, the "blessing of Māra, intended to harm the essential teaching of nonelaboration."⁵⁰⁵ Go ram pa also mentions that clinging to emptiness is criticized in many tantric scriptures, and is the eleventh root downfall according to mahāyoga (*rnal 'byor chen po*).⁵⁰⁶

In effect, Go ram pa accuses Tsongkhapa of "underpervasion" (*khyab chung ba*)—that is, a too-limited definition of the negandum of emptiness—while Tsongkhapa would have accused Go ram pa of "overpervasion" (*khyab che ba*).⁵⁰⁷ The differences in the scope of the negandum that each maintains is related once again to how the ultimate reality is defined. Go ram pa understands the definitive ultimate as nonelaboration (*niṣprapañca*, *spros bral*) that is realized in non-conceptual sublime equipoise, and thus beyond formulation as a mere logical negation, while Tsongkhapa understands the ultimate view as the absolute negation of inherent existence. Accordingly, for Tsongkhapa it is not useful to cultivate the total absence of apprehension in meditation, because that would amount to losing one's awareness of the ultimate view.

Thus, according to the *TSB*, Tsongkhapa's interpretation of "not existent, not nonexistent" as "not existent ultimately" and "not nonexistent conventionally" is "extremely mistaken" (*shin tu mi 'thad*). The definitive nonelaboration (*spros bral mtshan nyid pa*) is known from the perspective of sublime equipoise. Again, someone might object that the intended meaning is "not truly existent, not truly nonexistent," but this misses the point of nonelaboration, as explained above. Fabricated and unfabricated phenomena (*saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta*, *'dus byed 'dus ma byed*), as well as substantial and nonsubstantial entities (*ngos ngos med*), are together the subject of negation (*dgag gzhi*) in various authoritative passages, so what is the point of negating only a "true existence" of them?⁵⁰⁸

One additional similarity between Go ram pa and Mipham is their use of the

term *zung 'jug* (*yuganaddha*), or coalescence. In the section setting forth the Mādhyamika system of his own school, Go ram pa like Mipham defines the basis (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and result (*'bras bu*) with reference to *zung 'jug*.⁵⁰⁹ The basis is the coalescence of the two truths (*gzhi dbu ma bden gnyis zung 'jug*), the path is the coalescence of the two accumulations of merit and wisdom (*lam dbu ma tshogs gnyis zung 'jug*), and the result is the coalescence of the two buddha bodies (*'bras bu dbu ma sku gnyis zung 'jug*).⁵¹⁰

6.3.2. Topic 1: Philosophical View and Rational Negation

6.3.2.1. Tsongkhapa on the Negandum and Its Substratum

The first topic of the *Beacon* is stated in the question: “which of the two negations is explained as the view?”⁵¹¹ The table of contents of the Vārāṇasī edition glosses this as “Question 1: The basis as the coalescence of appearance and emptiness.”⁵¹² According to the *Beacon*, the Gelug view is said to be an absolute negation (*prasajyapratishedha*, *med dgag*). In a polemical context, the advantage of understanding the view of emptiness as an absolute negation is that the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika is not required to supply a counter-thesis against his opponent.⁵¹³ The ultimate Prāsaṅgika view is that no things inherently exist (*niḥsvabhāvatā*, *rang bzhin med pa*), so in confronting other views the Prāsaṅgika simply establishes the contradictions inherent in views based on the assumption of inherent existence. This does not mean, at least in the Gelug tradition, that Prāsaṅgikas have no position at all. They simply have no position about inherently existing things, which Prāsaṅgikas consider utterly false and nonexistent.⁵¹⁴

One of the hallmarks of Gelug Prāsaṅgika is its emphasis on proper identification of the negandum (*dgag bya*). Otherwise, in undertaking Mādhyamika analysis, one will just be throwing stones in the dark. If the negandum is over-defined (*khyab che ba*), one will become mired in nihilism (*ucchedavāda*, *chad ltar smra ba*), and if underdefined (*khyab chung ba*), one will become attached to eternalist views (*śāśvatavāda*, *rtag ltar smra ba*). mKhas grub says,

It is first necessary to ascertain what the object to be refuted is like. This object to be refuted is that [entity] whose exclusion (*vyavaccheda*, *rnam par bcad pa*) is what the ascertainment of reality must be based on, the reason being that without the appearance of the universal (*spyi*), [that is, the mental image,] of what is to be refuted, the universal of the refutation of that [object, namely, emptiness of inherent existence], will not appear. As the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* explains,

Without a feeling for the designated substance
One cannot apprehend that it is substanceless.⁵¹⁵

In his *LRC*, Tsongkhapa emphasizes that one must not confuse what is being

meditation, one will find the excellent supreme path and be able to gradually comprehend all the Dharmas of the Sugata. *Maṅgalam!*

After the syllable *Dhīh* the author's colophon reads, "When I was very young and had just begun my studies, this text, the *Beacon of Certainty*, was written just as it came to mind. Looking at them now, some of the words seem a bit awkward, but since they are not contradictory and since there are important points to be understood here, I have not changed them but left them as is. Thus, this was spoken by Mipham at age seven."



I say:

*Wishing to see the palace of Rong zom and Klong chen pa, which
is filled with the jewels of eloquent explanations,
If one upholds this jeweled beacon with one's innate and acquired
intellect,
One will have the good fortune to enjoy this profound and extensive
treasure;
But others, alas, see only a fragment of it, and intend to possess it
without aspiration.⁹¹¹
The royal banner of the teaching of the early translations, possessed of
six superiorities,⁹¹²
Is festooned with supreme divine ornaments, the scriptural knowledge
and reasoning of the lion of philosophers.
Beautifully adorned, it flies high in the heavens of Tibetan philosophy;
With this beacon of brilliance held aloft, one should be able to see it
perfectly.
By searching with the floodlight of this excellent text,
The sharp reasoning of its elegant explanations is unsheathed, like
a sword.
Grasping its handle by means of this commentary, one can embark
on its study,
And cut off one's doubts about the peerless, secret profundity.
The teachings of Rong zom and Klong chen pa, ornaments of the essence
Of the Buddha's teaching, were clarified by the reasoning of Ajita.
May we uphold the system of these peerless lords of scholarship,
Through study, reflection, and meditation!
Without a second thought you overwhelmed the arrogance
Of a thousand elephants of wicked disputation,
With the roaring laughter of a philosopher-lion.*

*May you prevail, Mipham Victorious in all Directions!*⁹¹³
May intellectuals, with their dry words and willful misinterpretations,
Confess their faults with heartfelt regret.
May the brilliant white moon of fresh merit
Cause the Buddha's teaching to spread and increase,
And may the holders of the teaching remain among us.
May all sentient beings with a connection to me
Be blessed with happiness and follow the teachings,
Find bodies of miraculous rebirth in pure realms,
And finally reach perfect buddhahood.

Some time ago, since there were others whose interest in this text was similar to my own, I wrote a little bit about it. At that time, [Zhe chen rgyal tshab] 'Gyur med Padma rnam rgyal—the lord of the lineage possessing the three forms of kindness of the all-compassionate protector Zhe chen kong sprul—requested that I write a short commentary, so, to the best of my ability, I wrote an outline. Later, the one whose life epitomizes the liberation of a learned, ethical, and noble person, 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse Chos kyi blo gros, proofread it and asked that I write a commentary based upon it. With a white scarf, a silver coin,⁹¹⁴ and, in particular, the implements of method and wisdom—a vajra and bell—plus paper to write on, his command fell on my head. Someone who should be embarrassed even to take the dust of their feet on the crown of his head—who is known as the nephew of the lord of siddhas, 'Gyur med mtha' yas, and of the lord of scholars, Tshul khri ms rgya mtsho—the Buddhist monk 'Jam dpal rdo rje was assisted by the scribe Khri dpon mkhan po Blo gros rab gsal. Virtue!

Table 1: Mipham's System of Four Pramāṇas

PERSON	CONVENTIONAL PRAMĀṆA	ULTIMATE PRAMĀṆA
untutored ordinary persons (<i>prthagjana</i> = <i>so so'i skye bo</i>)	(i) conventional valid cognition of limited impure perception (<i>ma dag tshur mthong tha snyad dyod pa'i tshad ma</i>)	N/A
ordinary persons practicing the path	(i) and (ii) conventional valid cognition of pure sublime vision (<i>dag pa'i-</i> or <i>phags pa'i gzigs snang tha snyad dpyod pa'i tshad ma</i>)	(iii) valid cognition involving the conceptual ultimate (<i>rnam grangs pa'i don dam dpyod pa'i tshad ma</i>) and (iv) ¹
enlightened or sublime beings (<i>āryajana</i> = ' <i>phags pa'i skye bo</i>)	(ii) and (i) ²	(iv) valid cognition involving the nonconceptual ultimate (<i>rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam dpyod pa'i tshad ma</i>)

Table 2: Traditions, Two-Truth Paradigms and Their Sources

"tradition" ³	primary two-truth paradigm	main sources for primary paradigm	secondary two-truth paradigm	sources for secondary paradigm
Svātantrika	(i) two isolates/one essence	ūir-Mādhyaṃikas (Nāgārjuna and Aryadeva); Pramāṇa	(ii) concordance/discordance of appearance and reality ⁴	Prajñāpāramitā and ūir-Mādhyaṃika
Prāsaṅgika	(ii) ⁵	ūir-Mādhyaṃikas; Candrakīrti	(i) ⁶	ūir-Mādhyaṃikas
Nyingma	(ii)	Nyingma tantras; "extensive tradition;" ⁶ Essence Sūtras; Nāgārjuna's hymnic corpus (<i>bstod tshogs</i>); his logical corpus (<i>rigs tshogs</i>), and his commentators	(i)	Prajñāpāramitā; Mādhyaṃika (<i>rigs tshogs</i>)
Extrinsic Emptiness (<i>gZhan stong</i>)	(ii)	Kālacakra Tantra; "extensive tradition;" Essence Sūtras	(i) ⁷	as above
Gelug	(i)	writings of Nāgārjuna (<i>rigs tshogs</i>) and Candrakīrti; Pramāṇa	(ii)	writings of Nāgārjuna (<i>rigs tshogs</i>) and Candrakīrti; <i>Ratnagotravibhāga</i> (acc. to Dar ṭik)

Table 3: *Pramāṇas and Their Paradigms of Truth and Negation*

pramāṇa	object of understanding and/or realization (<i>rtogs bya'i yul</i>)	two-truth paradigm context for pramāṇa	type of negation required in Gelug system	Mipham's interpretation of Gelug negation	type of negation required according to Mipham	locus classicus
conventional valid cognition of impure limited perception	perceptions of ordinary beings; conventional phenomena	(i) appearance-emptiness (<i>snang stong gyi bden gnyis</i>) as two isolates of one essence	implicative negation ⁸ and absolute negation ⁹	implicative negation and absolute negation	implicative negation and absolute negation	instinctual perception (<i>'jig rten rang dga' ba'i shes pa</i>); teachings of cause and effect (first turning); pramāṇa treatises.
conventional valid cognition of pure sublime vision	vision of enlightened beings; pure perception	(ii) concordance/disconcordance of appearance and reality	[implicative negation] ¹⁰	not applicable ¹¹	implicative negation ¹¹	Essence Sūtras (<i>snying po'i mdo</i>) and their commentaries (esp. <i>Ratnagotravibhāga</i>); tantras (esp. <i>SnyG</i>)
valid cognition of the conceptual ultimate	conceptually formulated emptiness	(i) and (ii)	absolute negation	implicative negation ¹¹	absolute negation ¹²	Svātantrika texts
valid cognition of the nonconceptual ultimate	nonconceptual emptiness	(ii) and (i)	absolute negation	absolute negation	not applicable ¹³	Svātantrika texts ¹⁴ ; Prasangika texts

Table 4: The Role of Ascertainment and Conceptuality According to Mipham and Gelug Philosophers

pramāṇa	object of appearance according to Mipham	object of ascertainment according to Mipham	object of appearance according to Gelug	object of ascertainment according to Gelug	path & level of perceiver according to Mipham	path and level of perceiver according to Gelug
conventional valid cognition of limited impure perception	deceptive phenomena	deceptive phenomenon as if truly existent	deceptive phenomenon as if truly existent	deceptive phenomenon as if truly existent or a phenomenon <i>per se</i> ¹⁵	worldly beings; paths of accumulation and preparation	worldly beings; paths of accumulation and preparation
conventional valid cognition that arises from investigation of pure sublime vision	[conventional phenomenon as pure divine forms]	nonconceptual ultimate, e.g., coalescence of form and emptiness]	[deceptive phenomena] ¹⁶	emptiness cum absolute negation	[paths of accumulation and preparation; sublime paths]	[paths of accumulation and preparation; sublime paths]
valid cognition that arises from investigation of the conceptual ultimate	emptiness as absolute negation ¹⁷	emptiness as absolute negation	emptiness as absolute negation	emptiness as absolute negation	paths of accumulation and preparation	paths of accumulation and preparation; [sublime paths?] ¹⁸
valid cognition that arises from investigation of the nonconceptual ultimate	emptiness and form inseparable	emptiness and form inseparable	emptiness as absolute negation	emptiness as absolute negation	paths of accumulation and preparation; sublime paths	[paths of accumulation and preparation?]; sublime paths

Notes to Tables

- 1 Strictly speaking, only enlightened beings can directly perceive the nature of emptiness—in a nondualistic manner—by means of the valid cognition which arises from investigation of the nonconceptual ultimate. However, since the radically nonelaborated nature of this ultimate, as well as the reasonings which establish it, are taught in sutras and tantras—especially in Prāsaṅgika texts—it would be incorrect to say that ordinary persons cannot ponder and discuss the nonconceptual ultimate, in the mode of a mental image (*don spyi*), through study and reflection. But then, it might be objected, the ultimate under consideration would no longer be the nonconceptual ultimate, but just another conceptual ultimate. That objection would be conceded, but it would also be pointed out that it is not meaningless for an ordinary person to conceptualize the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual ultimates, in so far as the former implicitly relies upon the definition of the two truths as different isolates of the same essence, while the latter relies—at least implicitly—upon the definition of the two truths as the concordance and discordance of appearance and reality (cf. table 2, column 2). Of these two-truth paradigms, the former requires the logical exclusivity of the two truths and risks being a trivial distinction, whereas the latter, which is based upon the gnosis of sublime beings, requires the experiential coalescence of the two truths, and is thus only knowable nonconceptually.
- 2 Whether sublime beings have the conventional valid cognition of limited impure perception is a matter of some dispute. At the very least it must be said that they are not “subject to” such mistaken cognitions—as are sentient beings, who involuntarily misapprehend the nature of appearances as impure (i.e., truly existent). On the other hand, it is problematic to say that sublime beings are unaware of such cognitions (i.e., the way sentient beings habitually perceive things), because, in that case, buddhas would be disqualified from omniscience.
- 3 Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika are, of course, the doxographical creations of Tibetan scholars. Nonetheless, for the purpose of understanding Mipham and the Gelug philosophical traditions, they are necessary in so far as those traditions accept the distinction. In any case, “Svātantrika” and “Prāsaṅgika” are hardly more artificial as doxographical labels, than are the labels “Nyingma,” “gZhan stong,” or “Gelug,” if those are misunderstood as denoting monolithic philosophical traditions.
- 4 Cf. note 7.
- 5 While two isolates/one essence would have to be considered the most explicit paradigm in the writings of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, the distinction of the concordance/discordance of appearance and reality should be considered to be more distinctive of the Prāsaṅgika approach. This is especially true in so far as (1) the emphasis of Prāsaṅgika (as *dbu ma chen po*, or “Great Madhyamaka”) is the nonconceptual ultimate—wherein all elaborations that differentiate subject and object cease—and (2) it is distinguished from the Svātantrika, whose proper emphasis is

the conceptual ultimate, which is part and parcel of two-truth paradigm (i).

- 6 *rgyas pa'i lugs*, e.g., the writings of Maitreya, his disciple Asaṅga, and their commentators; especially the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.
- 7 gZhan stong pas maintain that two-truth paradigm (i) applies to deceptive realities, which are inherently empty (*rang stong*), while two-truth paradigm (ii) applies to ultimate reality, which is devoid (*gzhan stong*) of the deluded perceptions that involve the discordance of appearance and reality but is not devoid of the qualities of enlightened wisdom.
- 8 For example, when a Buddhist philosopher maintains that "permanent sound does not exist," he is only negating the permanence of sound, not sound itself.
- 9 For example, when someone says "Brahmins are not _____, there is no implication that Brahmins are _____, etc.
- 10 In the Gelug tradition, this pramāṇa is not explicitly reckoned; but Gelug commentators maintain that, in the context of tantric visualization of deities, maṇḍalas, etc., those pure appearances are concomitant with the ascertainment of emptiness. Whether, for Gelug commentators, the ascertainment of emptiness by subjective great bliss (*bde ba chen po*) actually *implies* the presence of the pure perception of divinity is not clear, but if it does, then emptiness would indeed function as an implicative negation in this particular context. If the special subjectivities of Vajrayāna practice (*bde ba chen po, rig stong dbyer med, et al.*) did not imply the presence of pure divinity, then the perception of divinity would, according to Mipham, be no better than "spraying a vomit-filled vase with perfume" (*Beacon* §5.2.2.2.2.1.2.–5.2.2.2.2.2.1); it would still be an implicative negation, since the perception of divinity would still imply the perception of impurity (cf. table 4). I think Mipham would acknowledge that, in the context of practicing the Vajrayāna path, the cessation of ordinary perception automatically implies the presence of pure perception, and thus that the existence of conventional valid cognition that arises from investigation of pure sublime vision does involve, for practical intents and purposes, implicative negation.
- 11 Since Gelug Prāsaṅgika considers the negandum to be the misapprehension of true existence and not a conventional phenomenon *per se*, this means that negation of true existence implies the existence of a conventional phenomenon in addition to negating true existence. Hence, it is not an absolute negation, as the Gelugpas claim, but an implicative one.
- 12 To the extent that Mipham accepts that emptiness as absolute negation is a valid conceptual ultimate, he accepts that the negation paradigm that applies in the valid cognition of a conceptual ultimate is that of absolute negation. He also maintains, however, that the use of absolute negation in defining the ultimate as his Gelug opponents understands it is not, in fact, an absolute negation, but an implicative one.
- 13 Since the nonconceptual ultimate is, for Mipham, thoroughly nonelaborated, it is not

appropriate to associate it with any paradigm of negation. But since he considers the definitive ultimate to be the coalescence of form and emptiness, Gelug scholars might well consider Mipham's ultimate an implicative negation, since emptiness would imply form and vice versa. Cf. *Beacon* §1.2.2.1.

- 14 Methodologically speaking, Svātantrika texts do not emphasize the logical methods that establish the nonconceptual ultimate as do Prāsaṅgika texts, but they (i.e., works of Bhavaviveka) are a *locus classicus* for the distinction between the two types of ultimate. According to Mipham, for this reason (among others), and notwithstanding their differences in philosophical methodology, the Svātantrika view converges with that of the Prāsaṅgika.
- 15 In the abstract of his paper delivered at the XIIth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Lausanne, "Is Seeing Believing? The Theory of Perception in Dharmakīrti's Epistemology According to Mi-pham," Lopen Karma Phuntsho observes:

According to Sa-paṅ and Mi-pham, two leading interpreters of Dharmakīrti, perception is bare awareness free from conceptual distortion; it knows its objects merely by taking the percept of the object. Sense perception cannot verify or ascertain but only collect the data within its scope. Perhaps one could say in Kantian terms that sense perception according to Dharmakīrti is just empirical intuition and not a faculty of judgement. The issue of whether or not sense perception gains certainty (*nīścaya*, *nges-pa*) about what it apprehends has become a highly controversial topic among Tibetan epistemologists. The dGe-lugs-pas argued that perception, as valid knowledge, should have certainty, whereas Mi-pham refuted this. He, like Sa-paṅ, attributed certainty only to conceptual thoughts and reasoned that perception being free of conceptual thoughts cannot have certainty. If perception were to ascertain, it would also follow that perception is eliminative (*apoha-pravṛtti*, *sel-'jug*) in its nature of engagement, which would then contradict Dharmakīrti's theory of eliminativism (*anyāpoha*, *gzhan-sel*) according to which eliminativity is limited to conceptual thought and language. Thus, according to Mi-pham, perception can apprehend appearances but without ascertaining (*snang-la ma-nges-pa*)." (unpublished collection of 1999 IABS Conference abstracts, p. 109).

Bearing in mind the fact that, at least as far as Mipham is concerned, to ascertain a phenomenon as what it is (e.g., through *anyāpoha*) *ipso facto* involves the perception of the phenomenon as if truly existent (cf. diagram 1), I have listed "deceptive phenomenon" as the object of appearance in row 2, column 2, and "deceptive phenomenon as if truly existent" in row 2, column 3; and accordingly, I have also listed the the object of appearance according to Gelug epistemology in row 2, column 4 as "deceptive phenomenon as if truly existent." This classification reflects the crucial distinction that Lopen's paper has brought to my atten-

tion. The reason row 2, column 5 gives "phenomenon as if truly existent *or* a phenomenon *per se*" as the Gelug object of ascertainment is to reflect that, according to Gelug Madhyamaka and epistemology, a phenomenon *per se* is not negated by ultimate analysis, while a falsely conceived true existence is negated. Thus, in knowing a conventional phenomenon by means of conventional valid cognition, one should be able to ascertain it either authentically (divested of conceptions of true existence), or inauthentically (as if truly existent). This begs the question of why a mere appearance of deceptive reality (*snang tsam*), or a deceptive phenomenon *per se*, as in row 2, column 2, can be the object of appearance (though not necessarily the object of ascertainment) in Mipham's system. Wouldn't this mean that Mipham would have to accept the very same distinction of which he is so critical in the first topic of the *Beacon*—namely, that of a deceptive phenomenon and its true existence—exactly as the Gelugpas do (row 2, column 5)? And wouldn't that mean, contrary to diagram 1, that a misperception of true existence would not invariably be connected with the presence of a deceptive reality? If so, there would be a conventional phenomenon, such as a jar or a pillar, perceived without such misperception; and thus a conventional reality (*kun brdzob*) would no longer be known as the discordance of appearance and reality, but as the concordance of appearance and reality—which would mean that conventional reality would become ultimate reality. Furthermore, even if this last consequence were not entailed, wouldn't impure conventional valid cognition become the conventional valid cognition of pure perception, wherein appearance and reality are concordant? And wouldn't this entail that all ordinary individuals would be sublime beings—or, at least, practitioners of pure perception? In anticipation of further clarification from holders of Mipham's exegetical lineage, these questions must remain unanswered for now.

- 16 The Gelug system of tantric exegesis does not distinguish between pure and impure appearances as the objects of different types of valid cognition. Because the Gelug distinguishes tantra by its methods and not by its view, they do not understand divine appearance as an object of a special valid cognition or as an inseparable aspect of the ground (*gzhi*), but rather primarily as a feature of the path
- 17 Since an analytically determined emptiness is an absolute negation, a correct mental image (*don spyi*) of emptiness, when ascertained through investigation or meditated upon subsequent to investigation, should be exclusive of appearance. But this begs the question of whether a mental image, as an object of a conceptual mind, is not in fact an appearance. For this reason it is given as an "appearance" here.
- 18 There is some ambiguity here since Gelug authors make very little use of the distinction between the conceptual and nonconceptual ultimate. It is not clear whether what Mipham considers to be a conceptual ultimate is in fact excluded by Gelug authors from the meditations of sublime beings.

Translation of the *Beacon of Certainty*

Introduction

- O.I.I.2.I.I.I "Trapped in doubt's net, one's mind
Is released by the lamp of Mañjuvajra,
Which enters one's heart as profound certainty.
Indeed, I have faith in the eyes that see the excellent path!
- O.I.I.2.I.I.2. Alas! Precious certainty,
You connect us with the profound nature of things;
Without you, we are tangled and confused
In this web of samsaric illusion.
- O.I.I.2.I.I.3 The development of confidence through certainty
In the phenomena⁶³² of the basis, path, and result,
And being roused to faith by studying them⁶³³
Are like the authentic path and its reflection.
- O.I.I.2.I.2.I The fame of the Moon of the Amazing Dharma⁶³⁴
Arises along with the light of elegant speech
In the vast sky of the Buddha's teaching,
Vanquishing the heavy darkness of doubt.
- O.I.I.2.I.2.2. The valid cognition that examines conventionalities
Is unerring with respect to engaging and avoiding.
Specifically, the textual corpus on valid cognition
Is the only way to acquire confidence
In the teacher and the teaching, and
The Madhyamaka of the Supreme Vehicle
Elucidates the stainless valid cognition
Of ultimate reasoning, which determines the nature
of things.
[The two valid cognitions emphasized in] these
two [systems]⁶³⁵
- O.I.I.2.I.2.3 Are the wisdom eyes of a well-trained intellect.
Praise to such enlightened beings who
Abide on the path taught by the teacher
Without taking detours!"
- O.I.I.2.2.I.I As the sage reflected thus,
A mendicant⁶³⁶ who happened along
Asked these seven questions
In order to critically examine his intellect:
- O.I.I.2.2.I.2 "What's the point of being a scholar
If you only repeat the words of others?
Give us a quick answer to these questions
According to your own understanding.⁶³⁷

- O.I.I.2.2.I.3 Then your philosophical acumen will be obvious.
Though they stretch out the elephant's trunk of
their learning,
Like well water, the deep water of Dharma is not tasted;
Yet they hope still to become famous scholars
Like low-caste men lusting for a queen.
- O.I.I.2.2.I.4 According to which of the two negations do you explain
the view?
Do arhats realize both types of selflessness?
Does meditation involve modal apprehension?
Does one meditate analytically or transically?
Which of the two realities is most important?
What is the common object of disparate perceptions?
Does Madhyamaka have a position or not?
- O.I.I.2.2.I.5.I Thus, starting with the topic of emptiness,
Give an answer established by reasoning,
Without contradicting scripture,
For these seven profound questions!
- O.I.I.2.2.I.5.2 Even though pressed with the barbed lances
Of a hundred thousand sophisticated arguments,
These issues have not been penetrated before.
Like lightning, let your long philosopher's tongue strike
These difficult points, which have confounded the great!"
- O.I.I.2.2.2.I Thus incited by intellect,
The speech-wind wavered somewhat,
And that shook the sage's heart
Like a mountain in the winds at the end of time.
After maintaining a moment of disciplined engagement,⁶³⁸
he said:
- O.I.I.2.2.2.2. "Alas! If by undergoing hundreds of difficult tests,
And analyzing again and again,
The fires of great intellects blazed ever greater
Yet were still not refined to a flawless state,
How can a low person like myself possibly explain this,
Whose innate brilliance is weak
And who has not undertaken lengthy study?"
- O.I.I.2.2.2.3 Then, as he cried these words of lament to Mañjuḥoṣa,
By what seemed to be His mystic power
A light dawned in the mind of the sage.
At that moment, as he acquired a little self-confidence,
He reasoned analytically according to eloquent scriptures,
and spoke.

Topic 1

- 1.1 The dGe ldan pas⁶³⁹ say the view is an absolute negation;⁶⁴⁰
Others say it is an implicative negation.⁶⁴¹
- 1.2.1 What is our own Early Translation⁶⁴² tradition?
- 1.2.2.1 In the state of great gnosis of coalescence,
After making a negative judgement of "nonexistence,"
What other thing such as an exclusive emptiness,⁶⁴³
Or something that is not [that which is negated],⁶⁴⁴
Could be implied in its place?
Both are just intellectually designated, and,
In the ultimate sense, neither is accepted.
This is the original reality beyond intellect,
Which is free of both negation and proof.
- 1.2.2.2.1 But if you should ask about the way in which emptiness
is established,
Then it is just an absolute negation.
In India the glorious Candrakīrti
And in Tibet Rong zom Chos bzang both
With one voice and one intention
Established the great emptiness of primordial purity.⁶⁴⁵
- 1.2.2.2.2 Because these dharmas are primordially pure,
Or because they are originally without intrinsic reality,
They are not born in either of the two realities;
So why fret about the expression "nonexistent"?
- 1.3.1.1.1 In the place of a pillar, primordially pure,
There is nothing non-empty whatsoever.
If you don't negate it by saying, "There is no pillar,"⁶⁴⁶
What does it mean to say, "The pillar does not exist?"⁶⁴⁷
- 1.3.1.1.2.1 The emptiness that is the negation of the pillar
And a left-over appearance
Are not fit, as "empty" and "non-empty," to coalesce;
It is like twisting black and white threads together.
- 1.3.1.1.2.2 To say, "a pillar is not empty of being a pillar"
Or "dharma-tā is empty of being a pillar"
Is to posit the basis of emptiness and something
of which it's empty.
These are verbal and ontological extrinsic emptinesses.
- 1.3.1.1.2.3 Woe! If this is not empty of this itself,
The empty basis is not empty and is left over.
This contradicts both scripture and reasoning—
"Form is empty of form!"
- 1.3.1.2.1.1 Consider a pillar and the true existence of a pillar:

- If they are one, then refuting one the other is refuted;
 If they are different, by refuting a true existence
 That is not the pillar, the pillar
 That is not empty of itself would be immune to analysis.
- 1.3.1.2.1.2.1. "Because true existence is not found to exist,
 There is no need to debate sameness and difference"—
- 1.3.1.2.1.2.2 Even though true existence does not exist,
 Individuals still apprehend vases as truly existent.
 So aside from a non-empty vase
 What is there to establish as truly existent?
 And you think you've determined the appearance of
 the negandum!⁶⁴⁸
- 1.3.1.2.1.3 To teach emptiness by applying some qualifier
 Such as "true existence" to the negandum
 Is of course well known in Svātantrika texts.
 But in the context of analyzing ultimate reality,
 What is the point of applying it?
- 1.3.1.2.2.1 Thinking that if it's empty, then even deceptively
 A pillar will be nonexistent,
 You try to avoid misinterpretation of the word
 [nonexistent];
 But this is itself a great contradiction!⁶⁴⁹
- 1.3.1.2.2.2.1 You are not satisfied to say simply,
 "A pillar is deceptively existent."⁶⁵⁰
 Why must you say, "It is not empty of itself"?
- 1.3.1.2.2.2.2.1 You may say, "They⁶⁵¹ are the same in meaning,"
 But it is not so; "A pillar exists" and
 "There is a pillar in a pillar"⁶⁵² are different statements.
 The latter means "Something depends on something"—
 This in fact is what you end up claiming.
- 1.3.1.2.2.2.2.2 If ultimately a pillar is not perceived,
 Then how can a pillar not be empty of pillar?
 In saying "Deceptively a pillar [is not empty of being a]
 pillar,"
 You are confused, using the same word twice.⁶⁵³
- 1.3.1.2.2.2.2.3 If something is not empty of itself,
 Then while it exists itself, it must be empty of
 something else.
 If the negandum is not something else,
 This contradicts the claim that it is not empty of itself.
 Generally speaking, extrinsic emptiness
 Does not necessarily qualify as emptiness.
 Although a cow does not exist in a horse,
- 1.3.2.1

How could one thereby establish the horse's emptiness?
By seeing that horse, what harm or good
Will it do to the cow?

1.3.2.2 Therefore a non-empty nirvāṇa and
An apparent saṃsāra are unfit to be dharma and dharmatā.
Here there is no coalescence of appearance and emptiness
Or equality of cyclic existence and peace.

1.3.2.3. "The moon in the water is not the moon in the sky"—
If you think the emptiness of being the moon in the sky
And the appearance of the moon in water
Are the coalescence of form and emptiness,
Then the realization of coalescence would be easy
for anyone.

1.3.2.4 Everyone knows a cow is not a horse;
They directly see the appearance of a cow.
How could the Mahātma have said,
"To realize this is amazing"?

1.4.1 Therefore, in our own system,
If one examines a moon in the water, that moon
Is not found at all, and does not exist as such;
When the moon in the water manifestly appears,
It is negated, but appears nonetheless.⁶⁵⁴

1.4.2.1 Emptiness and existence are contradictory
In the mind of an ordinary person. But here, this manifest
Coalescence is said to be wonderful;
The learned praise it with words of amazement.

1.4.2.2 If one examines from the side of emptiness,
Because nothing at all is non-empty,
One can say simply that everything is "nonexistent."

1.4.2.3.1 But that nonexistence is not self-sufficient,
For it arises unobstructedly as appearance.
That appearance is not self-sufficient,
For it abides in baseless great emptiness.

1.4.2.3.2 There, distinctions such as "This is empty of that,"
Or "That is empty of this,"
Or "This is emptiness and that is appearance,"
Are never to be found;

1.4.2.3.3 When one develops inner confidence in this,
The one who searches won't be frustrated
By pointless analysis,
But will attain peace of mind—amazing!

Topic 2

- 2.I.I.I Some say that śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats
Do not realize phenomenal selflessness.
- 2.I.I.2.I As long as the self that is the apprehension
Of the aggregates as the mere “I” is not eliminated,
By the power of that, emotional disturbances are not
abandoned.
- 2.I.I.2.2 That self is a designation made
With respect to the aggregates; it is the object
Of innate I-apprehension. That, and vases, etc.
Aside from being different, bases of emptiness
Are no different in their modes of emptiness;
For phenomena and persons are both
Empty of intrinsic establishment.
- 2.I.I.2.3 Thus, this is proven by scripture and reasoning.
To go beyond this and state that
“Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not realize emptiness”
Is just a claim.
- 2.I.2.I At this point, some draw unwarranted conclusions and
claim that
The paths of vision of the three vehicles are the same
And that there are no distinctions of levels of realization.
They interpret the Prajñāpāramitā and mantra, all of sūtra
and tantra,
As texts of provisional meaning.
- 2.I.2.2.I There, when those who have already traveled lower paths
Achieve the the Mahāyāna path of vision and so forth
There would be such faults as not having anything
to abandon;
By reasoning, harm would befall them irrevocably.
- 2.I.2.2.2 Moreover, though having realized what must be realized,
They say that in abandoning what must be abandoned,
[One must] ally [one’s practice with the accumulations]—
[But this means] nonrealization, which contradicts the
claim of realization.
To claim that the rising sun must rely on something else
In order to vanquish the darkness—quite strange!
- 2.I.I.2.3.I Some say that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas realize
the emptiness
Of the five aggregates of their own continua of experience,
But do not realize selflessness of other phenomena.
- 2.I.I.2.3.2 If one realizes the five aggregates to be empty,

Then, aside from noncomposite phenomena [like space and cessation],

What other dharma would be left unrealized?

2.2.1.1

So what is our own tradition?

Glorious Candrakīrti's Autocommentary

Says that, in order to abandon obscurations, the buddhas

Teach śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas personal selflessness,

And in order to abandon cognitive obscurations, they teach

Bodhisattvas how to realize phenomenal selflessness.

2.2.1.2

"Well then, what does it mean to say

That both śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas

Have realization of emptiness?"

2.2.1.3

In order to abandon just the emotional afflictions

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas meditate on personal selflessness;

But "They do not meditate on the entirety

Of phenomenal selflessness"—thus teaches [our tradition].

2.2.2

Klong chen rab 'byams said of yore

That although earlier masters all disputed

Whether they did or did not [realize both forms of selflessness],

Our own position is that whatever types of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas

Appeared of yore and reached arhatship

Did not become liberated without

Realizing the emptiness of the self

That is the apprehension of the aggregates;

But just having that realization does not mean

That they realized selflessness entirely.

Just like the space inside a sesame seed

That is eaten out by a worm,

[Their realization] is said to be a lesser selflessness.

Thus, with words that refute the lesser [of possible realizations],

It is said that "They do not realize emptiness."

This is a most excellent eloquent explanation;

There is nothing else like it.

2.2.3.1

For example, if one drinks a single gulp

Of the water of the great ocean,

One cannot say that one has not drunk the ocean.

Because they see the selflessness of the mere "I,"

Which is one phenomenon among others, it is held that [Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas] see emptiness.

Just as by drinking a single gulp one cannot say
That one has drunk the entire ocean's water;
Because they do not realize the nature of all knowables
To be emptiness, it is held that they do not see selflessness
perfectly.

2.2.3.2.1

If one sees the emptiness of a single thing,
Why wouldn't one see the emptiness of everything?

2.2.3.2.1.1

If, with scripture, reasoning, and pith instructions,
They were to examine things, of course they would see it.
But, for the most part, those who are destined
To be śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas
Are attached to the selflessness of persons,
So it is hard for them to realize the latter extremes
[of the *catuṣkoṭi*],

2.2.3.2.2.1.2

Just as those who analyze a vase
Might assert its particles to exist substantially.
If the mind that realizes [selflessness]
After analyzing a vase also were to
Analyze particles, it would be reasonable to realize
[their emptiness];
But usually, they do not realize [their emptiness].

2.2.3.2.2.1.3

Though coarse bases and partless atoms appear
contradictory,
Since [śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas] are mostly bereft
Of those scriptures, modes of reasoning, and pith
instructions,
They practice systems that do not contradict [the possibility
of personal liberation].

2.2.3.2.2.1.4

Likewise, followers of the Cittamātra system
Do not accept the existence of external objects,
So why wouldn't they also accept the nonexistence of
the subject?
Why wouldn't Svātantrikas use the reasoning that establishes
Ultimate truthlessness to understand the conventional
Nonestablishment of intrinsic characteristics (*rang mtshan*)?
So, for you everyone would become a Prāsaṅgika!
How would it be possible for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas
To denigrate the Mahāyāna [if they were Prāsaṅgikas]?

2.2.3.2.2.2

Thus, although the nature of one thing
Is also the nature of everything,
As long as the collection of external and internal causes
and conditions
Is not complete, realization will come slowly.

- 2.2.3.2.2.3.1 Generally speaking, those with sharp minds become realized
Under their own power, while dullards
Do not necessarily reach realization immediately.
- 2.2.3.2.2.3.2 At some point, realization is inevitable;
At the end of ten thousand aeons, it is said,
The arhat wakes up from the state of cessation,
And enters the Mahāyāna path.
- 2.2.3.2.2.4.1.1 To properly abide on the Mahāyāna path,
One must cultivate oneself for a countless aeon.
So why shouldn't it be impossible for
Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who strive for their own
happiness,
Not to realize all forms of selflessness
During those [ten] thousand aeons [they spend
in cessation]?
- 2.2.3.2.2.4.1.2 Don't those who have attained the bhūmis
Gradually clarify and perfect their realization?
- 2.2.3.2.2.4.2 With the help of the accumulations,
Infinite modes of reasoning, bodhicitta,
The conduct [that follows from it], and perfect dedication—
When these conditions are complete, it is certain
That one will achieve realization,
Just as complete knowledge of skillful means is a condition
For swift realization on the mantra path.
- 2.3.1.1 Even if one has abandoned notions of permanent self,
Instinctive apprehension of "I" occurs in relation to
the aggregates.
Therefore [it is said], "[As long as] there is apprehension
of the aggregates,
There is apprehension of 'I'"—this statement [from
the *Ratnāvalī*]
- 2.3.1.2 Means that, as long as there is a basis of designation in
the aggregates
And a mind that apprehends them,
The causes for designating a self are complete,
And as a result, apprehension of self will not cease.
- 2.3.2 Thus, even if the permanent self were abandoned,
Since the object, in relation to which the designated self
Is instinctively designated, would not be eliminated,
There would be nothing to oppose the occurrence of
self-apprehension.
- 2.3.2 Thus, in abandoning emotional disturbances,

- The assertion "One must realize the aggregates and so forth
to be empty"
Is not the meaning of the passage [in the Ratnāvalī].
That meaning was explained in this way by Candrakīrti:
- 2.3.3.1 If one recognizes the designated mere "I,"
That is enough to stop the apprehension of "I."
Though one does not know a rope to be nonexistent,
By seeing the lack of snake, the apprehension of snake is
stopped.
- 2.3.3.2 Finally, one will definitely realize both kinds of selflessness.
The suchness of all phenomena is unique,
And the way of seeing suchness is the same,
So Nāgārjuna and his son [Candrakīrti] have expounded
A line of reasoning that establishes the finality of a single
vehicle.
- 2.3.3.3 If, as in your system, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas
Had already seen reality, what would that line of reasoning
Do to establish a single vehicle?
It is just an assertion.
- 2.3.3.4.1 Here, the primordial wisdom of coalescence
That sees the ultimate
Is precisely identical with suchness;
All sublime beings head toward it, and enter it.
- 2.3.3.4.2 Therefore, if one understands this system well,
The systems of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga are like
Molasses and honey combined;
A hungry person will easily digest them.
- 2.3.3.4.3 Otherwise, as with inappropriate food,
One feels the discomfort of cancer within.
Poked and jabbed with a hundred sharp lances
Of scripture and reasoning, one is afraid.

Topic 3

- 3.1 When pursuing the main practice of the view,
Some say one should not apprehend anything.
The meaning of "not apprehending anything"
Can be understood well or wrongly.
- 3.2.1.1 The first [way of understanding]
Is free of the elaborations of the four extremes.
For the gnosis of sublime beings,
Nothing is seen to remain,

- So modal apprehension automatically subsides;
It is like looking at the empty, luminous sky.
- 3.2.1.2.1.2 The second is the mindless⁶⁵⁵ system of Hashang:
Letting the mind rest blankly⁶⁵⁶ without analysis and
Without the clarity aspect of penetrating insight,
One remains ordinary, like a rock in the ocean depths.
- 3.2.1.2.1.3.1 For example, though both say "There is nothing at all,"
The Mādhyamika sees there really is nothing,
And the other one just imagines the absence of form;
Likewise here, though the words are the same,
The meaning is different like earth and sky.
- 3.2.1.2.1.3.2.1 Therefore, if in the absence of elaboration of the four
extremes,
One does not apprehend the four extremes anywhere,
One is beyond the four extremes, and modal apprehension
subsides;
Because it no longer exists, we say there is no modal
apprehension.
- 3.2.1.2.1.3.2.2 If some idiots think "Since there is no modal apprehension,
From the very beginning one should relax and not grasp
anything"—
Then because all beings are quite relaxed in their ordinary
state,
Always wandering in the three worlds of saṃsāra,
There is no reason to encourage or remind them!⁶⁵⁷
- 3.2.1.2.2.1 Some might say, "We have recognized the nature of mind,"
Without really understanding it; in recognizing the ultimate,
One must definitely realize the absence of true existence.
That "Deluded appearances are one thing, and I am
another"
Is obvious and requires no meditation.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.1.1.1 You might say, "When examining the color, form, origin,
cessation,
And so forth, of the mind nothing is seen;
That is realization of emptiness."
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.1.1.2.1 This system of teaching is extremely profound,
And there are also great mistakes one can make;
Because mind does not have a form,
It is impossible for anyone to see its color, etc.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.1.1.2.2 However, it is a very great mistake to think that merely
not seeing them
Is the same as being introduced to emptiness.

- Though you examine your head a hundred times,
A ruminant's horns cannot be found.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.1.1.2.3 To say that not seeing something is to realize its
emptiness—
Wouldn't that be easy for anybody?
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.1.2 Therefore, if by this rational analysis
One sees the nature of things precisely,
One will profoundly realize the essential unreality
Of the illusion mind, which is like an illusion.
Then, just like looking directly into space,
One will derive profound certainty in the nature of
one's mind,
Which though moving is empty.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.1 You ask, "Well then, this mind of yours—
Is it nonexistent, like space,
Or does it have disparate awarenesses?"
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.2 Because the vibrant mind that we all possess
Doesn't rest for a moment, surely everyone would say
There is some sort of awareness.
Thus, you say that mind,
Which is neither existent nor nonexistent,
Is the luminous dharmakāya.
Although he hasn't done much study,
Such a person who claims to introduce the nature of mind
Thinks this is a teaching such that
"Knowing one liberates all."⁶⁵⁸
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.1 The teaching of "neither existent nor nonexistent"
in the Great Perfection
Is the freedom from the four extremes of elaboration.
If you examine this mind carefully,
You cannot say it exists,
Nor can you say it does not exist.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2.1 But in fact, your mind does not go beyond either
The extreme of both existence and nonexistence
Nor the extreme of neither existence nor nonexistence.
You are just thinking about the mind on the basis
Of "neither existence nor nonexistence."
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2.2 Aside from a difference in name, the mind,
Spoken of in that way, is no different than
The "inconceivable self" of the apostate.
- 3.2.1.2.2.2.3.1 The mind and dharmas other than it
Are determined to be unreal, and on that basis

Appearances arise as relativity,
Which is beyond thought and expressions of "existence"
and "nonexistence."

This is the crucial point of freedom from elaborations of the
four extremes,

Which is without a focal point and all-pervasive.

3.2.1.2.2.2.3.2 [But] just saying "This is free of both existence and
nonexistence"

Is to place a target in front of your mind.

Depending on this apprehension of self and others as real
entities,

One enters the river of saṃsāra continuously.

3.2.2.1.1.1 The antidote that ends all of this

Is the modal apprehension of selflessness.

If one does not know the manner of absence,

To imagine nonexistence does not help;

If you mistake a rope for a snake,

It doesn't help to think "There's no snake;"

But if you see how it does not exist, it disappears.

3.2.2.1.1.2.1 Thus, having realized emptiness through analysis,
You should not rest content with analysis.

Since the habit of clinging to real entities is beginningless,

You should meditate again and again with modal
apprehension.

3.2.2.1.1.2.2 By meditating on selflessness the view of self

Is uprooted, so it's been called necessary

By many seers of truth who practiced intensely.

3.2.2.1.1.2.3 If this is the fail-safe entry way for beginners,

To say that modal apprehension should be abandoned

From the very beginning is a rumor spread by Māra.

3.2.2.1.2.1 When you acquire outstanding certainty in truthlessness

Induced by that modal apprehension,

The mere apprehension of nonexistence

Is not the final nature of things,

So meditate on the great emptiness free of elaboration,

Free of conceptual ambivalence.

3.2.2.1.2.2 When you've really understood truthlessness,

Emptiness arises as relativity,

Without apprehension of either form or emptiness.

This is worthy of confidence just like

Gold refined by fire.

3.2.2.1.2.3 Though this extremely profound matter

Has been realized with long-standing effort

- By the great scholar-yogis of India and Tibet,
 Woe to those idiots who say it can be realized
 In a moment—they are plagued with doubts!
- 3.2.2.2.1 In the main practice of absorption,
 Actual and potential phenomena, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,
 Are beyond existence and non existence. If in the nature
 of things
 Existence and nonexistence are nowhere established,
 Biased apprehension is [nothing but] conceptual
 elaboration.
- Therefore, when analyzing rationally,
 One does not see anything established anywhere;
 So how can apprehension come about?
- 3.2.2.2.2 However, if you analyze the nature of
 Freedom from the four extremes of elaboration, certainty
 is gained.
- By this the penetrating insight of self-arisen
 Luminous wisdom becomes clear like a lamp.
- 3.2.2.2.2 Its opposite—the dark night of the
 Four extremes of inferior intellects—
- 3.2.2.2.3 Is uprooted by this very antidote;
 So when you meditate upon it, certainty should arise.
- 3.2.3.1.1 The fundamental space beyond intellect where
 The elaborations of the four extremes are eliminated
 instantly
 Is difficult to see all at once
 At the level of an ordinary person.
- 3.2.3.1.2 The system of study and reflection
 Is for eliminating the elaborations of the four extremes
 in stages.
- To the extent that one grows accustomed to it,
 Certainty grows ever greater;
 One's intellect, which causes mistaken reification to subside,
 Improves like the waxing moon.
- 3.2.3.2 The unsound view that doesn't apprehend anything
 Cannot produce the confidence that
 No real entities are established anywhere;
 Therefore, it cannot remove obscurations.
- 3.2.3.3.1 Therefore, just like inferring fire by smoke,
 The difference between these meditations
 Is known from the dividend of abandoned defilement and
 acquired realization.
- 3.2.3.3.2.1 The ordinary idiot's meditation

- Is not a cause for abandoning defilements or realization.
 Because it is an obstacle to producing good qualities,
 It is like pouring tea through a strainer—
 Scriptural learning and realization slip away,
 While emotional disturbances accumulate.
 In particular, one has little confidence in cause and effect.
- 3.2.3.3.2.2.1 If one has the eyes of the authentic view,
 Scriptural learning, experience, and realization blaze up.
 By virtue of seeing emptiness,
 Confidence in the infallible relativity of cause and effect
 Will increase, and emotional disturbance will lessen.
- 3.2.3.3.2.2.2 With the samādhi that abides one-pointedly
 In the state of certainty induced by analysis,
 The ultimate meaning is seen by nonseeing.
- 3.2.3.3.2.2.3 One does not succumb to any particular object of seeing
 And of course does not apprehend anything.
 Like a mute's taste of molasses,
 Confidence grows in a yogi who cultivates it,
 But it cannot be produced by analysis alone.

Topic 4

- 4.1 In meditating the view of the supreme vehicle,
 Which is right—to analyze or focus the mind?
- 4.2.1.1 Some say, "Don't analyze, but meditate transically.
 Analysis obscures the nature of things,
 So without analyzing, sit like a bump on a log."⁶⁵⁹
- 4.2.1.2 Some say, "Only do analysis.
 Meditation without analysis
 Is like going to sleep and doesn't help,
 So one should always analyze."
- 4.2.1.3 To adhere exclusively to analysis or transic
 Meditation is not appropriate.
- 4.2.2.1.1 Most transic meditations without analysis
 Can become a mere calm abiding,
 But meditating thus will not produce certainty.
 If certainty, the unique eye of the path of liberation,
 Is abandoned, obscurations cannot be dispelled.
- 4.2.2.1.2.1 If you do not know the nature of dharmas,
 However much you meditate, you are still
 Meditating on ordinary concepts. What's the use?
 It's like travelling on a path with your eyes closed.
- 4.2.2.1.2.2 The habits of beginningless delusion

Produce clinging to mistaken notions about the nature
of things.

Without endeavoring to investigate
With a hundred methods of reasoning, it is difficult
To achieve realization.

4.2.2.1.2.3 Insofar as clinging to mistaken appearances
And seeing the authentic meaning are mutually exclusive,
Here, in the darkness of existence to which
Sentient beings are well habituated,
It is difficult to obtain a glimpse of reality.

4.2.2.2.1 Through the ripening of the karma of previous practice
And the master's blessing,
By just examining the origin, abiding, and cessation of
the mind,
It is possible to determine truthlessness.

But this is extremely rare;
Not everyone can achieve realization this way.

4.2.2.2.2.1.1.1 In cutting through to primordial purity,
One needs to perfect the Prāsaṅgika view.⁶⁶⁰
As for the aspect of nonelaboration,
Those two⁶⁶¹ are said to be no different.
In order to prevent clinging to blank emptiness,
The Mantrayāna teaches great bliss.
This causes an experience of
The expanse of nondual bliss and emptiness,
Free of subject and object.
Appearance, clarity, and awareness
Are synonyms of that bliss.⁶⁶²

4.2.2.2.2.1.1.2 Here the appearance aspect is the formal buddha bodies,
Which protect all beings and bring them to happiness
As long as saṃsāra exists;
It has the nature of ultimate compassion.
Therefore great gnosis by its very nature
Does not abide in either existence or peace.⁶⁶³
Because it abides in the basis,

4.2.2.2.2.1.2 By practicing the path *Evam* of bliss and emptiness
In this very life, one will manifest
The fruitional coalescence.

4.2.2.2.2.1.3 In fact the basis, path, and result
Are not divided; the path of the fourth empowerment,
Which is the culmination of the Vajrayāna,
Is the self-arisen gnosis of awareness and emptiness.
This is exclusively emphasized

- In the path of the vajra pinnacle of luminosity,⁶⁶⁴
 Which is the final point where all vehicles converge.
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.1.1 As long as certainty has not been born,
 One should induce it with skillful means and analysis.
 If certainty is born, one should meditate
 In that state without separating from that certainty.
 The lamp-like continuity of certainty
 Causes false conceptuality to subside.
 One should always cultivate it.
 If it is lost, then induce it again through analysis.
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.1.2 At first, analysis is important;
 If you don't start out with analysis,
 How can you induce an excellent certainty?
 If an excellent certainty is not born,
 How can miserable projections cease?
 If miserable projections do not cease,
 How can the foul wind of karma be stopped?
 If the foul wind of karma is not stopped,
 How can this awful saṃsāra be abandoned?
 If this awful saṃsāra is not abandoned,
 What can be done about this dismal suffering?
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.1.3 In reality, there is no good or evil
 In saṃsāra and nirvāṇa;
 To realize the equanimity of neither good nor evil
 Is the nature of excellent certainty.
 With excellent certainty, nirvāṇa is not attained
 By abandoning saṃsāra.
 The mere words may seem contradictory,
 But in fact they are not.
 This is the most important point of the path,
 A crucial secret instruction on the view and activity—
 You should examine and savor its meaning!
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.2.1 Next, you should alternate analysis and trance.
 If you analyze, certainty will be born;
 When you don't analyze, and cling to the ordinary,
 Analyze again and again, inducing certainty.
 When certainty is born, rest in that state
 Without distraction and meditate one-pointedly.
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.2.2 Certainty and the projecting mind
 Are mutually exclusive;⁶⁶⁵
 So by the analysis that roots out projection,
 You should increase certainty more and more.
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1.3.1 Finally, if even without analysis

- Certainty arises naturally, rest in that very state;
 Since it has already been established through analysis,
 There is no need to accomplish it again.
- 4.2.2.2.2.1.3.2 If you understand that a rope is not a snake,
 That very certainty blocks the perception of a snake.
 To say "Still you must go on analyzing
 The absence of a snake" is silly, isn't it?⁶⁶⁶
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.1 When realization of the sublime paths occurs,
 You will not meditate with analysis;
 What need is there to apply
 Inferential analysis to direct realization?
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.2.1 If you think that "When you leave off analysis
 There is no realization of the ultimate,"
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.2.2.1 Then for you the gnosis of buddhas and sublime beings,
 And the undistorted perceptions of worldly beings,
 Would all be mistaken.
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.2.2.2.1 Because they have already been perceived,
 They are not subject to analysis.
 Therefore, in the context of extraordinary certainty
 Free of elaborations of the four extremes,
 There is no occasion for analyzing or focusing on
 Thoughts of "this" and "that."
- 4.2.2.2.2.2.2.2.2.2 When the analytical apprehension of characteristics
 Binds the thinker like a silkworm in its silk,
 The authentic nature will not be seen as it is.
- 4.2.2.2.2.3.1 When this extraordinary certainty
 Dispels the darkness that obscures reality,
 One realizes the actual fundamental luminosity
 And the flawless vision of thatness,
 Which is the individually cognized gnosis.
 How could this be analytical wisdom, a form of
 mentation?⁶⁶⁷
- 4.2.2.2.2.3.2 The object of analytical wisdom is "this" or "that,"
 Which is differentiated and conceptualized,
 Whereas this gnosis of equanimity
 Does not reify subject, object,
 Appearance, or emptiness in any way;
 It does not abide in the characteristics
 Of mind or mentation.
- 4.2.2.2.2.3.3.1 Therefore, the stainless analytical wisdom
 Of equipoise in supreme certainty
 Induced by analysis is the cause by which
 One attains the resultant gnosis of coalescence.

- 4.2.2.2.2.3.3.2.1 The ascertainment of the view
And the establishment of philosophical systems
Determined [by that view]
Is the stainless valid cognition of analytical wisdom
That differentiates and cognizes individually.
- 4.2.2.2.2.3.3.2.2.1 The gnosis of sublime equipoise
That has reached the nature of things
By the certainty induced by that valid cognition
Is the main practice of the Great Vehicle.
- 4.2.2.2.2.3.3.2.2.2 If you have it, in this very life
The result of coalescence is bestowed;
So it is both a "vehicle" and "great."
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.1.1 According to the system of four tantric classes,
This path of the word empowerment in anuttarayogatantra
Is of course the ultimate gnosis,
But it is not designated as a separate vehicle.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.1.2 However, in the explanation of
The glorious *Kālacakratantra*,
The body of the gnosis of equanimity
Is emphasized, so it is held as the ultimate tantra.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.1.3 Among the classes of anuttarayogatantra,
The gnosis of the path of the fourth empowerment
That is emphasized and explained here [in the Great
Perfection]
Is the basic intent of all tantric classes.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.1.4 Just as gold smelted sixteen times
Is extremely pure, so too here
The analysis of other vehicles' philosophical systems
Reveals their progressive purity, which culminates here.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.1.5 Thus the way this is established
Through the valid cognition of stainless wisdom
Is found in all the interpretive commentaries and tantras
And in the analysis of Dharmabhadra.⁶⁶⁸
If you think about it, it is beyond the realm of Māra,
And causes inalienable wisdom to mature.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.1.1 However, to teach the main practice of the view
As an object of mind and mentation, such as
Adhering one-sidedly to appearance or emptiness,
Is to make the inexpressible into an object of expression;
So it contradicts the intention of the learned.⁶⁶⁹
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.1.2 Since atiyoga is the inconceivable gnosis
Of form and emptiness inseparable,
It is simply beyond impure mind.

- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.2.1.1 Here the view of cutting through—which ascertains
The emptiness aspect of primal purity—and
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.2.1.2 The view of the luminous all-surpassing realization—
Which determines the nature
Of spontaneously present buddha bodies and gnosis
In the inner luminosity of the youthful vase body—
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.2.1.3 Are inseparable;
They are just the coalescence of
Primal purity and spontaneous presence.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.2.2.2 Here in the Great Perfection the so-called “indestructible
Tilaka of gnosis” of other tantric systems
Is very clearly taught as a synonym for this.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.3.1 Each of the pith instructions of the mental class of the Great
Perfection
Is found in the practice of learned and accomplished
masters.
The Mahāmudrā, Path and Result, Pacification,
Great Madhyamaka of Coalescence, and so on,
Are known as its synonyms;
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.3.2.1 Because in fact they are all the gnosis,
Beyond mind, they are all the same.
The buddhas’ and siddhas’ intention is the same—
The learned affirm this univocally.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.3.2.2 Some people say, “Our system of the Great Perfection
Is better than other systems like Mahāmudrā.”
They have no realization and
No understanding of the conventions of the path.
If they understood, they would see that this unique
intention
Cannot be divided through reasoning.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.3.3 Likewise, all the gnosés of the fourth empowerment
In the anuttarayogatantras
Are indivisible in the Great Perfection.
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.4.1 However, the source of all of those
Is the gnosis of the Great Perfection, whose tantric classes
Are divided into “mental,” “space,” and “instructional,”
According to their profound, extensive, extraordinary
meanings.
There are many instructions here that are not known
In other systems, which use just a fragment of them,
So it goes without saying that this is an “extraordinary
teaching.”
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.4.2 There, the ultimate Great Perfection

- Is profound, peaceful, luminous, and unfabricated—
 The gnosis of the buddhas.
 But here in the context of the paths,⁶⁷⁰
 One practices the exemplary and actual coalescences,
 Which are like a drawing of the moon,
 The moon in water and the moon in the sky,
 Homologous to that gnosis.⁶⁷¹
- 4.2.2.2.2.4.4.3 Each one gradually leads to the next,
 As one cultivates the self-arisen stainless gnosis
 According to one's own capacity.
 Therefore it is like meditating homologously
 In order to reach sublime gnosis.
- 4.3.1 If one directly ascertains
 The great gnosis of the coalescence of dharmatā,
 All views that are apprehensions of mental analysis
 Will definitely subside, and one will see nonelaboration.
- 4.3.2 Therefore, without citing the context,
 Saying one-sidedly that modal apprehension
 Should be used or not has both faults and good points,
 Like the waxing and waning of the moon.
 This is established through reasoning,
 According to scriptures of definitive meaning.

Topic 5

- 5.1 Which of the two truths is more important?
 5.2.1.1.1 Some claim the ultimate is most important.
 "Deceptive reality is a deluded perception," they say,
 Understanding it as something to be abandoned.
 "Ultimate reality is not deluded, so that ultimate
 Is the perfectly pure view," they say.
- 5.2.1.1.2.1.1 If deceptive reality were not erroneous, were indeed true,
 Ultimate reality could not be emptiness, so
 They are expressed differently in this way.
- 5.2.1.1.2.1.2 However, no ultimate can be established
 Over and against the deceptive;
 The two of them are method and methodical result.
 Without depending on an entity for examination,
 Its nonsubstantiality cannot be established—
 Therefore both substance and nonsubstance
 Are the same in being mere relativity.⁶⁷²
- 5.2.1.1.2.2.1 If that clinging to emptiness
 Were to fully exclude appearance,

- It would mess up Nāgārjuna's fine system.
- 5.2.1.1.2.2.2 If by cultivating the path by that seeing of emptiness,
One were only to realize the expanse of emptiness,
Then one would have to accept that the
Sublime equipoise on emptiness
Would be a cause for the destruction of substantial entities.
- 5.2.1.1.2.2.3 Therefore, though things are empty from the beginning,
Appearance and emptiness are not separate things;
Adhering to the statement "Only emptiness is important"
Is an unskilled approach to the final meaning.
- 5.2.1.2.1.1 Some people put aside the ultimate
And from the perspective of mere conventionality,
Differentiate the levels of the view in the tantric classes.
- 5.2.1.2.1.2.1 Viewing oneself as a deity conventionally
Without complementing the view with the ultimate reality
of emptiness
And thus differentiating "higher" and "lower" teachings,
is incorrect.⁶⁷³
- 5.2.1.2.1.2.2 Without having confidence in ultimate reality,
Just meditating on deceptive reality as divinity
Is mere wishful thinking, not a view;
Just as some heretical awareness mantras
Involve visualizing oneself differently during recitation.
- 5.2.1.2.2.1 Some say deceptive reality is more important;
They say you must integrate the two truths,
But then they heap praise on deceptive reality.
- 5.2.1.2.2.2 At the time of maintaining the view of coalescence,
They desert coalescence and grasp a blank emptiness.
Thus the toddler of practice cannot keep up
With the mother of good explanations.
- 5.2.2.1.1 Therefore, here in our early translation tradition,
Our Dharma terminology for the basis, path, and result
Does not fall into extremes or bias with respect to
Permanence, impermanence, the two truths, and so forth;
We maintain only the philosophical position of
coalescence.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.1.1 If deceptive and ultimate reality are separated,
One cannot posit the basis, path, or result on the basis of
either.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Basis, path, and result are all
Without the distinction of abandoning one thing
or accepting another.
For if one abandons deceptive reality,

There is no ultimate; there is no deceptive
Reality apart from the ultimate.

- 5.2.2.1.2.1.1.3 Whatever appears is pervaded by emptiness,
And whatever is empty is pervaded by appearance.
If something appears, it cannot be non-empty,
And that emptiness cannot be established as not appearing.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.2.1 Since both entities and nonentities should both
Be taken as bases for establishing emptiness,
All appearances are just designations,
And emptiness too is just a mental designation.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.2.2 For the certainty of rational analysis,
These two are method and methodical result;
If there is one, it is impossible not to have the other,
As they are inseparable.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.2.3 Therefore appearance and emptiness
Can each be conceived separately,
But in fact they are never different.
Therefore, they are called "coalescent,"
Since the confidence of seeing the nature of things
Does not fall to any extreme.
- 5.2.2.1.2.1.2.4 In the perspective of the wisdom of authentic analysis
Appearance and emptiness are considered to be
A single essence with different aspects, for
If one exists, the other exists, and if
One does not exist, the other does not exist.
- 5.2.2.1.2.2 Nonetheless, for beginners
They appear as negation and negandum;
At that time they are not combined as one.
When the nature of emptiness
Arises as appearance, one attains confidence.
Thus, everything is primordially empty,
And these appearances are empty;
Though empty, they appear; though apparent,
They are seen as empty—this is the birth of certainty.
- 5.2.2.1.3 This is the root of the profound paths
Of sūtra, tantra, and pith instructions.
This is the meaning of cutting off misconceptions
Through study and reflection;
It is the unmistakable, authentic view.
- 5.2.2.2.1.1 By realizing that crucial point more and more profoundly,
Clinging to the characteristics of appearances of
Deceptive reality will gradually be abandoned.
The stages of the vehicles of the various tantric classes

- Appear in that way.
- 5.2.2.2.1.2.1.1. Intellectual wishful thinking and
The view of certainty that finds confidence in the
Divine appearance of animate and inanimate phenomena
Cannot possibly be the same.
- 5.2.2.2.1.2.1.2. The determination that phenomena are truthless
By Mādhyamika reasoning is a view.
But when a Brahmin recites a mantra over a sick person,
His imagining a lack of illness is not the view.
- 5.2.2.2.1.2.2.1. By realizing the abiding nature of ultimate reality,
One grows confident in the divine appearance of deceptive
reality.
Otherwise, if one dwells on the manner of deceptive
appearance,
How can divinity be established?
- 5.2.2.2.1.2.2.2. Aside from this deluded appearance of subject and object,
There is no such thing as saṃsāra;
The divisions of the path that abandons it
Are not only made from the perspective of ultimate reality,
Because ultimate reality has a unitary character.
- 5.2.2.2.1.2.2.3. With respect to the mental ability gained
Through seeing and cultivating all phenomena
Of apparent deceptive reality, the subject (of qualities),⁶⁷⁴
With respect to ultimate reality, the action tantra,
Performance tantra, yoga tantra, and unexcelled yoga tantra
are taught.
- 5.2.2.2.1.3. Therefore, the tantric classes are not differentiated as higher
Or lower with respect to either of the two truths
individually.
According to one's attainment of confidence
In the coalescence of the two truths,
The practice of [each of the tantric classes naturally] follows.
- 5.2.2.2.2.1.1. Therefore, if one properly practices without mistakes
The peerless Vajra Vehicle,
The path that bestows liberation in a single life,
Then, just like the example of water seen
By several different types of sentient beings,
With respect to pure vision
It will be impossible for anyone not to see
Actual and potential phenomena as a manifested maṇḍala.
- 5.2.2.2.2.1.2. If you don't know things that way,
Meditating on deities while holding
The nature of saṃsāra to be impure

Is like spraying a vomit-filled vase with perfume.
Alas! That sort of meditation on the Vajra Vehicle of
equanimity

Is just like a drawing of a butter lamp.

5.2.2.2.2.2.1.

The way things appear is impure,

But that is the system of delusion.

We say that authentically seeing the nature of things

Is the meaning of the undivided Vajrayāna system.

5.2.2.2.2.2.2.1

Seeing the animate and inanimate universe

As lacking the nature of pure support and supported,

But meditating while imagining that they do—

This path evinces an obvious contradiction,

And is just a reflection of the Vajrayāna path.

Coal cannot be whitened by washing;

5.2.2.2.2.2.2.2

Likewise, a fabricated meditation that thinks

“It is not, but it is”

Attaining some kind of result

Would be like the heretical sun worshippers (*nyi ma pa*)—

Who have no confidence in the emptiness of true
existence—

Abandoning emotional afflictions through meditating

On an emptiness devoid of appearance, etc.

5.2.2.2.3.1.

What if the action, performance, and unexcelled tantric
classes

Did not have different levels of view?

5.2.2.2.3.2.1.

If you have confidence in the view that realizes

The pure equality of actual and potential phenomena,

But fail to take advantage of the correct view,

Seeing yourself and the deity as superior and inferior

And discriminating things as pure and impure,

You will only harm yourself.

5.2.2.2.3.2.2.

And, if you are still attached to what is accepted and aban-
doned in the lower tantras

But practice the equality of what is accepted and abandoned
in the unexcelled tantras,

Such as “union and liberation,” eating meat, drinking
alcohol, etc.,

This is known as the “reckless behavior of
misunderstanding”—

Isn't that despicable?

5.2.2.2.4.1.

The view is defined according to one's certainty

In the vision of the nature of things;

According to one's confidence acquired by the view,

- One maintains the practice of meditation and conduct.
 5.2.2.2.4.2.1. "Because the vehicles are differentiated
 By different levels of view, they are not necessarily nine in
 number"—
- 5.2.2.2.4.2.2. From the lowest of the Buddhist philosophical systems
 Up to the ultimate vajra pinnacle of atiyoga,
 There is a specific reason for positing
 The enumeration of nine classes.
 Of course there are many levels of vehicle,
 But they are posited by necessity, as is the three-vehicle
 system.⁶⁷⁵
- 5.2.2.3.1 Thus, according to the relative strength
 Of inner gnosis, the animate and inanimate
 Worlds are seen as pure or impure.
- 5.2.2.3.2 Therefore, the basis of inseparable appearance and emptiness
 Is realized as the inseparability of the two realities;
 As you cultivate the path in that way,
 You will see the gnosis,
 The coalescence of the two buddha bodies.

Topic 6

- 6.1. When a single instance of water appears
 As different substances to various sentient beings,
- 6.2.1.1.1. Some say there is a single object of perception⁶⁷⁶
 And that all perceptions of it are valid.
- 6.2.1.1.2.1 If water had some kind of essence,⁶⁷⁷
 Valid and invalid cognitions would be impossible [here].
- 6.2.1.1.2.2. If the various objects that appear were distinct,
 It would not be possible for [different minds]
 To perceive the same pillars, vases [etc.].
- 6.2.1.2.1. Some say [that in the case of water] there is just wetness;⁶⁷⁸
- 6.2.1.2.2.1.1 But if [different appearances] are not different aspects [of the
 same substance,
 But merely perceptions belonging to different perceivers],
 Different perceptions [of the same thing] would be
 impossible.
- 6.2.1.2.2.1.2 If what one [being sees as] water, pus, and so forth,
 Is not present to other [beings],
 What would be the basis of [those perceptions of] water,
 pus, etc.?
- 6.2.1.2.2.1.3 Moreover, what would happen to the wetness basis
 In the case of beings of the realm of infinite space?

- 6.2.1.2.2.2 If wetness were the same as water,
It could not appear as pus and so on;
If it were different from water and so on,
Liquidity would not be perceived anywhere.
- 6.2.1.3.1.1 It is not possible for there to be a common object
Of each distinct perception,
Because it is not possible for a suitable common substance
To appear in different ways.
If one accepts an analytically [determined] basis
Other than a dependently designated one,
One must establish its existence in reality—
However you look at it, it's unreasonable.
- 6.2.1.3.1.2.1 If the common object were nonexistent,
There would be no object as in Cittamātra,
And one would have to accept that consciousness itself
is the object;
That is unreasonable.
- 6.2.1.3.1.2.2 The subjective apprehension of a nonexistent object
Would also be nonexistent in fact.
- 6.2.1.3.1.2.3 Both subject and object are equally apparent
In relative truth, so considering whatever appears⁶⁷⁹
It is not reasonable to differentiate
Subject and object as existent and nonexistent.
Although an object appears, it is false.
Likewise apprehension of an object appears but is
not established.
- 6.2.1.3.2.1 The common perceptual object is a mere appearance
That is established as the basis of similar and dissimilar
perceptions,
Because otherwise it would be unreasonable, as in seeing
a dance.⁶⁸⁰
- 6.2.1.3.2.2 Aside from this mere existence [of an appearance],
It is not possible for it to come from some other existent;
Without this, all appearances
Would be nonapparent, like space.
- 6.2.1.3.2.3 On the basis of outer and inner conditions,
One does not see the thing itself as it is,
But in the manner of seeing horses and cattle
In the place of wood blessed by illusion mantras.
- 6.2.2.1.1 Therefore the common object of perception
Cannot be specified as "this" or "that."
So in our system appearance and emptiness
Are not differentiated in the basis itself,

- Which is not established anywhere.
 Because it is the same in everything that appears,
 A single substance appears as various things.
- 6.2.2.1.2 For whomever appearance and emptiness are possible,
 Everything is possible;
 For whomever appearance and emptiness are impossible,
 Nothing is possible.⁶⁸¹
- 6.2.2.2.1 "Well then, the distinction of valid and invalid cognitions
 Would be invalid."
- 6.2.2.2.2.1.1.1 Whatever appears does not appear otherwise,
 So it is not the case that the perception of its being thus
 Does not establish it as a cognandum.
- 6.2.2.2.2.1.1.2 For all things naturally abide in their own essences,
 Because they are established by valid cognitions
 That determine their sameness and difference.
- 6.2.2.2.2.1.2.1 Thus, things by their very nature are
 That in dependence upon which valid cognitions are
 established,
 But they are not themselves established by valid cognition;
 If they were, they would be reality itself.
- 6.2.2.2.2.1.2.2 An instance of water that is established
 By the valid cognition of one's own apprehension
 Is not independently established under its own power.
 It is not established by ultimate reasoning,
 Nor is it [established] for a hungry ghost.
- 6.2.2.2.2.1.3 If one determines the objects of one's own perception
 By means of direct perception and inference,
 One is not deceived with regard to engaging and avoiding
 The objects of those [valid cognitions];
 So valid cognition is not pointless.
- 6.2.2.2.2.2 Thus, when we say "a single instance of water,"
 We refer to the visual perception of human beings.
 In the divine context,
 A single instance of nectar is understood as the basis
 of perception.
 When water is seen as pus, water, and nectar,
 The three are not mixed together.
 If one of those three were not valid,
 Then it could not be established as validly cognized
 By being cognized as a different substance, and
 All three objects of visual perception would be nonexistent.
 If this instance of water perceived by a human being
 Were not water, it would not be viable as water for another,

And "water" would be completely nonexistent.
In such a system, a system of valid cognition
Would also be untenable.

6.2.2.2.2.3.1.1

Thus, the object of a sense faculty
That is undistorted by accidental conditions
Should be established as validly cognized,
As in the appearance of water and mirages.

6.2.2.2.2.3.1.2

Thus, in the context of hungry ghosts
Karmic obscurations cause clean water
To appear as pus, but if the fault [of such obscuration]
Is dispelled, it then appears as water.

6.2.2.2.2.3.1.3

For this reason, what is seen by human beings
Is posited contextually as validly cognized,
Because the other is distorted by perceptual fault.
For now water is established by a valid cognition.
But if one analyzes with ultimate reasoning,
Everything is the appearance of karmic propensity.
Since [for sublime beings] water appears
As the pure realms and kāyas,

6.2.2.2.2.3.1.4

The human perception cannot itself
Be established one-sidedly as the [only] valid cognition.
Thus, by progressively purifying the causes of obscuration,
It is reasonable to posit higher forms of seeing
In relation to lower forms of seeing.

6.2.2.2.2.3.2.1

Since the final nature of things is unique,
The valid cognition that sees only it
Is likewise unique; a second type is impossible.

6.2.2.2.2.3.2.2

Reality is a unique truth, coalescence,
And valid cognition is self-arisen gnosis.
Since there is nothing to abandon except unawareness,
It is simply a case of awareness and unawareness.

6.2.2.2.2.3.2.3

Thus, this system of valid cognition
Establishes the nature of all appearances as deities.
This is the unique tradition of the early translations,
The lion's roar of the elegant works
Of the omniscient Rong zom Paṇḍita.

6.2.2.2.2.3.2.4

Other [systems] do not explain [this] point correctly;
In this respect whatever other systems say is contradictory.

6.2.3.1

The claim that the common object of perception
Is either appearance or emptiness is untenable.

6.2.3.2.1.1.1

If it were only emptiness,
It would be possible for any sentient being
To perceive space as vases,

- And vases would disappear like space.
 If emptiness without appearance
 Were viable as an object of perception,
 What would not appear?
- 6.2.3.2.1.1.2 Things would either be permanently existent,
 Or become entirely nonexistent, being causeless;
 Either way, it is the same.
- 6.2.3.2.1.1.3 In the context of emptiness there is no appearance,
 Because they are contradictory;
 If there were something non-empty,
 It would contradict the position
 That mere emptiness is the basis of appearance.
- 6.2.3.2.1.2.1 “Well, didn’t you say earlier
 That appearance and emptiness are not contradictory?”
- 6.2.3.2.1.2.2.1 Here, the object of visual perception is understood
 In the context of conventional valid cognition,
 For which existence and nonexistence are contradictory;
- 6.2.3.2.1.2.2.2 On the basis of a single thing the two truths
 Are noncontradictory only for gnosis.
- 6.2.3.2.2.1 If a mere appearance bereft of emptiness
 Were not viable as the basis of appearance,
 That appearance could appear any which way;
- 6.2.3.2.2.2.1 For there is no appearance that is not
 Distinguished in one way or another.
 [A non-empty appearance] is not established as the basis
 of appearance,
 It is not perceived by a valid cognition that causes one
 to know it;
 To say that it exists is only a claim.
- 6.2.3.2.2.2.2 If whatever appeared were entirely separate,
 Nothing other than it could appear;
 Because it would be a non-empty appearance,
 It would be immune to an ultimate analysis.
- 6.2.3.2.2.2.3 Whether one understands the basis as water, pus,
 Nectar, or whatever, there is contradiction.
 If that water were pus,
 How could it appear as water?
 If it were water and not pus,
 How would it appear otherwise as pus, etc.?
 If you say that the object that appears to hungry ghosts
 Is water, then you would have to accept that the pus
 That appears is nonexistent.
- 6.2.3.3 For aside from whatever appears to oneself,

There is no separate basis of appearance,
Because if there were it would be something different,
Like pillars and vases, having a single basis but being
different.

6.2.4.I Therefore the coalescence of appearance and emptiness,
Or the absence of true existence and mere appearance,
[Is equivalent to] the original pure equality of all
phenomena

In the great equal taste of the coalescence
That is free of partiality and extremes.

6.2.4.2.I.I In that way, when one determines the essence of accom-
plishment

In the Great Perfection of equality,
In the context of the path where one cultivates
[that essence],

In dependence upon the vision of purity,
Impure appearances self-liberate.

Hence one attains confidence in the meaning
Of the statement from the vajra scriptures,
“Dharmakāya, which is the purity of all appearances.”

6.2.4.2.I.2. So, in the *Magical Net Tantra*, it is taught that
The continuous appearance of the five aggregates
Is the “pure divine body of thatness”;
This is confidence in the intended meaning [of that
scripture].

6.2.4.2.2.I.I Similarly, when the apprehension of pus is removed,
It is realized to be delusion, and by cultivating that
Water appears in its place.

A great bodhisattva [on the] pure [stages]⁶⁸²
Sees countless buddha fields in each drop of water,
And water itself manifests as Māmākī.

6.2.4.2.2.I.2.I On the bhūmi where the two obscurations are finally
abandoned,

One sees the great equal taste of coalescence.
As for pure vision,

If in order to abandon all obscurations
The unerring reality of things is seen
By it and it alone,

It is taken to be the final valid cognition⁶⁸³

6.2.4.2.2.I.2.2 And is established for those with the eyes of reason
Who abide on the pinnacle of the establishment of
the statement⁶⁸⁴

“Everything abides originally in the purity of dharmakāya.”

- 6.2.4.2.2.1.3 Moreover, this vehicle has thousands
Of wonderful rays of light.
The low-minded, like spirit birds,⁶⁸⁵
Are as if blind to it.
- 6.2.3.2.2.2.1 Although it cannot be incontrovertibly proven
That the final space of equality
Only appears as divinity,⁶⁸⁶
- 6.2.4.2.2.2.2 To the extent that the expanse of original natural purity
And its apparent aspect, the wisdom body,
Are inseparable, the apparent aspect is
Originally pure divinity,
And cannot be harmed by ultimate reasoning,⁶⁸⁷
- 6.2.4.2.2.2.3 For the expanse of coalescent form and emptiness,
Which is free of the two obscurations,
Is the final suchness of things.
- 6.2.4.2.3.1 Aside from this, whatever else one analyzes
Is not the final meaning;
For if the two obscurations are not completely abandoned,
Abiding and apparent natures are always discordant.
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.1.1 Contextual appearances in the practice of the path
Are like healing a cataract;
By purifying defilements of the subject,
The object is likewise seen in its purity,
Because for a pure subject
There are no impure objects.
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.1.2 Thus, when an ordinary person becomes a buddha,
[There is no impurity], but impurity still appears to others,
Because they obscure themselves with their own
obscurations.
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.2.1 Thus, although object and subject
Are originally pure,
They are obscured by adventitious defilements,
So one should strive to purify them.
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.2.2 Because there is nothing impure with respect to
The purity of one's own nature,
There is the equality of natural luminosity.
Not realizing it, one apprehends
Various appearances individually.⁶⁸⁸
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.2.3.1 A childish person whose mind is attached
Is an ignorant child whose ignorance enslaves him;
- 6.2.4.2.3.2.2.3.2 But everyone who realizes this will seize
The citadel of fruition in the state of equality,
And become victorious in self-arisen gnosis

In the fundamental expanse of the three times and
of timelessness.

6.2.4.2.4.1.1.1 This system, which accepts the principle
Of great pure equality, is well established.
Because appearance and emptiness are not established,
Whatever can appear appears anywhere and everywhere.

6.2.4.2.4.1.1.2 However else you look at it,
Nothing can appear anywhere.

6.2.4.2.4.1.2.1 The way to gain confidence in this system
Is the path of emptiness and dependent origination.
If one gains certainty in appearance and emptiness,
In the self-arisen changeless maṇḍala,
Profound tolerance will be born within oneself
For the inconceivable dharmatā
And for the emptying and non-emptying [of the limits of
existence].

6.2.4.2.4.1.2.2 In the width of an atom
One sees as many buddha fields as are atoms,
And in a single instant an aeon appears.
With certainty in the absence of true existence
Which is like an illusion,
One can enter the range of buddhahood.

6.2.4.2.4.2.1 One may have disciplined oneself and thought for a
hundred years
About the meaning of the words of different philosophical
systems, such as
The undifferentiability of one's own appearances [and
their basis],
The absence of partiality and extremes,
The inconceivability of the fundamental expanse,
The dharmatā that is not established anywhere,
The coalescence of form and emptiness, etc.,
Yet if one lacks the cause of prior familiarity,
Then, even if one's intellect and training are not
inconsiderable,
One will not get it.

6.2.4.3.1 Thus the hundred rivers of elegant explanations
In which flow the quintessences
Of all philosophical systems
Pour into this great ocean, which is amazing.

6.2.4.3.2. Other modes of appearance
That appear in the process of transformation are indefinite;

The consummate gnosis of coalescence
Sees the infallible meaning and is changeless.

Topic 7

- 7.1 When analyzing whether or not there is a position
In the Great Madhyamaka of nonelaboration,
- 7.2.1.1 Earlier scholars univocally stated
That our own Mādhyamika system has no position,
Because existence, nonexistence, being, and nonbeing
Do not exist anywhere.
- 7.2.1.2 In our texts, all the philosophical explanations
Of path and result and relativity
Are accepted as our own position, so
To say that all conventions are only set forth
From other people's perspective
Is to contradict both the words and the meaning.⁶⁸⁹
- 7.2.2.1 According to Klong chen rab 'byams,
Earlier scholars veered to the extremes of
Asserting that Madhyamaka has or does not have a position;
Each of those positions has defects and qualities.
- 7.2.2.2.1 Thus, when approaching the nature of reality,
Nothing is established in the original state;⁶⁹⁰
What then is there to accept as a position?
- 7.2.2.2.2 Therefore, because a philosophical system
Is a position about the nature of things, at the time of
debate, etc.,
No position is taken, in accordance with the original state.
In meditative aftermath, the systems of path and result—
Whatever and however they are posited—
Are expounded according to their respective positions,
Without confusing them.
Klong chen pa said, "From now on, if someone knows
how to
Expound this, it is because of my elegant explanation."
- 7.2.3.1 In that respect, some Tibetan scholars
Established and overestablished the fact that
Their own systems had a position.
- 7.2.3.2.1.1.1 But if one does not differentiate the context,
Because the meaning of the original state
Is not established anywhere, it is difficult
To assert one-sidedly that one has a position.
- 7.2.3.2.1.1.2.1 If you say "Madhyamaka is our system,"

- It should refer to the way that the Mādhyamika system
Approaches the ultimate meaning.
- 7.2.3.2.1.1.2.2 Anything else is not our own system,
Because when other systems are approached
By a Mādhyamika, they cannot be established.
- 7.2.3.2.1.2.1 Thus, if the Mādhyamika accepts [deceptive reality],
Then he accepts it as established by its own power,
Because it is established by the force of reasoning.
That position would be established ultimately
And thus be immune to analysis.
- 7.2.3.2.1.2.2 If our own system had no position,
This would contradict the statement,
“We do have a position
[That accords with worldly renown].”
- 7.2.3.2.2.1 We would have two positions according to
Whether or not there is analysis.
If both of them were definitely true,
Would “our system” be each of them separately,
Or would it be both of them together?
- 7.2.3.2.2.2.1 If it were each of them separately, then
Each would contradict the other.
If we do not accept “existence”
But do accept “nonexistence,”
The position of “existence” would not
Even be conventionally acceptable,
Because of only accepting nonexistence.
- 7.2.3.2.2.2.2.1 If we accepted both of them together,
Having removed that which is susceptible to analysis,
We would posit something not harmed by reasoning.
Thus, both existence and nonexistence
Would be immune to analysis.
- 7.2.3.2.2.2.2.2.1 Accordingly, both existence and nonexistence
Cannot be mixed together;
- 7.2.3.2.2.2.2.2.2.1 For if they were, then even though one
Could realize [coalescence] through analysis,
When not analyzing, existence would be engaged.
So what good would analysis do
For eliminating clinging to deceptive realities?
For deceptive reality to be established
Through analysis is irrational.
- 7.2.3.2.2.2.2.2.2.2 If there were no reality beyond the mere
Exclusion of a negandum, an absolute negation,
That modal apprehension could not have

An apparent aspect; so why would this be any different
 Than the position of someone who thinks
 That view, meditation, and action are simply nonexistent?
 For there would never be any need to meditate
 In accordance with the nature of things.

7.2.4.1.1.1

Therefore, according to the statement
 of the Omniscient One,

Our system should be understood as follows:
 If ours is to be a definitive Mādhyamika system,
 It must be the Great Madhyamaka of coalescence,
 Or the nonelaborated Madhyamaka.

Because, by defining it according to
 The gnosis of sublime equipoise,
 All extremes of existence, nonexistence, and so forth,
 Are completely pacified.

7.2.4.1.1.2.1

That path that objectifies emptiness alone
 Succumbs to each of the two realities one-sidedly;
 That trifling point of view
 Is neither coalescent nor unelaborated.
 Coalescence means the equality of
 Existence and nonexistence, or of form and emptiness;

7.2.4.1.1.2.2

Whereas that view is just the subjective aspect
 Of the expanse of ultimate emptiness.
 Among all types of reification, such as
 The elaborations of existence and nonexistence,
 This is nothing but an elaboration of nonexistence,
 Because it reifies [emptiness].

7.2.4.1.1.3

Therefore, from the perspective of Great Madhyamaka
 There is no position whatsoever.
 In order to realize the equality of appearance and emptiness,
 It is free of all proof and negation such as
 Reality, unreality, existence, and nonexistence.

According to the sense of [ultimate] reality, all things
 Cannot be asserted through rational proof;
 Therefore, there is nothing to have a position about.

7.2.4.1.2.1.1

Thus, although the ultimate meaning of reality
 Has no position, in the way things appear
 There is a position on the conventions of each of the
 two realities;

With respect to how the two realities abide inseparably,
 They are both simply ways of appearing.

7.2.4.1.2.1.2.1

With respect to the gnosis that
 Sees that they are inseparable, both valid cognitions

- 7.2.4.1.2.1.2.2 Are fragmentary, because with only one of them
Both realities cannot be apprehended.
- 7.2.4.1.2.2.1 Therefore, if the wisdom of ultimate and
Conventional valid cognition
Both engage a vase, etc.,
Two essences are found.
- 7.2.4.1.2.2.2 But when one is engaged, the other is not, for
In the mind of an ordinary person the two realities
Can only appear in succession.
Thus, the positions based on each type of engagement
Are established in fact.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1 “Well, don’t the faults of having or not having a position,
And the internal contradiction of the two realities
That you have ascribed to others above
Apply just as well to you?”
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.1.1 By making subtle distinctions,
I have differentiated the path Madhyamaka and
The equipoise Madhyamaka that is the main practice.
Since my explanation distinguishes great and little
Madhyamakas
With respect to coarseness and subtlety,
Cause and effect, consciousness and gnosis,
How can that defect apply to me?
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.1.2.1.1 Thus, the Great Madhyamaka
With no position is our ultimate system.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.1.2.1.2 In the context of meditative aftermath,
When the two realities appear separately,
All the proofs and negations engaged by
The validating cognitions of each of the two realities
Are for negating various misconceptions;
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.1.2.2.1 But in the original state, there is
No position of refutation or proof.
Therefore, in the original state
The two realities are not divided,
Because neither of their positions
Is established in truth.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.1.2.2.2 If [a position] is posited [conventionally about either] of
the two [truths],
It is only with respect to the way things appear.
For the time being, each is established as true
In its own context, so there is no contradiction,
And the fault of immunity to analysis, etc. does not apply.

- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.1.1 Real entities are not immune to analysis;
Nor are unreal entities immune to analysis.
In the final analysis, they are the same;
They are just designated contextually.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.1.2.1 Something that exists by consent, without investigation,
Is a mode of appearance, not the way things are;
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.1.2.2 Whatever is seen by the rational knowledge
That analyzes truthlessness is considered
As the way things really are.
This is an ultimate reality in relation to
Deceptive reality, but in the final analysis
It is just a conceptual ultimate.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.2.1 If the way things appear and the way things are
Are mutually exclusive,
The four faults of the two realities being different are
incurred.
If the two realities are mutually inclusive,
The four faults of the two realities being identical are
incurred.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.2.2.1 In this way, buddhas and sentient beings
Are just the way things are and the way things appear;
The claim that they are cause and effect
Should be known as the Hīnayāna system.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.2.2.2 Because the way things are and the way they appear
Are not posited as either the same or different,
There is absolutely no logical fault, such as
Sentient beings appearing as buddhas,
The path and practice being pointless,
The cause residing in the effect.
- 7.2.4.1.3.1.2.2.2.3 However things may be in reality,
They are obscured by obscurations,
And do not appear as such.
Everyone accepts the need to practice the path.
- 7.2.4.2.1.1 Because the two truths are not contradictory,
Though the two views of "existence" and "nonexistence"
Are posited, how could they be contradictory?
Because they are not mutually inclusive,
The two positions are formulated.
- 7.2.4.2.1.2 For this reason, as long as the two realities
Are engaged by minds for which
They appear separately,
Both realities are quite equivalent in force,
And there is no one-sided position about either of them.

- 7.2.4.2.1.3 The determination of the emptiness of truth as
“nonexistence”
And the determination of appearance as “existence”
Are the objects found or seen alternately by each
Of the two valid cognitions at the time of their engagement,
And are said to be the two truths.
- 7.2.4.2.1.4 Because those two are neither the same nor different,
It is not possible to one-sidedly discard one
And accept the other.
The wisdom that analyzes these two
Differentiates their respective positions.
- 7.2.4.2.2.1.1 For example, when the dharmakāya is finally attained,
All minds and mental events without exception
Cease, conventionally speaking;
But ultimately there is no cessation.
- 7.2.4.2.2.1.2 In all the texts of all sūtras and treatises,
Among the various kinds of proof and negation
Some posit ultimate reality,
And some are stated with respect to deceptive reality.
- 7.2.4.2.2.2.1.1 With respect to ultimate reality alone,
The path, buddhas, sentient beings, and so forth,
Are rightly said to be “nonexistent.”
It is not the case, however, that
Without relying on conventions, they are simply
nonexistent.
- 7.2.4.2.2.2.1.2 Though they do not exist, all appearances of saṃsāra and
nirvāṇa
Appear, and are established through direct perception.
Therefore, with respect to conventional valid cognition,
The path, buddhas, sentient beings, and so forth,
Are rightly said to be “existent.”
But this doesn't mean that they are really existent
Without reference to ultimate reality.
They exist, but are not established as such,
- 7.2.4.2.2.2.2 Because they can be determined by
An analytical cognition of ultimate reality.
Thus, those two can never exist
One without the other.
- 7.2.4.2.3.1 “When both are true with equal force,
Will existent things be non-empty?”
- 7.2.4.2.3.2.1 Both are not established by their intrinsic nature,
Nor are they, as objects, really different;
- 7.2.4.2.3.2.2.1 Whatever appears is empty, so what can be non-empty?

- 7.2.4.2.3.2.2.2 Both are equally apparent,
So they are established as empty;
If they were not apparent, how would emptiness be known?
- 7.2.4.2.3.2.2.3 Thus, both appear together as cause and effect,
Without contradiction.
If one is certain that one exists, the other does too:
They are always inseparable.
- 7.2.4.2.3.2.2.4 There is no case where one does not
Encompass the other; therefore,
Whichever one investigates, it is correct.
By knowing appearance as emptiness,
One realizes appearance as realitylessness;
And by knowing emptiness as appearance,
One will not conceive emptiness as real.
Therefore, when they are seen as inseparable,
One will not revert to seeing them as real.
- 7.2.4.2.3.2.2.5 The abiding character of whatever appears
Is emptiness, so they are inseparable.
If one rejects appearance,
Emptiness cannot be established independently.
- 7.2.4.3.1.1.1 Therefore, one cultivates the wisdom
Of meditating on the two realities alternately.
In the context of this saṃsāra of dualistic perception,
Gnosis does not appear,
So the two stainless analytical wisdoms
Should be upheld without ambivalence.
- 7.2.4.3.1.1.2 When one of these is incomplete,
The coalescence of gnosis
That arises from them will definitely not arise,
Just as fire will not occur without
Two pieces of wood rubbed together.
- 7.2.4.3.1.1.3 Therefore, a path where method and emptiness
Are separated is inauthentic
According to all the buddhas and vidyādhara.
- 7.2.4.3.1.2 Therefore, if one abandons these two causes,
There is no other way for the great gnosis to arise.
The essence of gnosis
Is beyond thought and expression.
Therefore, aside from symbolic means and mere words,
It cannot actually be indicated.
Thus, the teaching of the word empowerment in the
Mantrayāna,
In the tantras of the vajra essence, and so forth,

- It is taught by words and methods.
 7.2.4.3.1.3.1 The supramundane gnosis
 Cannot be understood without relying on
 Some kind of verbal expression,
 So the path of the Madhyamaka of the two realities is taught.
 7.2.4.3.1.3.2 The result of analyzing in the manner of two realities
 Can be established as coalescence itself.
 Therefore, when the two realities are ascertained,
 Appearance and emptiness are taught alternately
 As negation and negandum.
 Their result, the gnosis of coalescence,
 Is taught by many synonyms in tantra.
 7.2.4.3.2 Thus, all Mādhyamika systems
 Are established by way of the two realities;
 Without relying on the two realities,
 Coalescence will not be understood.
 Whatever the buddhas have taught
 Has relied entirely on the two realities;
 7.2.4.3.3.1.1.1 Therefore, the Madhyamaka that contains
 The positions of each of the two truths
 Is the little Madhyamaka of alternation,
 Which gives the result's name to the cause.
 7.2.4.3.3.1.1.2 The emptiness of the analyzed five aggregates
 Is the mere absolute negation exclusive of the negandum;
 In that respect there is the position of "nonexistence."
 7.2.4.3.3.1.1.3 Whatever the causal or path Madhyamaka
 Posits as the two truths,
 Both are our own system.
 It makes no sense to posit the ultimate as our system,
 And say that conventional reality
 Is only from other people's perspective.
 7.2.4.3.3.1.2.1 If that were so, then our own system of the ultimate
 Would be a blank nothingness,
 And we would wind up totally denigrating
 All appearances of the basis, path, and result
 As "delusions to be abandoned."
 Then a mere expanse of emptiness without obscuration
 Would be left over, while the two types of omniscience
 Would be negated. This would be similar to the śrāvaka
 path,
 Which asserts a remainderless nirvāṇa,
 Just like the blowing out of a candle.
 7.2.4.3.3.1.2.2 Thus, the Buddha said that these

Spaced-out people who denigrate
 The expanse of coalescence as mere nothingness
 Are thieves who destroy the Śākya Dharma.
 With reasoning, one can see how
 That system denigrates the existent as nonexistent,
 And one is able to destroy the mountain of bad views
 With the vajra-fire of certainty.

7.2.4.3.3.2.1.1

Thus, in all Mādhyamika texts,
 Without establishing the causal Madhyamaka
 Of analytical wisdom through rational analysis,
 The fruition of coalescence is not established.
 Therefore, even if one has rationally determined
 The character of the two realities,
 The fruition is the establishment of the inseparability
 Of the two realities. This is the quintessence of all vehicles.

7.2.4.3.3.2.1.2

Therefore, gnosis
 Does not abide alternately in the two extremes,
 And is beyond intellect;
 Thus it is Madhyamaka, and also great.

7.2.4.3.3.2.1.3

As long as one has not reached gnosis
 By means of alternation, this is not
 The ultimate Madhyamaka that is
 The heart of all buddhas' realization (*dgongs pa*).

7.2.4.3.3.2.2.1

Like fire stirred up by a fire-stick,
 The fire of coalescent gnosis induced
 By the stainless analytical wisdom of the two realities
 Pacifies all elaborations of the four extremes
 Such as existence, nonexistence, both, and neither.
 This is the gnosis of sublime equipoise,
 And is considered the fruition of Madhyamaka of
 coalescence.

7.2.4.3.3.2.2.2

Not falling into the extremes of the two realities—
 For the analytical wisdom of meditative aftermath
 This may be considered the “coalescence of
 Appearance and emptiness,”

7.2.4.3.3.2.2.3

But for the great gnosis of equipoise,
 Appearance, emptiness, and coalescence
 Are not reified as having some essence.
 Appearance is the object of conventional valid cognition,
 Emptiness is the object of ultimate analysis,
 And coalescence combines these two components.

7.2.4.3.3.2.2.4

Since these are objects of words and concepts,
 The equipoise that transcends them

Is merely designated as "gnosis known for oneself."

[In the context of sublime equipoise,]

"Apparent," "nonapparent," and so forth,

Are not established by authentic reasoning.

7.2.4.4.I.I.1

Thus, as long as one meditates on the two realities

Alternately, this is analytical wisdom,

And when there is no such alternation,

One attains the coalescent gnosis.

Then one transcends the bare emptiness

That is the absolute negation that

Is the analytical exclusion of the aggregates.

Negation and negandum no longer appear separately.

The great nonelaborated emptiness that

Is consummately endowed with the aspect

Of appearance as method,

Mahāmudrā of coemergence, and so forth,

Have many synonyms.

Because these are all the gnosis that transcends mind,

They are inconceivable by any other concepts.

7.2.4.4.I.I.2

Because this gnosis is not the object of words and concepts,

It is not differentiated by

Implicative and absolute negations,

Nor as different, nondifferent, apparent, or empty, etc.

Because it does not fall into any extreme or partiality,

It is beyond having and not having a position,

And appears as the nonabiding self-arisen gnosis of

The coalescent *Evam*.

7.2.4.4.I.I.3

Thus, the ultimate meaning, free of reification and negation,

That is beyond all positions,

The state of awareness and the expanse inseparable,

Is held to be without any expression or indication of "this"
or "that."

However, unlike the "thoughtless agent,"

It is not something that cannot be known by anyone,

Because the Dharma lamp of certainty

Is the consummate gnosis attained subsequent

To the individually cognized gnosis induced

By the analysis of stainless reasoning,

What appears directly to those [yogis] who

Are free of the darkness of doubt.

7.2.4.4.I.2

In the sūtra path, both method and wisdom

Are considered in light of each other,⁶⁹¹

But here both method and wisdom

- Are realized and cultivated inseparably.
- 7.2.4.4.2.1 Both the Great Madhyamaka of coalescence and
The Great Perfection of luminosity
Have the same meaning, and their names are synonymous.
There is no view higher than that,
- 7.2.4.4.2.2 For anything other than the absence of the elaborations
Of the four extremes—which is the nonapprehension
Of appearance and emptiness alternately—
Is nothing but some sort of elaboration.
- 7.2.4.4.2.3 However, the meaning of coalescence in the sūtra system
Is ascertained through analysis;
In mantra, it is established through directly experiencing
The expanse of intrinsic awareness.
- 7.2.4.4.3.1.1 Therefore, “Madhyamaka” refers to the
Path Madhyamaka of analytical wisdom that
Investigates each of the two realities,
And the single savor of the two realities induced by it,
Which is the Result Madhyamaka of coalescence.
- 7.2.4.4.3.1.2 With respect to the causal and resultant views of sūtra
and mantra,
The former is the aspect of analytical wisdom,
And the latter is just gnosis.
Therefore, this latter is praised
With the word “great.”
- 7.2.4.4.3.2 As for the “the way things are”:
There is the way things are as the emptiness of entities,
And the way things are as the inseparability of the two truths.
The term is the same in both cases, but in fact
The difference is like the earth and sky.
Accordingly, the terms “nature of things,” “expanse
of reality,”
“Emptiness,” “nonelaboration,” “limit of cessation,”
“Ultimate,” and so forth, function similarly in different
contexts,
But their difference—in terms of final or partial significance—
Is great, so one must explain them in context,
Like the word *sendhapa*.

Conclusion

- 0.3.1.1 Thus, when the seven profound questions
Were explained with profound, vast, meaningful words,
The questioner said, with great respect:

- 0.3.1.2 "Alas! Like a frog at the bottom of a well,
Having not seen the depths
Of the Dharma ocean of other textual traditions,
And having tasted only the flavor of the well
Of our own arrogant view, our pride is crushed
By these words of yours!
In the great ocean of sublime spirituality,
- 0.3.2.1.1 The ecstatic dance of Mañjuśrī,
Known as "Rong zom" and "Klong chen pa,"
Is an ocean of the sublime enlightened mind,
Which possesses many and sundry bejeweled Dharma
treasures.
Those who abandon them and hanker after
The trinkets of other systems are surely deceived!
- 0.3.2.1.2 Those who have the discerning intellect
Born of the analysis of the excellent Dharma (*chos bzang*)
Are never obstructed by demons.
As this great lion's roar of the path of reasoning
Is proclaimed, will they not find confidence in
This outstanding tradition of the Lake-born's⁶⁹² teaching?
- 0.3.2.1.3 Please grant us the opportunity to firmly grasp
The handle of wisdom's sword, which cannot be stolen away
By the refutations of arrogant extremism!
- 0.3.2.1.4 The profound meaning that is found in the
Nectar ocean of Dharma learning
Is like a jewel that should be taken, wherever it
happens to be;
One should not just follow the external behavior of
another person.
- 0.3.2.2.1 It's not enough to receive a lot of teachings and talk
about them,
For though one seems talented and well trained, one's
analysis
cannot get this profound point, like a buried treasure.
But whoever does get it should be known as a spiritual
genius.⁶⁹³
- 0.3.2.2.2 As if it were a jewel-encrusted vessel
For a hundred thousand spiritual treasures,⁶⁹⁴
My mind realized that it was time
To accept the beneficence of instructions
Accomplished in the great ocean of profundity and vastness,
And I joyfully drank the ocean of the glorious
King of Nāgas.

- 0.3.2.2.3 Having definitely realized the vast extent of the
analytical mind
By the river of eloquent explanations that descend from him,
One should realize that the source of these explanations
Is the oral tradition of the vidyādhara lineage,
Which is like the Lord of Nāgas himself.
- 0.3.3.1 Please brighten the lamp of the amazing Dharma,
Which causes the mind to acquire great strength
By receiving the springtime nectar that benefits the heart,
The quintessence that is imbibed
All at once from the limits of space!”
- 0.3.3.2.1 When he had shown his respect with these words,
The sage advised him again,
Condensing the meaning of what he said before,
Which converts a shallow mind to a deep one:
“The lion’s milk of the supreme Dharma
Is only contained by the vessel of a sound mind.
Though others may try, it won’t stay in place.
A vessel that can hold it is like this:
- 0.3.3.2.2.1 *A* is the door of unborn dharmas;
Ra is the door free of particles;
Pa is the door of the appearance of the ultimate;
Tsa is the absence of death, transmigration, and birth;
Na is the absence of names;
Dhiḥ is the door to profound intelligence.
- 0.3.3.2.2.2.1 If one focuses on all of these six doors
In the manner of the two truths
And accomplishes the samādhi of illusion,
With one gulp, one will be able to stomach
The water of the great infinite ocean of phenomena,
And in the stainless gem of one’s heart,
The dhāraṇī of spiritual brilliance will blaze with glory.
- 0.3.3.2.2.2.2 By the path of certainty that eliminates
The elaborations of four extremes,
May we abide in the expanse of fundamental luminosity
Beyond mind that reaches the original state,
The state of the Great Perfection Mañjuśrī.
- 0.3.3.2.2.2.3 Having seen the real meaning of remaining in the
equanimity of
The vast expanse of the regal view without extremes,
All the darkness of the crude mind of the four extremes
Will naturally disappear as the sun of luminosity rises.”
- 0.3.4.1 Thus, the questions asked by that wanderer

- Were explained in the number corresponding to
The [seven] accoutrements of royalty.
- 0.3.4.2 Thus, a feeble-minded intellectual like myself
Has received this extremely profound and abstruse meaning
From the heart of sublime great-minded beings
And presented it here.
- 0.3.4.3 This elegant explanation like a shower of Dharma
Is the path trodden by millions of bodhisattvas;
By listening joyfully, hoping to attain the great goal,
And by inquiring, the joyous opportunity for blessing has
appeared.
- 0.3.4.4 Therefore, I have considered these profound
And vast subjects again and again,
And just as they arose in the face of the mind's mirror,
The *Dhī*-named one arranged them playfully.
- 0.3.4.5 The profound way of the Buddhadharma, like the limit
of space,
Cannot be put into words entirely,
But if you rely on this *Beacon of Certainty*,
You can discover the amazing path of the supreme vehicle.

Mangalam