NITÁRTHA, NEYÁRTHA, AND *TATHÁGATAGARBHA* IN TIBET*

D. S. Ruegg, in his La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra and other works, has mentioned the need for further study of the various Tibetan exegetical traditions involved in the controversies surrounding the tathāgatagarbha doctrine. He has relied extensively on the exegesis developed by dGelugs-pa scholars. This paper is an initial attempt to address this need voiced by Ruegg, by presenting the views of a bKa'-brgyud-pa and two rNying-ma-pa scholars. In particular, the focus will be on elucidating how they applied the interpretive devices of nītārtha (nges-don, certain, definitive meaning) and neyārtha (drang-don, indirect meaning which is to be established) to texts dealing with the tathāgatagarbha. One of the basic philosophical problems the Tibetans faced in this regard was the relationship between the concepts of stinyatā and tathāgatagarbha emphasized in the second and third "turnings of the wheel of Dharma" (dharmacakra-pravartana) respectively.

of this erroneous notion, according to Padma-dkar-po, those who thought of mocanasūtra and others as the [basis for the] third 'turning'."3 On the basis 'turning' spoken of in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra, while taking the Saṃdhinir scholars who, "... took the Prajnaparamitasutras as the basis for the second his Chos-'khor rim-pa gsum-gi dogs-gcod, criticized the majority of previous of the trinihsvābhava. The third, which is nītārtha, was in accord with the calling themselves gzhan-stong-pas (those who took sūnya as primarily nonheld the second 'turning' to be *nītārtha* and the third *neyārtha*, while those nîtärtha. This error, said Padma dkar-po, was based on a more fundamental the reverse interpretation, i.e., the second 'turning' was neyartha and the third reflexive, denoting an ontological region devoid of relativity)⁵ put forward themselves as rang-stong-pas (those who took sūnya as a reflexive concept)⁴ Madhyamaka teaching, as set forth in such sāstras as the Mūlamādhyamikakārik accord with the Cittamatra doctrine, which can be summed up in the theory the Prajnāpāramitāsūtras: the second 'turning', which is neyārtha, was in him both the second and third 'turnings' were based "primarily" (gtso-bo) on presupposition: that each 'turning' must be based on a unique set of texts. For Padma dkar-po (1527-1592), the great 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud scholar, in

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and the Ramagotravibhāga, and as embodied in the sūtras which teach the tathāgatagarbha (snying-po'i mdo).

In support of his position, Padma dkar-po shows, for example, that the Samdhinirmocanasiira teaches both Cittamātra and Mādhyamaka doctrines, and thus cannot be made the basis for claiming that the third 'turning' is strictly a Cittamātra teaching of certain, definitive meaning. Furthermore, he held that the Cittamātra teaching on the subject is in contradiction with the tathāgatagarbha doctrine of the snying-po'i mdo, which teach that there is but one gotra (rigs, spiritual lineage or affinity). Thus, despite his reversal of the usual order of the 'turnings', and his cautions on equating 'turnings' unequivocally with basic texts (which enable him, however, to account for Cittamātra interpretations of the Prajnāpāramitāsūtras, as well as to bring Samdhinirmocanasūtra VII, 30 into accord with a Madhyamaka interpretation), Padma dkar-po's presentation remains quite orthodox by Tibetan standards.

Two r/ving-ma-pa leaders of the nineteenth-century non-sectarian (rismed) movement of Eastern Tibet, Kong-sprul blossgros mtha'-yas (1813–1899), in his so-called 'Indo-Tibetan Encyclopedia' (Shes-bya kun-khyab) and his commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga; and Mi-pham rgya-mtsho (1846–1912), in his commentary on the same work and in his bDe-gshegs snying-po'i stong-thun chen-mo senge nga-ro, presented similar views. Basically, they both held that the second and third 'turnings' were nitāriha, although the third was nonetheless "higher" (Ihag-pa) or "ultimate" (mthar-thug). Kong-sprul's presentation, however, had been strongly influenced by the gzhan-stong-pa approach, 8 while the influence of the rDzogs-chen philosophy of Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa (1308–1364) was clearly evident in Mi-pham.

Kong-sprul states, in his Shes-bya kun-khyab, that the second 'turning', as explicated by the Madhyamaka, is of "definitive meaning which is contextually dependent or conditional" (gnas-skabs kyi nges-don), in that it focuses on opinionatedness (lta-ba, dṛṣṭī) so as to cut off ingrained "semantic structurning" (spros-pa, prapañca) whose sense-relations always operate in extremes (mtha', anta). The third 'turning', as explicated by what he calls the Yogācāra (mal-'byor spyod-pa) or Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (mal-'byor spyod-pa'i dbu-ma), is of "ultimately definitive meaning" (mthar-thug-gi nges-don), in that it clearly sets forth "pristine cognitiveness itself as a unique experience, the presence of Being which is absolutely real" (don-dam-pa'i gnas-lugs so-so rang-rig-pa'i ye-shes nyid). 10 This Yogācāra trend of thought,

in Kong-sprul's usage, which began with Asanga and Vasubandhu, is to be distinguished from the Cittamātra (Vijnaptimātra) trend initiated by these two Indian masters, as well as from the later Svātantrika-Yogācāra-Mādhyamika. For exsmple, in the introduction to his commentary on the Uttaratantrasāstra, Kong-sprul states that Vasubandhu's commentary on the Prajnāpāramitā, the gnod-'joms, as well as his commentary on the Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga, belonged to the "siddhānta of the Madhyamaka which is of definitive meaning" (nges-don dbu-ma'i grub-mtha'), but that this exegetical lineage did not survive. 11

states that the dhātu (khams, spiritual make-up), which is a synonym for garbha is 'open' (stong-pa, sūnya), while its actuality is the intrinsic possession actuality of Being (ngo-bo, rang-bzhin).12 The facticity of the tathāgataaccomplished through the rDzogs-chen conceptions of the facticity and second 'turning' and the tathagatagarbha teaching of the third. This he objection to both the usual rang-stong-pa and gzhan-stong-pa approaches. but not "devoid of" (asunya, mi-stong-pa) Buddha-capabilities. The first two become clear by considering his commentary on Uttaratantra I, 155, 14 which corresponding cognitiveness (sku dang ye-shes). 13 Mi-pham's approach will (ye-ldan) of Buddha-capabilities (yon-tan, guna) of the Buddhakāya and its precisely, the unity (zung-'jug, yuganaddha), of the sūnyatā teaching of the with something eternally present-at-hand (rtag-pa, nitya). For example, capabilities; this spontaneous presence, however, should not be confused Mi-pham, however, the actuality of the tathagatagarbha is the luminous actuality, as well as facticity, of the tathagatagarbha, as "void" (stong). For capabilities (mi-stong); while the rang-stong-pas err when they regard the being something ontically ultimate (bden-grub) and not devoid of Buddhapham, and in view of this interpretation one can put concisely Mi-pham's padas refer to facticity and the second two to actuality, according to Mitathagatagarbha, is "devoid of" (sūnya, stong-pa) incidental obscurations, as the basic cause-factor (rgyu, hetu) of Buddhahood. 15 This position leads, mere "non-existence in truth of the citta" (sems bden-grub med) can serve Mi-pham criticizes the position (that of the dGe-lugs-pa?) that sūnyatā as the presence (gsal-ba) in utter spontaneity (lhun-grub) of intrinsic Buddha-The gzhan-stong-pas err in regarding the facticity of the tathagatagarbha as open, and actuality, as luminous, mentioned above, in that it entails sünyatä for Mi-pham, to a contradiction of the principle of the unity of facticity, as Mi-pham rgya-mtsho's major concern was to show the harmony, or more

without its inseparable, spontaneously present, luminous actuality: the intrinsic Buddha-capabilities. In their anxiousness to avoid having the tathāga-tagarbha construed as the dharmakāya existing in-truth (bden-grub) at the level of ground, the dGe-lugs-pa may have risked throwing the baby out with the bath-water. ¹⁶ Several generations before rGyal-tshab and mKhas-grub-rje, the two chief disciples of Tsong-kha-pa who gave the dGe-lugs-pa interpretation its definitive form, Klong-chen rab 'byams-pa had already pointed out some of the pitfalls in such an interpretation, while also retaining some similarities with it, thus not incurring the faults of the Jo-nang-pa and Bu-ston interpretations which the dGe-lugs-pa would criticize. ¹⁷

Klong-chen-pa's approach is nicely summed up in the following quotation from his autocommentary on the Sems-nyid ngal-gso: 18

'At the time of the status of a sentient being, although the non-thematicness of experience (sems-kyi chox-nyid) possesses the complete capabilities of the dharmakāya through its modality of openness and the capabilities of the rūpakāya through its modality of presence, since it has been obscured by impurities on account of which it does not shine forth directly, it is called 'spiritual affinity' or 'existential make-up' (rīgs, khams).

Although, at the time of status of a Buddha, it is free from all impurities, it is called 'Enlightenment' (byang-chub), merely from the presence or absence in its completeness of the potency (nus-pa) of experience-as-such (sems-nyid) in its facticity, one cannot claim that the capabilities which are at first non-existent at the time of the status of a sentient being, are afterwards newly produced, since (experience-as-such) does not change into some other status.'

Although the rNying-ma-pas and the dGe-lugs-pas agree that the tathāgata-garbha doctrine is a Madhyamaka teaching of the third 'turning' which is of certain meaning, there is a source of contention here in the proper interpretation of the Madhyamaka understanding of sūnyatā. In this regard, Mi-pham, Kong-sprul, and Klong-chen-pa often warned against a negativistic (phyang-chad) interpretation of sūnyatā taught in the second 'turning' as a mere 'absolute negation' (med-dgag, prasajya-pratisedha). Such a negativistic interpretation creates problems in dealing with the tathāgatagarbha doctrine of the third 'turning'. According to Mi-pham, 19 the second 'turning' has merely emphasized facticity as 'open', and the third has emphasized actuality as intrinsic possession of Buddha-capabilities. Problems only arise due to a one-sided emphasis on either facet, resulting in either negativism or substantialistic ontologizing. For Mi-pham the third 'turning' is only "higher" (thag-pa) in regard to its pointing out the inseparability of facticity and actuality in regard to the tathāgatagarbha doctrine. It is difficult at this time

to properly assess the rNying-ma-pa critique, as they do not mention their opponents by name, as, for instance, Go-ram-pa bsod-nams senge (1429—148) did on this matter of 'negativism'.²⁰

Another problem in assessing the rNying-ma-pa contribution is that, while the dGe-lugs-pa, for example, base their interpretation of sinyatā on the texts primarily by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti which explicate the sūtras of the second 'turning', the rNying-ma-pa range farther afield, to include what they call the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka trend, as indicated above, on up to the Mantrayāna doctrine of the rDzogs-chen. ²¹ The dGe-lugs-pa, on the other hand, did not mix tantra into their sūtra discourse. This issue is particularly relevant here, in that a major source of contention on the issue of tathāgata-garbha interpretation, the Jo-nang-pas, were generally regarded by their opponents as being unreproachable as Tantric yogins, who nevertheless erred in the way in which they brought their realization (sgrub) into the realm of philosophical explication (bshad). While this may have been true of the Jonang-pas, further research is needed to determine whether the rNying-ma-pas, some of whom have been gzhan-stong-pas (like Kong-sprul) and some of whom have not (like Mi-pham), were liable to similar criticisms.

In conclusion, I would venture that philosophical problems concerning the tathāgatagarbha doctrine will continue for contemporary scholars, as they did for the Buddhist tradition itself, as long as an undue emphasis is placed on the 'negative' aspect of śūnyatā, which is both a 'being-devoid-of' and an 'openness'. 22 Several scholars have remarked (May and Conze, for example) that the main thrust of the Madhyamaka is ontological and not epistemological, but they did not bring out the nature of this ontology. 23 The Madhyamaka is certainly a critique of ontologies which tend to absolutize particular existents or beings. But this critique does not leave us with a collection of emptied-out phenomena (internal and external) — but rather fulfilled, in the open and luminous clearing of Being (-as-such) and its working "in" and "through" us as tathāgatagarbha.

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NOTES

This is an amended and annotated version of a paper delivered at the 188th annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, Toronto, April, 1978.

- ¹ See Ruegg, D. S., La Théorie du Taihāgatagarbha et du Gotra (Paris, 1969), pp. 55-66; Le Traité sur le Tathāgathagarbha de Bu-ston (Paris, 1973), Introduction; 'On the dGe lugs pa Theory of the Tathāgatagarbha', in Pratidanām (La Haye, 1968), pp. 500-509.
- On nītārtha and neyārtha, see Lamotte, É., 'La critique d'interpretation dans le bouddhisme', Annuaire de l'Institute de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves (Bruxelles), IX (1949), 341-361; Ruegg, La Théorie, p. 55st. Kajiyama puts it nicely in discussing nītārtha and neyārtha as the third of the four "reliances" (rton-pa, pratisaraṇa), i.e., rely, "... on a sūtra teaching explicitly what it aims at (nītārtha), but not on a sūtra the teaching of which implies a hidden intention (neyārtha)..." (Kajiyama, Y., 'Later Mādhyamikas on Epistemology and Meditation', in Kiyota, M., ed., Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation [Honolulu, 1978], pp. 116-17.) Still, this represents only the formal aspect of the distinction, which is also a doctrinal one: neyārtha relates to the samvṛti, nītārtha to the paramārtha.
- PK, p. 330
- * By 'reflexive' here we mean that sūnya does not indicate that one entity is 'devoid of' another, that something is absent in a given locus. Sūnyatā indeced means niḥsvabhāvatā, although it is just this negative which is a source of contention, as we shall see, even though all rang-stong-pas in Tibet agreed it was a case of med-dgag (prasajya-pratizedha), non-implicative negation. To take svabhāva as the nature, or essence, of an entity, and then to negate this 'nature' and call this the understanding of sūnyatā, is to remain within the limits of a purely conceptual analysis, however valuable this may be.
- S The gzhan-stong-pa, making use of the Yogācāra theory of the trisvabhāva, held the parinispanna to be devoid of both the parikalpita and the paratantra. This was attacked by the rang-stong-pa as being in contradiction with the Indian doctrine; however, on this point see Ruegg, D. S.; 'The Uses of the Four Positions of the Catuskoti and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism', JIP, 5 (1977), p. 67, n. 126. Cf. also notes 16 and 22 below.
- PK, p. 338
- ⁷ See Lamotte, É., trans., Samdhinirmocanasūtra (Paris, 1935), pp. 85, 206-7. This is the definitive statement of that sūtra on the three 'turnings'.
- ⁸ Cf. his presentation of the development of the Madhyamaka in Tibet in Encyc., I, 451, 7-459, 1. Kong-sprul's major works on gzhan-stong, however, are to be found in his Thun-mong ma-yin-pa'i mdzod, which has yet to be republished. See Gene Smith's Introduction to Encyc., p. 69.
- 9 Encyc., Part III, f. 24, 3.
- Madhyamakavṛti (Paris, 1959), p. 175, n. 562; and Bhikkhu Nānananda's Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought (Kandy, 1971). Madhyamaka-kārikā XVIII, 5 is central to an understanding of prapañca, where it is said to found vikalpa, dichotomous conceptualization; as well as Candrakīti's commentary on XVIII, 9, which glosses prapañca as vāk (Vaidya ed., p. 159). There, he tells us that the reason for this is that prapañca conjures up, proliferates (prapañcayati, spro-bar byed-pa) meanings (artha, don). Such hints have suggested 'semantic structuring' to us, but a contemporary poet, Ceorge Quasha, seem to have captured it best as "the linguistic unconscious of easy conceptualization." On sense-relations in modern semantics, see John Lyons' excellent survey, Semantics 1 (Cambridge, 1977), chapter 9.
- " RC, f. 7b, 4-6

- On ngo-bo and rang-bzhin, see Guenther, H. V., Kindly Bent to Ease Us, Part One: Mind (Emeryville, Calif., 1975), pp. 223-4; Kindly Bent to Ease Us, Part Three: Wonderment (Emeryville, Calif., 1976), pp. 5ff.; and Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective (Emeryville, Calif., 1977), pp. 119, 124-5, 156, 176, 212.
- This idea appears throughout the DS, first occurring on ff. 564, 4-565, 1.
- 14 RGM, f. 433, 6ff.; DS, f. 576, 6ff. The difference between the usage of sūnya here and in the Prajnāpāramitā literature (and the works of Nāgājuna, Candrakīrtl, etc., which are said to explicate it), lies in what Tibetan scholasticism called the stong-gzhi, "the basis for (the understanding) of sūnya." In the Uttaratantrasāstra, the stong-gzhi is the khams (dhānu), while in the Prajnāpāramitā it is any dharma, or entity, in its ontical givenness or 'nature'.
- 13 DS, f. 568, 1f
- See Ruegg's article mentioned in note 1 for a concise statement of their approach.
- 17 See the treatment of tathāgatagarbha in his Theg-pa mtha'-dag gi don gsal-bar byed-pa grub-pa'i mtha' rin-po-che'i mdzod (Gangtok, Sikkim, n.d.), p. 161, 4ff. and the following note.
- ing note.

 18 rDzogs-pa chen-po sems-nyid ngal-gso'l 'grel-pa shing-ria chen-po (Gangtok, Sikkim, n.d.), p. 312, 4-6. Klong chen-pa's most extensive treatment of the tathāgatagarbha is to be found in this work, p. 310 ff., by way of commentary on the verse numbered "BIIc" in Guenther's translation, p. 65 (Kindly Bent, Part One). Klong-chen-pa makes the same distinction which the dGe-lugs-pa were later to emphasize in criticizing the theories of Bu-ston and the Jo-nang-pa, i.e., we speak of tathāgatagarbha or gotra as long as one is bound up with the adventitious kleśa, but when these have been removed, we can speak of tathāgata. Cf. also Kindly Bent, Part One, pp. 52-3.
- 20 TS, p. 2ff. Here Tsong-kha-pa is placed under the chad-mtha'la dbu-ma smra-ba ("Nihilistic Mādhyamika").
- In his controversial commentary on the Madhyamakālamkāra of Sāntarakṣita, for example, Mi-pham explicitly links the philosophical perspective (lta-ba, dṛṣṭī) of CandrakIrti with the rDzogs-chen:

The intent of Candrakirti (is) the profound perspective in which the deceptiveness of conventionality subsides in the continuum of Being (dbyings-su yal-ba), because all presence is pure in exactly its own place (rang-sar). (This) is similar to the setting forth of the initially pure (ka-dag) in the works of the rDzogs chen.

(Collected Writings of Jam-mgon Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, Vol. 12 [Gangtok, 1976], f. 46, 3-4.)

22 It is interesting to note that the gzhan-stong-pa seized on the difference between these two aspects, relegating the rang-stong (sūnya as 'being-devoid-of') to the samvṛtī and the gzhan-stong (sūnya as an ontological region) to the paramārtha. See TS, pp. 1-2.

This is closely related to the understanding of prapañca discussed in note 10, for prapañca clearly has an ontological function. Not only do we 'have' and 'use' language, but we have been "habituated to saṃsāra since beginningless time" because of prapañca, as Candrakirti tells us in his commentary to Madhyamakakārkā XVIII, 5 (Vaidya ed.,

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- Smtsho, in Collected Writings of Jam-mgon Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, Vol. 3, bDe-gshegs snying-po'l stong-thun chen-mo senge nga-ro of Mi-pham tgya-Gangtok, 1973.
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bshad srol dang sbyar ba'i rnam-par 'grel-pa phyir mi-ldog-pa senge nga-ro ot

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- mtsho, in Collected Writings of Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, Vol. 3,
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