

Radical Rejection - Special Supplement

**Readings to Prepare for the Talk by the
Venerable Kyabgon Traleg Rinpoche -
“Distinguishing Shentong from Chittamatra”
Saturday, June 11, 2005: 10 am and 2 pm**

1. A Discussion Concerning True Existence Regarded as Extraneous to Phenomena, Mipham and Chandrakirti, *Introduction to the Middle Way: A Commentary on Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara*, Trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2002, pp. 165-172 (top)
2. The Lion's Roar Proclaiming Extrinsic Emptiness, Mipham, Mipham's Beacon of Certainty: Illuminating the View of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, by John W. Pettit, Wisdom, Boston, 1999, pp. 415-427
3. The Zhentong Tradition in Tibet, *The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen*, by Cyrus Stearns, State University of New York, Albany, 1999, two excerpts on pp. 41-55 and 74-77 = 18

Answers to Questions:

1. One the main assumptions of Chandrakirti's refutations of the Chittamatra seems to be that if an object is real the subject must be and vice versa, and if the object is not real then the subject must be unreal and vice versa. What is the basis for this?

Karl Brunnholzl: Well, it is basically that something real cannot be perceived/perceive something unreal and vice versa. Either both are unreal or both are real. The basic thing is that object and subject mutually depend on each other, so something unreal cannot depend on something unreal and vice versa

Ari Goldfield: The Mind-only School is saying that outer objects don't truly exist; only the mind exists. But Chandrakirti says that if the outer object doesn't truly exist, the mind that is the perceiving subject doesn't truly exist either. How can you have a real perceiving subject without a real perceived object? It's like in a dream--how could the perceiver of dream objects be existent when the perceived objects themselves are not? Therefore, inner perceiving mind and outer perceived objects are only dependently existent. Therefore, neither of them truly exists--that is the Middle Way's point.

2. Are there separate individual Alayas or are they not separate?

Elizabeth Callahan: I believe it is standard Buddhist doctrine (Indo-Tibetan at least) that each individual (gang zag) has his or her own mindstream and that that mindstream is singular (sems rgyud geig).

Karl Brunnholzl: Of course the alayas are separate for each sentient being, otherwise karma would be shared and so on.

Ari Goldfield: Yes. From the perspective of conventional reality, each individual has their own set of eight consciousnesses. From the perspective of genuine reality, which they assert to be non-dual mere clarity and lucidity, self-awareness, alaya is beyond one or many, same or different.

MIPHAM'S BEACON OF CERTAINTY

*Illuminating the View of Dzogchen,
the Great Perfection*

By John W. Pettit

NAMO GURU MANJUSHRIYE

Respectfully I bow to the lion among men, the Friend of the Sun,
To the great compassionate Maitreya, Asanga, and their lineage,
And to the one who makes the fearless lions roar in Tibet!

The secret treasure of infinite victors and their scions,
The essential nectar of instructions of sūtras and tantras of definitive
meaning.

The finest of the experience and realization of
The learned and accomplished ones of India and Tibet:
Here I will explain a little of the profound Mādhyamika view.²¹⁵

Here, the philosophers of extrinsic emptiness take the sūtras of the final turning, which teach the irreversible, fearless, permanent path of the Victor's teaching of definitive meaning, the *Mahājānottaratantrāśāstra*, which is the teaching of the regent Maitreya, the lord of the tenth bhūmi, the profound meanings taught by the sublime Asanga and his brother, the scriptural commentaries on the definitive meaning such as the Lord Nāgārjuna's hymnic corpus, the tantras, such as the glorious Kālacakra, as well as their interpretive commentaries (*dgments 'grel*), which elucidate them, such as the three cycles of commentaries on mind (*sems 'grel skor gum*), as having the same essential significance. Although this [extrinsic emptiness], which causes one to enter the textual system of the great Madhyamaka of profound and definitive meaning, has an extremely profound and vast intention underlying it, nowadays those who undertake to expound philosophy say whatever comes into their mind in this regard, whether they understand it or not. They are extremely deluded.

Now, to say a little bit about this system. In order to understand definitively the philosophical system of extrinsic emptiness, one must first understand the absence of inherent existence according to the texts of Nāgārjuna. If one does not understand this, one will not understand how deceptive reality is empty with respect to itself, and how ultimate reality is empty with respect to the other. So, one must first understand for oneself the absence of conceptual elaborations.



Having realized the ultimate reality that is free of elaboration by means of subjective (*jnl can*) nonconceptual gnosis, the subject and object that are concordant with respect to the abiding nature of things and the way things appear are together called “ultimate” (*paramārtha* = *don dam*), and the subject and object for which abiding nature and appearance are discordant are called “superficial” (*samvṛti* = *kun rdzob*). If one analyzes with a conventional validating cognition, they are, respectively, nonmistaken and mistaken, or nondelusory and delusory. So, whatever is neither mistaken nor delusory is ultimate, and the other is considered deceptive.

Both of these ways of positing the two truths—the well-known distinction of appearance and emptiness, and the harmony and discordance of the abiding and apparent natures as just explained—were originally explained in the sūtras and great treatises. These are not the original creations of the philosophers of extrinsic emptiness. They were explained in the *Dharmadharmaśālvabhangā* and in the *Mahayānottaratantra*:

It is empty of adventitious elements,
Which have the character of being differentiable;
It is not empty of the unsurpassable dharmas,
Which have the character of being nondifferentiable.

And, in its commentary:

The buddha essence is capable of being differentiated and separated; it is empty of the shell of negative emotions. It is not empty of the buddha qualities, which are not differentiable, not separate, and are more numerous than the sands in the river Ganges.

The great system-builder Nāgārjuna said:

Just as the stains on a fireproof cloth
That is sullied by various stains
Are consumed when the cloth is placed in fire
While the cloth itself is not,
Likewise the stains of the luminous mind
Are consumed in the fire of wisdom;
They are not luminous.
All the sūtras on emptiness
Taught by the Victor
Counteract negative emotions;
They do not harm that element [of luminosity].

The Dharma king, the awareness-holder Mañjuśrīkṛṣṇa said:

The emptiness [that results from] analysis of the aggregates
Is without essence, like the plantain tree;
The emptiness supremely endowed with qualities
Is not like that.

Thus, the statement “not empty from its own side” must by all means be understood in terms of the latter way of positing the two truths; this means that it should be understood in terms of the position of the two truths being mutually exclusive, where one is the negation of the other (*geig la geig dkag*). It must never be understood according to the manner of positing the two truths as different isolates of the same essence (*nge bo geig dang ldog pa tha dad*). According ly, the delusory appearances of the discordance of abiding nature and appearance appear from the perspective of delusion; because they are not established that way in reality, they are considered deceptive. The other [namely, the ultimate truth] is established as it appears from a nondeluded perspective; since it is not invalidated by valid cognition, it is said to exist ultimately and to be truly established. This [ultimate truth] does not have to be a truly established appearance that is separate from emptiness.²¹⁶ Being established from the very beginning as the emptiness supremely endowed with qualities—the coalescence of the expanse of phenomena and emptiness—it has already been accepted as the ultimate reality that is the nature of things. Thus, such an ultimate is not empty from its own side. To take a conventional example, a coiled rope is ultimate reality; a snake should be posited as deceptive reality in relation to it. They should be differentiated as conventionally established and nonestablished, respectively, as it is impossible for them to be either both false or both true.

Thus, the ultimate is not empty of its own essence, because the ultimate has both a nondeluded subject and a nondelusory object, because what exists there cannot be invalidated (*gnod pa*) by a valid cognition that proves otherwise, because it is what is proven after the reasoning establishing emptiness has already been applied, and because in establishing it according to conventional validating cognition, no one in this world, including the gods, can dispute it in accordance with the Dharma.

Since the ultimate is true and nonmistaken from its own side, it is never empty of dharmas that exist in that way; if it were empty, there would have to be some valid cognition that posited it as deluded and untrue, and that is impossible. If it were possible, and the peace of nirvāṇa were unreliable, then this position would, except for devils and tirthikas bereft of valid cognition, not be something for those with faith in this teaching to expound.

This ultimate reality that is the nature of things exists primordially in this way, but the deluded perceptions that do not realize it are validly established as untrue and deluded and in this context are called “deceptive” (*samvṛti* = *kun rdzob*), which accords with the meaning of the word *saṃvṛti*, which is “having obscurations.” So, the ultimate is empty of that deception; it is empty of the very subject

and object that comprise the deluded perceptions that are termed “deceptive.” For example, a rope is empty of being a snake.

Thus, one is very much compelled to accept [this position]. According to other philosophical systems that claim to refute extrinsic emptiness, truthlessness [in Gelug Prāsaṅgika] is the probandum of an ultimate analysis, but one should not take it [i.e., truthlessness] as a negandum. Likewise, [according to other Prāsaṅgikas such as Go ram pa,] nonelaboration is the probandum of ultimate reasoning but is not a negandum. So, [according to these interpretations,] if one does not uphold the position of truthlessness and the absence of elaboration, one will not be able to establish anything as “our own philosophical system.” Moreover, if ultimate reality were empty of its own essence just like deceptive reality, then one would not be able to establish the ultimate as nondelusory and as the abiding nature of things, nor would one be able to establish deceptive reality as delusory and not established by way of its own essence—for emptiness is here understood in terms of what kind of dharma (*chos*).

If ultimate reality were empty from its own side, there would be no way to distinguish between deluded and nondeluded appearances by means of a valid cognition of truth and falsity, and it would be just like the rope and snake being either both existent or both nonexistent. That emptiness of deceptive phenomena definitely qualifies as emptiness, because that true existence [that is negated in relation to conventional phenomena in the Gelug Prāsaṅgika system] is not established, and because the apprehension of true existence is a deluded cognition that is misleading and [causes] wandering in samsāra. Thus, since that delusory subject and object [bound up with the misapprehension of true existence] are both considered deceptive reality in this context [of intrinsic emptiness], and since [the ultimate] is empty of them [from the perspective of grosis], if the fact of [ultimate reality] being empty of that [deluded dichotomy of subject and object] did not qualify as emptiness, then the emptiness of true existence would also not qualify as emptiness, and the elimination of the apprehension of true existence would not qualify as meditation on emptiness.

So emptiness, which is the absence of subject and object [established] with respect to the elimination of the elaborations of object and object-possessor, is perfectly complete in this system. Since all elaborations of the dualistic perception of subject and object are comprised by the delusory object and object-possessor, in this context they are posited as deceptive reality. If the fact of ultimate reality being empty of that [subject-object dichotomy] did not qualify as emptiness, then the absence of elaboration would not qualify as emptiness, and the mind that mediates on nonelaboration would not qualify as meditation on emptiness, either.

“Well, isn’t that ultimate not truly existent and free of elaboration?” How could something that is neither nontruly-existent nor nonelaborated be the ultimate? It is the same as the case of deceptive reality [as considered in our system, for we, like you, accept that true existence does not even conventionally exist]. “Well, if the ultimate is not truly existent and empty, then how can you say

that it is truly existent and not empty from its own side?” Here you have utterly failed to understand that, in this context, true existence and non-emptiness exist and are established from the perspective of conventional validating cognition, so this is just ignorant quibbling on your part.

“Well, then aren’t you saying that it is both truly existent and not truly existent, and both emptiness and non-emptiness?” How could that be? You consider appearance to be deceptive reality, and emptiness to be ultimate reality. Just as you consider it inappropriate to eliminate truthlessness and nonelaboration when analyzing ultimate reality, in our system, which considers delusion as deceptive reality and nondelusion as ultimate reality, we do not think it appropriate to negate the nondelusory nature of the ultimate, nor to establish nondelusion as true. Thus, the great system-builder Asanga [sic] said, “When something does not exist in something else, that something is empty of it; whatever is left over there exists.”⁹¹⁷

Thus, when establishing a system (*gzhung*) of proof and refutation, one must by all means refute what is not established by reasoning, and one should accept what is proven by reasoning, without refuting it. If one were to refute everything, one would reverse the valid cognitions that establish the difference between authentic and inauthentic signifying dharmas (*rjod byed chos*) and signified meanings (*brijod bya'i chos*), and it would be impossible to develop any kind of certitude whatsoever.

“Well, don’t you have a position about the object of individual cognition, the dharmadhātu that is beyond refutation and proof?” Why do you say that? one should ask. “Because you set forth a system that, on the one hand, negates a negandum and, on the other hand, has a position of establishing a probandum, and thus you abide in a state that reifies something without claiming to negate everything.”

Since the dharmadhātu that is realized in an individual’s experience is beyond refutation and proof, this we accept as the ultimate reality. In the present context [of extrinsic emptiness], such an ultimate, which is already established [for you, as well as for us], is *conventionally* established to exist as the ultimate, so these two [positions] of refuting one thing and establishing another are not contradictory. If we did not have this position, which proves that ultimate reality is conventionally not empty of its own essence, then the ultimate that is free of refutation and proof would be nonexistent [conventionally]. Therefore, just as reversing the conventional position that things have no inherent existence would be tantamount to establishing that they do have inherent existence, if it were not proven that ultimate reality is not empty from its own side, then that ultimate would not be ultimate, but deceptive.

Given that it is already established that the ultimate is not truly existent from its own side and is without elaboration, one might think that the verbal expression “the ultimate is not empty from its own side” disqualifies it from being empty⁹¹⁸ and is the untenable view that existence and peace are not equal and that the ultimate is isolated (*skyang pa*), permanent (*nag pa*), and unchanging (*ther*

zug). This, however, is a case of not having even a partial understanding of this great philosophical system.

According to the position that emptiness is the absence of true existence and is free of elaboration, how could it have true existence or elaboration? The mere statement that the ultimate is established as the ultimate is a conventional distinction about what is empty and not empty by means of showing that [ultimate reality] is not deceptive reality; this [conventional distinction between ultimate and relative] is the probandum here. If to accept this [distinction] conventionally were to hold a view that refined emptiness as a thing, then to accept the absence of true existence would be to hold an untenable view clinging to emptiness as a nothing, and to accept nonelaboration would also be to hold an untenable view reifying emptiness as an inexpressible thing.

In brief, in this context [of extrinsic emptiness] the bases of the designations of ultimate and deceptive are, respectively, the absence of delusion and the distinct apprehension of objects by subjects that are deluded about them.⁹¹⁹ The nondelusory ultimate is the object of a nondeluded mind, is true, and is accepted as being empty of the delusion of deceptive reality. Conventionally, it is not empty [of truth], because it is held to be the experience of sublime beings.⁹²⁰ If the ultimate were empty from its own side, then it would not be possible to posit it as the basis for the emptiness of deceptive reality. Since it would not be possible to determine the difference between what exists and what does not exist as an object of sublime perception, the ultimate would not be the ultimate, and the deceptive would not be deceptive but would be entirely on the same level as the ultimate.

Therefore, it is completely inappropriate not to accept this position. Whatever faults are found therein would equally apply to the position of those who expound emptiness as truthlessness or nonelaboration. Also, it is not the case—since samsāra and nirvāna here have become different [because of being] nonexistent and existent, respectively—that there is no equality of existence and peace (*srid zhi myam nyid*). It is utterly impossible even conventionally for [something to be] both a deluded samsāra and a nondeluded nirvāna.⁹²¹ Though samsāra appears, it does not exist as such; the nature of samsāra is the originally pure ultimate reality that abides in great nirvāna, and this is the probandum here, which is termed “the equality of existence and peace.” In any system where all phenomena abide primordially in the ultimate expanse, this is called “the equality of existence and peace.” There is no position whereby samsāra and nirvāna have a common basis.⁹²² Also, the ultimate is not empty of being the ultimate, because if the ultimate were empty of itself, it would not be ultimate, but would become the deluded appearances of deceptive reality.

Listen, you [Gelugpas] who would vehemently dispute this philosophical position! Don’t you say that a vase is not empty of being a vase, but is empty of true existence? If it is reasonable to accept that all conventionally existent dharmas are not empty of themselves but are empty of something else—true existence—then

you must also accept the position that the ultimate is not empty of being the ultimate, together with the reasoning [that establishes that position, because “ultimate” is no less a conventionality than “vase,” etc.]!

“If the ultimate is not empty of being the ultimate, then it would not be empty of true existence”—but the same could be said of vases, etc. Thus, although our ultimate is not empty of being the ultimate, since it is empty of deceptive reality, it goes without saying that it is empty of true existence, [which is] false, deluded appearance. If the fact that we accept that it is empty of all dualistic appearances of deceptive reality [which are constituted by the misperception of true existence] does not qualify our [conception of ultimate reality] as empty, then how could the elimination of the superimposed, isolated object of true existence—which is not empty of all dualistic phenomena of deceptive reality—possibly qualify as emptiness? Just as you say that true existence is negated, but truthlessness never can nor should be negated, likewise we negate the deluded appearances of deceptive reality, [but maintain that] the nondelusory ultimate never can nor should be negated.

In brief, in your line of reasoning that establishes truthlessness without negating deceptive reality, the basis [for the designation] of emptiness (*stong gzhig*) winds up being deceptive reality, so ultimate reality is not empty of deceptive reality. We say that the basis [for the designation] of emptiness is ultimate reality, and that it is empty of deceptive reality. You maintain an ascertained (*phyang chad*) emptiness, which is the emptiness of true existence, with respect to a basis of emptiness, which is truthlessness *as absolute negation*; and [you maintain] an ascertained deceptive appearance, which is not empty from its own side, but is empty of an extrinsic (*yan gar ba*) true existence. [Thus, in your system] appearance and emptiness, as bases of emptiness, are never mixed together, and the equality of existence and peace is utterly impossible in either of the two levels of truth. Therefore, please look into the important details of this point.⁹²³

In our system, both objective emptiness and the subject, which is gnosis, are ultimate. In the final analysis, both of these are the nondifference of the two truths of appearance and emptiness, so the ultimate expanse of phenomena is not an ascertained emptiness. It is not empty of the inseparable buddha bodies and gnoses, and abides as the primordial, spontaneously present essence body (*ngo bo nyid*, *sku = svabhākāya*). Your ultimate, which is the ascertained emptiness of absolute negation, is a nomenity (*dagos med*) that is distinct from conventional appearances; it will never, ever be endowed with even a fragment of the buddha bodies and gnoses. The conventional appearances that are different from it exist, but they are of no use [for understanding] that emptiness, because [appearances and emptiness] are utterly incapable of being combined. Thus, since the object of the root of samsāra—which is the apprehension of true existence—does not exist, the subject and object both are deceptive delusions, so in your system deceptive reality should be considered as just true existence and the apprehension of true existence.

[In your system] conventional appearances are not ultimate, because they are not emptiness, and they are not deceptive reality, because they are nondeluded appearances or are immune to ultimate analysis—because, although they are not immune to analysis with respect to true existence, they are immune to analysis insofar as they are not conventionally empty from their own side. Thus, truthlessness and all conventions would be ultimate reality, true existence alone would be deceptive reality, and the apprehension of true existence would be a substantial entity, like vases and so forth.²⁴

Though it is reasonable to assert that the object of truly existing appearance and the subject of apprehending true existence together are the deceptive reality wherein the abiding nature of things and appearances are discordant, and that truthlessness and the apprehension of truthlessness are the ultimate wherein abiding nature and appearance are concordant, it is not reasonable to assert that both subject and object without dualistic appearance are the ultimate, and that the existence [of dualistic appearance] is deceptive reality.²⁵ If vases and so on were not empty from their own side, the dualistic appearance of existents and the mind that apprehends duality would become the subject and object wherein abiding nature and appearance are concordant, and the absence of dualistic appearances and the apprehension of duality would become delusion, wherein abiding nature and appearance are discordant.

In brief, in your system the rational negandum is only true existence; to meditate on emptiness is to abandon only appearances of true existence and the apprehension of true existence, and nothing else.

"In the meditative absorption of those training on the sublime paths (*phags-slob kyi myam bzhang*), why shouldn't all deceptive appearances empty of true existence be nonapparent? Though they are not objects of rational negation, they are negated on the path, and cease to appear."

That path, which is like a shade tree, causes existent things not to appear. If the fact of nonexistence appears, why can one not see what exists? Because one sees their nonexistence! As it is said, "What is this form of darkness?" Such a path is amazing!

In our system, when the ultimate is seen directly, the domain (*gocara = spiyod yul*) is nonconceptual wisdom without the dualistic appearance of subject and object. How can it have the appearance of true existence or the apprehension of true existence? How can it have the objects of elaboration and elaborations [about them]? This is designated as the ultimate. Taking that nondeluded ultimate as the basis of empleness, it is said that it is empty of the subject and object that comprise the deluded samsāric appearances of deceptive reality.

Though the the ultimate essence is beyond elaborations,

When establishing the ultimate, our position is that

What is ultimate and what is deceptive

Are differentiated as nondelusion and delusion:

What is wrong with that?

Although all dharmas are unelaborated because they have no inherent existence,

Those who refute nonelaboration and focus on absolute negation Maintain a one-sided position of "absence of inherent existence"; They hold these words alone as their philosophical refuge. But, by taking the position of "truthlessness,"

Even though they do not wish to accept the position

That the ultimate is not empty from its own side,

They cannot avoid it.

If one explains that ultimate reality is not empty from its own side,

It is good to establish the ultimate as the ultimate;

If one were to explain that a vase is not empty from its own side, All dharmas would be non-empty, would be seen as permanent, And emptiness would be a trivial nonsubstantiality—

Thus one would establish the basis of the view as a dichotomy of permanence and annihilation.

If the ultimate is established and known by conventional valid cognition

As permanent, real, and non-empty,

One seizes all qualities of the path and eliminates

All base views that cling to the extremes of permanence and impermanence.

"Whatever is permanent is not necessarily a view of permanence, And whatever is annihilated is not necessarily the extreme of annihilation;

Whatever is existent is not necessarily the extreme of existence, And whatever is not existent is not necessarily the extreme

of nonexistence"—

This is [universally] accepted by Tibetans renowned as scholars. Thus, if one analyzes well with conventional valid cognition, One can realize with a discriminating mind whether

Permanence, impermanence, empleness, non-emptiness, Reality, unreality, existence, and nonexistence are extremes. For the gnosis that analyzes the final ultimate

There are no elaborations of existence, nonexistence, and so forth; This is accepted by all the learned and accomplished philosophers of extrinsic emptiness.

Your position is that, even from the perspective of an ultimate analysis,

There is an elaboration of "truthlessness";

If something exists from the perspective of an ultimate analysis,

And is the object of sublime perception,
Why should it be contradictory to say that it is
Not empty, truly existent, and perceived as such?

Therefore, what contradiction is there in explaining this according to how it is imagined?

If the perception of truthlessness were empty of truthlessness,
How would that be any different than not seeing truthlessness at all?
If you think that truthlessness is seen as empty,

Then why not see a vase and so forth as empty?

You think that vases and so on are empty of true existence
but not of themselves—

For if they were, vases and so forth would not exist conventionally—
But why would this be any different than saying that
From the perspective of seeing the ultimate, the ultimate
is not empty?

In brief, if someone should ask, "What is the meaning of the statement 'The ultimate is not empty from its own side?'" we reply that it means that the ultimate reality is not empty of being the ultimate reality. To this they reply, "Then, the ultimate would be truly existent," [to which we reply], "But if a vase is not empty of being a vase, it would be truly existent!" Now they ask, "If a vase were empty of being a vase, then that vase would become a non-vase, so why wouldn't the vase become conventionally nonexistent?" Indeed, it would. Thus, if the ultimate reality were empty of being the ultimate reality, the ultimate reality would become nonultimate reality, [for] this would be the same as the ultimate being conventionally nonexistent.

Therefore, if it is reasonable for truthlessness, nonelaboration, emptiness, and the ultimate to be accepted as the probanda of an ultimate rational cognition, but unreasonable for them to be accepted as neganda [of such a cognition], then you must definitely assert that truthlessness and so forth exist. The fact that you do not accept their nonexistence means that you accept that [in the perspective of conventional validating cognition] the ultimate and emptiness are true, existent, and non-empty, and do not accept that they are untrue, nonexistent, and empty.

The pristine cognition of the equipoise that sees the ultimate must see, apprehend, have as objects, and accept as real the aforementioned truthlessness and so forth. Therefore, it would be wrong to claim that pristine cognition does not see, apprehend, have as an object, or witness the nonexistence of that [truthlessness], etc. Everyone accepts that ultimate emptiness is the perspective of sublime vision, exists, is established as true, and so forth.

"If it is accepted as truly existing, clinging to emptiness as true will not be eliminated"—but [you also say] it is not appropriate to negate clinging to it as conventionally true. The thought that what is [in fact] true is established as such is not the clinging to truth (*bden 'dzin*) that should be eliminated by reasoning

or the path, just as apprehending truthlessness as truthlessness is not a negandum. A true existence that is immune to an ultimate analysis is not something that needs to be analyzed here, for it has already been determined [as false] by the reasoning that establishes the ultimate, and because the emptiness of true existence is included in the explanation of the [ultimate] being empty of deceptive reality. Thus, just as you say that although there is no true existence in truthlessness, the apprehension of truthlessness should never be eliminated, in quite the same way [we assert that] although it is empty of dharmas that are immune to ultimate analysis, the apprehension of that ultimare *per se* is truly established and not empty of its own essence, is nor something to eliminate.

Just as you assert that by analyzing with an ultimate analysis nothing is found to be immune to analysis, and that no dharma that is not negated by such analysis is ultimately established, you likewise maintain that true existence is the only negandum of rational cognition that analyzes the ultimate, and is abandoned by nonconceptual gnosis. [You also say that] if one were to assert that anything that is reified as a dharma is to be negated and abandoned by those two [viz., by analysis and gnosis], that would be the extremely wrong view of Hashang. According to that position, rational cognition (*rig shes*) and pristine cognition (*je shes*) negate and abandon, respectively, the dualistic appearances of deceptive reality. But this establishes well the fact that the objective ultimate that is empty of deceptive reality, the subjective (*yul can*) pristine cognition, and the ultimate dharmas that are seen by pristine cognition are not negated or abandoned. If all objects (*dmigs pa*) were always taken as objects of negation and abandonment, all dharmas in their multiplicity and mode of existence (*ji lta ba dang ji snyed pa'i chos thams cad*) would be the neganda of reasoning and the path, and that would result in a space-like nihilistic emptiness of complete nothingness.

Thus, by disavowing our position, all those Tibetans who look down on this theory established by exponents of extrinsic emptiness wind up establishing all the theories of extrinsic emptiness automatically. Thus whatever is existent, whatever is nonexistent, whatever is real, and whatever is non-empty are not necessarily extremes; nor are all minds that apprehend [things in those ways] the apprehension of extremes. As it is said,

The Buddha thoroughly comprehends what exists as existent,
And what does not exist as nonexistent.

Modes of existence, modes of nonexistence, what is truly existent and nonexistent, what is empty and non-empty, and so forth, are differentiated and systematized by the analytical wisdom of meditative aftermath (*rjes thob shan 'byed pa'i shes rab*). As these are established by the valid cognition that investigates the meaning of whatever exists, without confusing any conventionalities and differentiating each [phenomenon], they are not objects of negation.

The supreme protector, Lion of the Śākyas,
 Sounded this lion's roar to his fearless retinue,
 Gratifying those who found confidence in it
 With prophecies [of irreversibility].

The rivers of the intentions of
 The lord of the tenth bhūmi, the regent Ajita,
 And those dwellers on sublime ground, Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga,
 Are united in the expanse of gnosis;
 Any contradictions seen therein
 Are just the faults of one's own mind.

Although all dharmas are empty of essence,
 The element of luminosity, the bodies, and gnosis
 Are spontaneously present, like the sun and its rays.
 The meaning of the Great Madhyamaka, the coalescence
 of appearance and emptiness,
 Is not deceptive for sublime perception, and is the ultimate truth.
 The dualistic appearances of conventional reality are deceptive
 delusions;

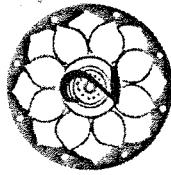
Opening the eyes of wisdom that discern modes of existence
 and appearance,
 This excellent, supreme explanation is like a bejeweled lamp.

For that reason intelligent, honest, and fortunate ones
 Will develop eyes to see this profound meaning;
 Dwelling in the mansion of the essence of definitive meaning,
 May they be rich with the joys of benefiting themselves and others!

Like the fresh brilliance of the harvest moon, may the virtue
 of this effort
 Permanently banish the burning torment of the five degenerations;
 May the lily garden of the scriptures and realizations of the Lord
 of Sages
 Explode into blossom, and may the ocean of liberation swell!

In all my lives may I be protected by the Gentle Lord
 (*'jam mgon bla ma'*)
 And perfect my skill in scriptures, reasoning, and personal
 instructions;
 From the heights of the peak of the supreme vehicle,
 May I proclaim this fearless lion's roar!

To this, the essential abbreviated kernel of a composition spoken by the unique lion among Tibetan philosophers, the Lord Lama, the omniscient Mipham 'Jam dpal dGyes pa'i rdo rje, I added my own words as the introductory and concluding verses. It was edited (*zhal bshus*) by 'Jam dbyang bLo gros rgya mtsho at his residence, the college of glorious Shechen Tennyi Dargye Ling. May this cause the tradition of the Great Madhyamaka of definitive meaning to spread in all directions, and to persist!

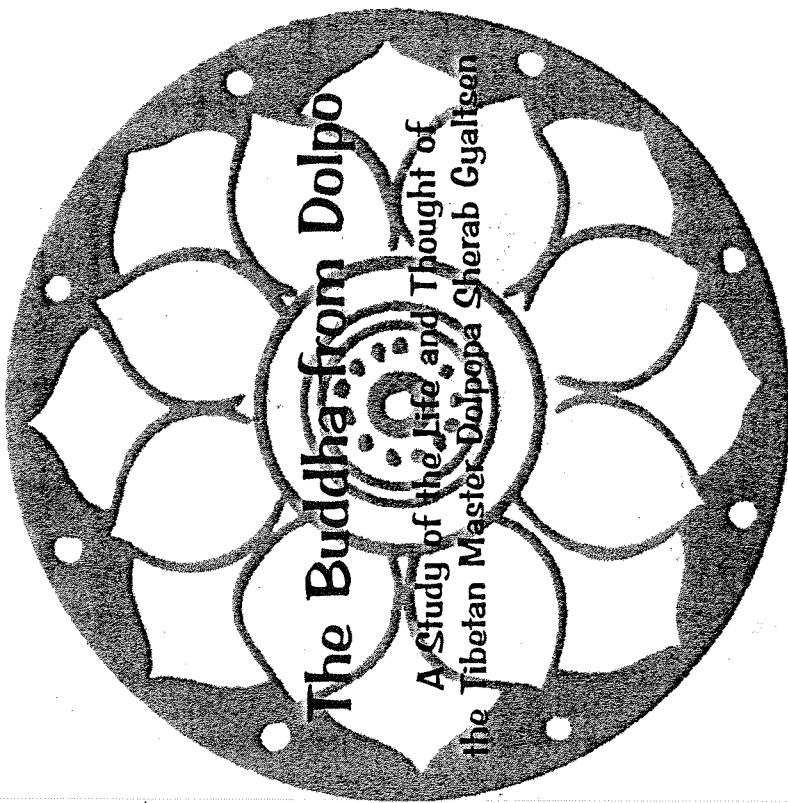


A Historical Survey of the Zhentong Tradition in Tibet

This advice by the Omniscient Dolpopa should be kept as the essential point in our hearts: 'If Buddhahood will be reached merely as a result of having heard the word 'Buddha-nature,' what need to mention what will happen from actualizing it by means of faith and devotion, and meditating upon it? Therefore, compassionate experts should teach it even though they may lose their lives, and so forth, and those who strive for liberation should seek it out and listen to it even though they must cross through a great pit of fire.'

—Jangön Kongdrul¹

Very little is known about the early Tibetan proponents of philosophical points of view which would later come to be known as *Zhentong* (*gzhan stong*). According to Lhey Gyaltsen, many persons with partial realization of the teachings of definitive meaning had appeared in Tibet before the fourteenth century, most of them serious meditators, but no one until Dolpopa had mastered all the teachings of definitive meaning found in the various scriptures, treatises, and esoteric instructions, and then formulated that realization into a coherent philosophical system.² Taranātha traces a transmission lineage for what he refers to as "the instructions on the view of the Zhentong Middle Way," as well as a separate lineage for the transmission of the Kalacakra teachings passed down in the Jonang tradition.³ The first of these lists is concerned with the transmission of the practical instructions which epitomize the intentions of all the sutras and commentaries of the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel. This lineage is primarily traced



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through Maitreya and the Indian brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu, who are considered to be the originators of the doctrine, but another list is also given for the transmission from Nāgārjuna.⁴ This text may be considered a record of the names of teachers who taught the Zhentong view based upon the teachings of the Mahāyāna scriptures and commentaries. Tāranātha's second text, concerned with the lineage of the Kālacakra as transmitted in the Jonang school, may be considered a record of the names of teachers who taught the Zhentong view based upon the teachings found in the tantras, and specifically as articulated in the Kālacakra tantra and the related literature. Examples of the teachings of only one Tibetan master in each of these lineages before the time of Dolpopa are available at the present time.

1. The Zhentong Tradition in Tibet before Dolpopa

According to Tāranātha, one of the earliest Tibetan masters in the Zhentong lineages based upon Mahāyāna teachings was Drimey Sherab, better known as Tsen Khawoche (b. 1021), who was most intimately connected with the transmission of the *Uttaratantra*.⁵ In his important collection of one hundred different instructions from a variety of lineages, Jonang Kunga Drolchok (1507-1566) preserved some instructions of this teacher, which are the earliest extant materials dealing with the Zhentong tradition in Tibet.⁶ The first excerpt he provides gives some historical context for the issue of the origins of the Zhentong position:

In regard to the instructions on the view of an emptiness of other, Tsen Khawoche said, "Sañjana, the pandita of Kashmir, made the very significant statement that 'The Victor turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. The first Wheel [proclaimed] the Four Truths, the Middle [proclaimed] the lack of defining characteristics, and the Final made careful and thorough distinctions. From among them, the first two did not distinguish between the real and the artificial. The final one, at the point of certainty concerning the absolute, taught by distinguishing between the middle and the extreme, and distinguishing between phenomena and true nature. Although just the original manuscripts of the *Dharmadharmaśābhāṣṭa* and the *Uttaratantra* were re-

discovered, if these two texts were lost it would be equivalent to the demise of Maitreya."⁷

This [statement] appearing in an old notebook of Tsen Khawoche himself which bears the title *The Lotus Hook [Padma lcags kyul]*, is informative concerning the later claim that the distinction of an "emptiness of other" was totally unknown in India, and only appeared later in Tibet with the Omniscient Dolpopa. Please also carefully examine the statement appearing in one of the Omniscient Budön's replies to questions [*dritis lan*], in which he states that there was earlier a philosophical system of Danakpa Rinchen Yeshe which appears to have been later enhanced and maintained by Dolpopa.⁷

Kunga Drolchok regards this statement by Tsen Khawoche as an extremely important example of an early precedent for the philosophical distinctions later formulated by Dolpopa. Tsen Khawoche refers to his teacher Sañjana's opinion that only the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel, wherein clear distinctions are made between phenomena and their true nature, represents the definitive meaning of the Buddha's teachings. Kunga Drolchok feels that this is enough to refute the criticism made by Tibetan critics who claimed that the Zhentong tradition was completely unknown in India and Tibet until the time of Dolpopa. He further remarks that even the great Budön commented that Dolpopa had enhanced an earlier Tibetan philosophical system held by one Danakpa Rinchen Yeshe, and refers the reader to one of Budön's replies to questions (*dritis lan*). This is an extremely interesting comment, but unfortunately there is no mention of Dolpopa in the replies of Budön that have been preserved.⁸ However, it is quite certain that Dolpopa did study with the Danak master Rinchen Yeshe. When he was still quite young, and just before his teaching debut at Sakya in 1313, Dolpopa spent about three months at Danak, where he studied with Rinchen Yeshe, and received from him an explanation of *The Five Treatises of Maitreya*, one of which is, of course, the *Uttaratantra*.⁹ The question of important influences on Dolpopa's formulation of the Zhentong doctrine will be dealt with in detail below.

In the lineage of the *Kālacakra tantra* transmissions in the Jonang school, the definitive aspect of the teaching was being emphasized long before the time of Dolpopa. This is most obvious in the collection entitled *Four Clear Lamps* (*Gsal sgron skor bzhi*) by

the eleventh-century Kālacakra master Yumowa Mīgyö Dorje, which has only recently become available. In these texts Yumowa is clearly dealing with some of the same themes that Dolpopa later elaborated. In fact, Tārānātha identifies Yumowa as having “initiated the tradition of the philosophical system of tantric Zhentong.”¹⁰ It is very significant, however, that none of the key terms associated with Dolpopa’s theories, such as *gzhan stong*, “emptiness of other,” or *kun gzhi ye shes*, “universal ground gnosis,” appear in the extant writings of Yumowa, nor does he use any of the terminology that Dolpopa apparently borrowed from certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises.

Nevertheless, the Geluk master Thukan Lozang Chögyi Nyima (1737–1802) much later states in *A Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems* (*Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*) that Yumowa was the originator of the Zhentong teachings, which he so named, and that they were passed down orally until the time of Dolpopa as a hidden doctrine (*lkg pa'i chos*) without any written texts. Although it is known that Dolpopa actively taught Yumowa’s *Four Clear Lamps* (*Gsal sgron skor bzhi*), he neither mentions Yumowa in his own writings, nor quotes from his texts.¹¹

Yumowa’s four brief treatises are ultimately concerned with the correct practice of the Six-branch Yoga, the perfection-stage meditation system grounded in the *Kālacakra tantra*. The four texts have as their topic matter total integration (*zung jug*), the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen po*), radiant light (*'od gsal*), and emptiness (*stong nyid*). That the extant manuscript was passed down in the Jonang tradition is indicated by the fact that a prayer to the masters in the transmission line of the Kālacakra teachings according to the Jonang lineage is appended to the first of the four texts.¹²

In these texts Yumowa focuses upon the discussion of tantric topics which are beyond the scope of this book. But it may be observed that one of his recurring concerns is to show that he does not accept the opinion of most scholars that the spiritual path is a process of realization in which emptiness is recognized as the ultimate nature of all phenomena, not established by any essential nature of its own, and free from the extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. He sees this view of emptiness as only the presentation of the philosophical system in which emptiness is established as the ultimate nature of all entities. This is *not* what is to be meditated upon as the path according to the stages of esoteric

instruction. In short, he feels that emptiness in the context of the path of meditation must be experiential. That which is emptiness by nature (*rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid*) cannot be directly experienced. In making these statements Yumowa is alluding to specific experiences which occur during the practice of the Six-branch Yoga, when what are known as “empty forms” (*śūnyabimba, stong gzugs*) are seen with the eyes. This is the direct experience of emptiness as the path according to the teachings of the *Kālacakra tantra*. So when Yumowa says that emptiness arrived at through logical analysis, and emptiness that is inconceivable, are not the path, he is indicating that it is the emptiness seen with the eyes during the experience of meditation that is the subject of his work.¹³ Echoes of this point of view will also be found in the works of Dolpopa.

The teachings of Dolpopa were also solidly grounded in the doctrine of the tantras, especially the *Kālacakra tantra*, and his treatises do not simply follow established philosophical tenets, but represent a synthesis of the view and practice of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. This will become clear when his views are actually encountered in the texts translated in part 2.

2. Dolpopa and the Zhentong View

It seems quite certain that the teachings of Tsen Khawoche, Yumowa, and others who taught what was later referred to as the Zhentong view did so only to small groups in the context of private instruction. No treatises written by any of the later members of their lineages, from the eleventh century until the fourteenth century, have survived. It was not until Dolpopa later proclaimed his realization, and gave his doctrine the name *Zhentong*, that this term and the teachings now associated with it became widely known in Tibet. The circumstances surrounding Dolpopa’s initial proclamation of the Zhentong were already described in chapter 1, and the nature of his controversial theories will be treated below in chapter 3 and in part 2. Here some of the influences behind his theories, his innovative use of language, his motivation, and the method by which he approached the Buddhist scriptures will be discussed.

It is clear from Dolpopa’s own statements that the most important scriptural sources for his controversial theories were *The*

Bodhisattva Trilogy (*Sems 'greł skor gsum*), which are the definitive commentaries on the *Kālacakra tantra*, the *Hervajra tantra*, and the *Cakrasamvara tantra*. For example, in a text which he sent to the ruler of the northern principality of Chang, he credits these three texts as being the key scriptural factors in his conversion from the view of absolute reality as an emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*).¹⁴ From among them, the *Vimalaprabhā* of Kalkin Pundarika held special significance for him. He once remarked, "Since I discovered all the essential points of profound definitive meaning from the great commentary of the *Kālacakra tantra*, it has been very kind."¹⁵

It is important to keep in mind that Dolpopa was a consummate practitioner of the Six-branch Yoga, the perfection-stage practices of the *Kālacakra tantra*, and although he based his doctrinal discussions upon scripture, in particular the *Kālacakra*-related cycles, his own experience in meditation was crucial to the formation of his theories. Indeed, as George Tanabe has recently emphasized in his study of the Japanese master Myōe, "Buddhists have long insisted that the primary experience—and experience is primary—is that of meditation and practice."¹⁶ Dolpopa obviously felt that he had experienced a special insight into the definitive meaning of the Buddha's message as known in the land of Shambhala, but not understood in Tibet. As mentioned in chapter 1, Dolpopa once claimed to have actually gone to Shambhala during an evening meditation session. The next morning he gave an extensive teaching about the layout of Shambhala, its relation to the rest of the universe, and the esoteric instructions of the *Kālacakra tantra*. After directly seeing Shambhala, he composed versified praises of it, in one of which he declared that he had discovered the precise manner in which Shambhala and Kailash exist, which was previously unknown to Indian and Tibetan scholars.¹⁷

When giving personal meditation advice to his students Dolpopa most often spoke of the special knowledge that he had discovered. He emphasized that although many in Shambhala understood the experiences arising from meditation upon the Six-branch Yoga, no one in Tibet did except for him, and that his own awareness was due solely to the kindness of the Kalkin emperors. For example, he wrote the following verses in an instruction to one of his disciples.

In general, if I speak frankly others do not like it. If I said what others say it would deceive my disciples.

It is hard to be a master in the present times. Even so, I will speak to you frankly.

The Kalkin resides in Shambhala to the north. In the Dharma Palace of Kalāpa many reside who understand experiences like this. In the kingdom of snowy Tibet only I understand experiences like this.¹⁸

And to another disciple he wrote:

These days most of those who are known as experts, who assert that they have fine meditation and high realization, and who are proud in being great adepts, are not aware of this method, but I have discovered it by the kindness of the Kalkin.¹⁹

The combination of Dolpopa's experience in meditation on the Six-branch Yoga and his visionary contact with the land of Shambhala, its Kalkin emperors, and their special blessings, certainly provided the primary inspiration for his theories. But there is also evidence that many of the themes of interpretation that came to fruition in his teaching had been present within the Buddhist tradition in Tibet for centuries. The teachings of Tsen Khawoche and Yumowa touched upon in the previous section are just two examples of earlier Tibetan teachers whose views certainly provided a precedent for some of Dolpopa's theories.²⁰

It is of considerable interest that some Tibetan sources speak of Dolpopa's contemporary, the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, as a possible influence, or even as the first adherent of the Zhentong.²¹ The earliest available account of the meeting between these two teachers is by the sixteenth-century Sakya master Mangtö Ludrup Gyantso, who remarks:

Moreover, this lord [Dolpopa] met with Karma Rangjung Dorje, and it is said that since [Dolpopa] upheld the philosophical system of the emptiness of self-nature [*rang stong*], the Karmapa prophesied that he would later become an adherent of the emptiness of other [*gzhän stong*]. In general I think the tradition of the emptiness of other was first upheld

by Karma Rangjung Dorje. The emptiness of other [was accepted] at Jonang following the Great Omniscient [Dolpopa].²²

According to Tāranātha this meeting seems to have taken place when Dolpopa was twenty-nine or thirty years old, just prior to his trip to Jonang to meet Yönden Gyantsö in 1322. He describes it like this:

Then [Dolpopa] traveled to Lhasa, Tsurphu, and so forth. He had many discussions about Dharma with the Dharma Lord Rangjung. Although Rangjung could not match the scriptural reasoning of this lord [Dolpopa], he had fine clairvoyance, and prophesied, “You will soon have a view, practice, and Dharma language [*chos skad*] much better than this which you have now.”²³

Tāranātha seems to directly quote the Karmapa’s prophecy, but makes no mention of him as a possible source for Dolpopa’s development of the Zhentong view. Unfortunately, there is no record of this meeting in any of the extant early biographies of either teacher.²⁴ There is, however, mention of it in the late history of the Karma Kamtsang tradition written by Situ Panchen Chögyi Jungney (1700-1774), who specifies that Dolpopa still adhered to the view of reality as an emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*) at the time of the meeting. According to the chronology of this work the meeting between these two masters can be dated to between 1320 and 1324.²⁵

One of the most innovative aspects of Dolpopa’s philosophical enterprise was his development of a new Dharma language (*chos skad*), which he utilized to express a wide range of themes found in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scripture. Tāranātha mentions that when Dolpopa first taught the Zhentong he wrote a number of texts containing a certain Dharma language which was incomprehensible to many scholars, who upon reading them experienced a state of what might be termed “hermeneutical shock.”²⁶ As mentioned above, Rangjung Dorje also prophesied that Dolpopa would soon develop a new and superior terminology.

Dolpopa did two things in regard to language that were largely unprecedented in Tibet. Although much research into these points needs to be done, it seems probable that he first developed a special terminology, or Dharma language, that involved the appropriation

of a number of terms from certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises; terms that were acceptable in their original context within scripture but were almost never used in ordinary scholarly discourse. Then he created, or at least made first extensive use of, several Tibetan terms, such as *gzhan stong* and *kun gzhi ye shes*, to express scriptural themes he wished to emphasize. He also drew into his vocabulary some key terms such as *dbu ma chen po* (“*maḥāmadhyamaka*), “Great Madhyamaka,” which had been in use in Tibet for centuries, but are not found in any Indian scriptures or commentaries. In this second phase he employed what may be referred to as source-alien terminology, utilizing previously unknown terms to explicate ideas and themes found in many Buddhist scriptures.²⁷

In his unique use of language Dolpopa first borrowed loaded terminology from Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises and incorporated it into his own compositions. A few examples will illustrate this unusual facet of his work. One of the controversial points in his teaching is the assertion that ultimate truth, referred to by terms such as *tathāgathagarbha* (Buddha-nature), *dharmadhātu* (expansive of reality), and *dharmaśākyā* (buddha-body of reality), is a permanent or eternal state. Of course, statements to this effect are not unusual in certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises, but for most scholars in Tibet the hermeneutical approach was to view those statements as provisional, and in need of interpretation (*neyārtha, drang don*).²⁸ For Dolpopa, all such statements in the scriptures and commentaries were of definitive meaning (*niārtha, nges don*), and were to be understood literally. He began to freely use the terminology of these scriptures, in a manner suggesting that no interpretation was required, and this was no doubt shocking. For instance, the Tibetan terms *bdag* (*ātman*), *rlag pa* (*nitya*), and *btan pa* (*dhruma*), as well as *ther zug*, *gyung drung*, and *mi jugs pa* (all three of which were used to translate Sanskrit *sāsvata*), are found in the Tibetan translations of treatises such as the *Uttaratantra*, and sūtras such as the *Lankāvatāra*, *Gandavyūha*, *Āngulimālīya*, *Śrimālā*, and *Mahāparinirvāna*, where they are used to describe the buddha-body of reality (*dharmaśākyā*), the Tathāgata, and the Buddha-nature (*tathāgathagarbha*).²⁹ These terms, which may be translated as “self,” “permanent,” “everlasting,” and “eternal,” are used by Dolpopa throughout his writings, not just when discussing the meaning of a passage in scripture. Budön’s refutations of the Jonang position in regard to the interpretation of these

very terms as used in scripture, clearly shows that this was one of the areas in which Dolpopa's contemporaries reacted strongly.³⁰ In one of his early short texts, *A General Commentary on the Doctrine* (*Bstan pa spyi 'grel*), which is nevertheless considered a major work, most of the terms in question are already in use. In another early and important work, *Exceptional Esoteric Instructions on the Middle Way* (*Dbu ma'i man ngag khyad 'phags*), which he wrote at the request of the master Sönam Trakpa, from whom he received ordination, several of these terms are also found, and a number of themes he would later develop more fully may be seen in embryonic form. These terms continue to be found in all of his later writings. In his last major work, *The Fourth Council* (*Bka' bsdu bzhi pa*), Dolpopa frequently used all the terms listed above, as well as other unusual compounds, such as "eternal buddha-body" (*g.yung drung sku, ther zug sku; *śśāpatakāya*).³¹

Unfortunately, Dolpopa never dated his major works, but it may be possible in the future to establish an approximate chronology of his writings through analysis of the terminology used in the different texts. For example, *A General Commentary on the Doctrine and Exceptional Esoteric Instructions on the Middle Way* do not contain the terms *gzhan stong* ("emptiness of other") or *kun gzhī ye shes* ("universal ground gnosis"). This gives the impression that they are very early works, and that the borrowing of vocabulary from scriptural sources, which is present in these works, was the first step in the evolution of his use of language, later to be followed by the creation of his own Dharma language.

The term *gzhan stong* is most often associated with Dolpopa, who is usually thought to have coined it.³² There is, however, some evidence of at least a few isolated occurrences of this term before his time. Dolpopa himself quotes a master whom he identifies as Lord Poripa, who makes a statement that could have come from Dolpopa:

Relative truth is empty of self nature [*rang gis stong pa*] and absolute truth is empty of other [*gzhan gyi stong pa*]. If the mode of emptiness of the two truths is not understood in this way, there is danger of denigrating perfect buddhahood.³³

Although this is certainly the most significant occurrence of the term by a writer who may predate Dolpopa, there is very little

information about any earlier master known as Poripa, or Phoripa, as the name is also spelled. The single possible identification is with the obscure early Kagyü teacher Phoriwa Gönchok Gyaltsen.³⁴

Another example of the use of the term *gzhan stong* is found in the biography of Ra Lotsawa Dorje Trak (eleventh to twelfth century), who uses it in contrast to the term *rang stong* in a spiritual song. There are, however, quite definite grounds on which to conclude that this biography was extensively reworked in the seventeenth century, and so the occurrence of the term *gzhan stong* is probably not significant.³⁵

Dolpopa's contemporary, the esteemed Nyingma master Longchen Rabjampa, also mentions the term on one occasion in the context of a discussion of the "three-nature" (*trisvabhāva*) theory of the Yogācāra school. He contrasts the three categories of "empty of self-nature" (*rang gis stong pa*), "empty of other" (*gzhan gyi stong pa*), and "empty of both" (*gnyis kas stong pa*), but with none of the connotations inherent in Dolpopa's usage. During a discussion of the Buddha-nature, the expression *gzhan stong* is also used once in a text attributed to Padmasambhava in *The Heartdrop of the Dakinis* (*Mkha' 'gro snying thig*), which was revealed in the thirteenth century by Payma Lendrel Tsé.³⁶ Once again, the usage of the term is not similar to that found in Dolpopa's works.

This evidence shows that the term *gzhan stong* had been used in Tibet before the time of Dolpopa, albeit only in isolated instances, and without the same connotation that he attached to it. Although the tradition itself certainly considers him as the one who coined the term, it is probably more accurate to say that Dolpopa made use of an obscure term that had very limited use before him, and gave it a place of fundamental importance in the expression of his philosophy.

Another central theme of Dolpopa's thought is the contrasting of *kun gzhī rmam shes*, (*ālayavijñāna*), the "universal ground consciousness," with *kun gzhī ye shes* (**ālayajñāna*), "universal ground gnosis." The term *kun gzhī ye shes* is not known to have occurred in the writings of any earlier Tibetan authors. Dolpopa includes *kun gzhī ye shes* in a listing of the various topics previously unknown in Tibet that he felt he had realized and explicated.³⁷ As noted above, Karmapa Rangjung Dorje may have had some role in the development of Dolpopa's ideas. Although there is no occurrence in Rangjung Dorje's extant works of the terms *gzhan stong*

or *kun gzhi ye shes*, the latter term may have been used in a work which is not available at the present time. In his commentary to Rangjung Dorje's *The Profound Inner Meaning* (*Zab mo nang don*), Jamgön Kongdrul Lodrö Tayey (1813–1899), himself an adherent to the Zhentong view, speaks of Rangjung Dorje's own use of the contrasting terms *kun gzhi rnam shes* and *kun gzhi ye shes* in his autocommentary to *The Profound Inner Meaning*. Unfortunately, Kongdrul does not directly quote Rangjung Dorje's text.³⁸ Rangjung Dorje wrote the *Profound Inner Meaning* in 1322, apparently the year after his meeting with Dolpopa. According to the chronology in the sketch of Rangjung Dorje's life as found in *The Blue Annals*, he wrote the autocommentary before 1326. This is considerably before the writings of Dolpopa began to circulate in Tibet. However, a short text in the collected spiritual songs of Rangjung Dorje, which is devoted to defining the nature of *kun gzhi*, the “universal ground,” uses neither the term *kun gzhi rnam shes* nor *kun gzhi ye shes*, and the ideas expressed are definitely incompatible with Dolpopa and the Zhentong doctrine.³⁹

The phrase “mirror-like universal ground gnosis” (*kun gzhi me long ita bu'i ye shes*) is found in one of the works of Longchen Rabjampa. He uses this term to characterize the buddha-body of reality (*dharmaakāya*), and contrasts it with the “universal ground consciousness” as one of the eight modes of consciousness. In this one instance there are some similarities with Dolpopa's ideas, but Longchenpa's usual position is to identify the *kun gzhi* only with impure states of mind.⁴⁰

Until 1322, when he was thirty years old, Dolpopa had spent almost all of his life in the study of Buddhist literature, philosophy, and practice according to the Sakya tradition. For most of the previous decade he had studied and taught at Sakya monastery itself. It is absolutely certain that he had thoroughly examined and mastered the works of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182–1251), such as *Distinguishing the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rab dbye*), which were fundamental to the education of a Sakya scholar and practitioner. The similarities between Sakya Pandita's statements concerning his motives for the composition of his controversial works, such as *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, and Dolpopa's own statements about his motives, are as striking as the fact that the two masters were at opposite ends of the spectrum of doctrinal interpretation.

A small example of Dolpopa's familiarity with Sakya Pandita's work, and his sympathy for the sentiments expressed in it, is found at the end of his autocommentary to *The Fourth Council*. In this instance Dolpopa has taken a couplet directly from *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, and then extended Sakya Pandita's metaphor by repeating it as a refrain for several pages.⁴¹ The gist of Sakya Pandita's verse is that no matter how many traditions of Dharma there may be, if they are not linked to an authentic source, they are worthless, like gaming pieces which are off the board and irrelevant, like dead men. Dolpopa used the first couplet of Sakya Pandita's verse as a point of departure, and through its repetition addressed a number of further related issues. For example, he states that there may be numerous teachings of the degenerate Tretayuga, but if they are not linked to the perfect Kṛtayuga they are worthless, like dead men.⁴² He continues in this vein, contrasting the fully established nature (*parinirpanna, yongs grub*) to the imagined nature (*parkalpita, kun brtag*), the absolute to the relative, emptiness of self-nature to emptiness of other, and so forth.⁴³ This borrowing was certainly done on purpose, and would have called to mind the themes and tone of Sakya Pandita's treatise, especially considering the fact that it was one of his descendants, Lanna Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen, who had requested Dolpopa to compose *The Fourth Council*.

One of the clearest extended statements of motivations and sentiments by Dolpopa is found at the end of *A Brief Analysis* (*Gshag byed bsduś pa*), which he sent to the ruler of the principality of Chang to explain his doctrinal views.⁴⁴ It is an extremely informative spiritual and literary autobiographical testament:

These investigations have been made by laying down a plumb line straight upon the true nature of reality just as it is, and are not contaminated with impurities such as prejudice, partiality, and presumptions. This is because I have taken as witnesses the opinions of the omniscient Blessed One, the Buddha, and the excellent lords on the tenth spiritual level, such as the Lords of the Three Spiritual Races,⁴⁵ Vajragarpha, and Maitreyanātha, as well as the great originators [of philosophical systems] and the excellent realized experts, such as noble Asaṅga, the great brahmin Saraha, and the great pandita Nāropa. And because I have avoided

exaggeration and denigration, and have written after thoroughly mastering their intentions exactly as they are.

It may be thought, "You are arrogant in having realized their intentions exactly as they are, but aren't your ideas in disagreement with those of other Tibetan masters precisely because you haven't actually realized them?"

That is not the way it is. The causes for a lack of realization are certainly inferior intelligence, a lack of the oral instructions of an excellent [master], little study, no experience and realization in meditation, being filled with pride and arrogance, determining truth and falsehood on the basis of presumptions and quantity of talk, and so forth. But I first engaged in much study of the great scriptural traditions, and then engaged in the practice of the oral instructions of India and Tibet which are known to be profound, and the precise experience and realization of each of them actually arose.

Then, as a result of the entrance of a little of the blessing of having encountered the definitive meaning of the great root tantras, the oral instructions of glorious Kalāpa,⁴⁶ the uncommonly profound heart-advice of the Kalkins on the tenth spiritual level, I discovered many profound essential points which have not been discovered, have not been realized, and have not been mastered by egotistical scholars, most great meditators endowed with experience and realization, and most of those who are arrogant as great upholders of secret mantra. Because a fine realization burst forth from within, and because I have an exceptional certainty untainted by doubts, not only most great meditators endowed with experience and realization, and those who are arrogant as great upholders of secret mantra, but even the Buddha definitely could not turn me back from this.

It may also be thought, "All that certainty is from blurred and dim meditation, or from misunderstanding; there are no perfect scriptural quotations for proof."

There is no lack [of such proof], because there are a great many clear quotations, as well as reasoning and esoteric instructions, from those upon the twelfth spiritual level, those upon the tenth spiritual level, and excellent realized experts

such as Nāgārjuna and his spiritual sons, and the great pandita Nāropa. Although that is the case, I have not written them here from fear of being overly verbose, but if you wish and are interested, I will write and offer them later.⁴⁷

Among these points [which I have written about], there are certainly several exceptional ones which are in disagreement with some that have been previously known in Tibet. But you have been accustomed to the previous philosophical system for a long time, so that the propensity for it has become firm, and many in Tibet adhere to that tradition. Therefore, although there is a difference of firm and unstable propensities for these previous and later philosophical systems, and a difference in the numbers of adherents, without giving in to the influence of those differences, please take as witnesses the scriptures of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and then examine them with an attitude of unbiased honesty as to which [system] is true.⁴⁸

As this and many other passages make clear, there was certainly considerable opposition to Dolpopa's theories. Specifically, he felt that most people had already closed their minds to the teachings of definitive meaning. He often mentions the presumptions and prejudice inherent in the established traditions of his time as one of the greatest factors inhibiting the widespread acceptance of his ideas. He was presenting his case to a prejudiced jury. It is therefore curious that not a single contemporary text has survived in which hostile testimony against Dolpopa is preserved. It may well be that the full reaction to his doctrine did not find open expression until after his death.

3. The Zhentong Tradition after Dolpopa

Dolpopa was surrounded by a group of scholars as formidable as any in fourteenth-century Tibet. His most influential successors in the Jonang tradition were his senior disciples Nyaön Kunga Bal, Mati Panchen Jamyang Lodrö, and the great abbot Choley Namgyal. Major works by both Nyaön and Mati Panchen are extant, and demonstrate the extent to which they followed Dolpopa's example when dealing with crucial doctrinal questions. In particular, it was

the monastery the new name of Genden Phuntsok Ling. This was all done in 1658.¹¹⁷

From this time the Jonang tradition was suppressed as an independent school in Central and Western Tibet. Nevertheless, the teachings of the Zhentong and the Kālacakra according to the Jonang lineage was continued even in those areas, although the far eastern Amdo monastery of Dzamtang and its affiliates now became the sole remaining centers which were openly Jonang.¹¹⁸ The Jonang teachings of the Zhentong view and the Kālacakra instructions have continued to be transmitted and practiced up to the present day. However, their survival in mainstream Tibetan religion has not been due to the presence of the Dzamtang enclave of Jonang followers in the relative isolation of Amdo, but to the influence of several great Nyingma and Kagyü masters from the Kham region of eastern Tibet who came to accept and actively teach Dolpopa's controversial views.

The Nyingma master Katok Rikzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755) was responsible for bringing about a sort of renaissance of the Jonang teachings of the Zhentong and the Kālacakra by introducing them to some of the leading Kagyü teachers of his time. In one of his versified autobiographical accounts, Tsewang Norbu notes that even as a child he felt great faith whenever he heard the names of Dolpopa and his immediate disciples.¹¹⁹ His natural affinity for the Zhentong view and the Kālacakra teachings became understandable later when the master from whom he received the transmission of the Jonang teachings recognized him as the rebirth of Dolpopa's disciple Mati Panchen Lodrö Gyaltsen, one of the pair of translators responsible for the Jonang translation of the *Kālacakra tantra* and the *Vimalaprabhā*.¹²⁰

In 1726, as he was passing through Tsang province in route to the Kathmandu valley in Nepal, Tsewang Norbu first made an effort to obtain the Jonang teachings from the great yogin Kunzang Wangpo, one of whose teachers had been a direct disciple of Tāranātha. Kuzang Wangpo was in strict retreat at the hermitage of Rulag Drepung, now renamed Genden Khachö due to its enforced change into a Geluk establishment, and Tsewang Norbu was not even able to see him, although he spent three days trying. He was very impressed with this master's serious meditation practice, and became even more determined to receive the Jonang transmissions from him.¹²¹

On his return to Tibet toward the end of 1728, Tsewang Norbu again approached Kunzang Wangpo, and this time succeeded in receiving the entire transmission of the Jonang teachings. Kunzang Wangpo bestowed upon him the instructions of the view of the Zhentong approach to the realization of the Great Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma chen po'i lta khrid*), the full Kālacakra initiations, as well as the complete teachings of the Six-branch Yoga, and many nonsectarian (*ris med*) teachings. He also received *The One Hundred Instructions of Jonang* (*Jo nang khrid bryga*) compiled by Kunga Drolchok, and the textual transmissions for the collected works (*gsung bum*) of both Dolpopa and Tāranātha. From this information it can be seen that although the Jonang institutions had been converted to the Geluk tradition, the original teachings from Dolpopa were still taught and practiced in those same monasteries even in the middle of the eighteenth century. The fifth Dalai Lama's earlier attempts to stamp out the Jonang teachings had been successful only on the surface, as had indeed been the case in the initial phases of the conversion operation discussed above. Contrary to the general impression, the teaching transmissions had survived not only in the far eastern region of Amdo but in the original Tsang areas near Jonang. In fact, this picture becomes even clearer when it is taken into account that Tsewang Norbu himself went to Jonang in 1734, ascended the teaching throne previously occupied by Dolpopa and Tāranātha, and gave many initiations, textual transmissions, and esoteric instructions of the original Jonang teachings to a large gathering.¹²² At least during this period the Geluk authorities were obviously not exerting great efforts to prevent the teachings of the Jonang tradition from being spread or revived even in Tsang.

Tsewang Norbu later spread these teachings in Central Tibet, where he gave a number of Jonang transmissions to the thirteenth Karmapa, Didiul Dorje (1733–1797), and the tenth Zhamar, Chödrup Gyantso (1742–1792).¹²³ But Tsewang Norbu's most significant role in terms of the continuation of the Jonang lineages was as a teacher of the great Situ Panchen Chögyi Jungney (1770–1774). Situ Panchen had already been to Dakden and Jonang in 1723, several years before Tsewang Norbu's first visit. From the description in Situ's autobiography, it was an important event. From his account it is known that Tāranātha's silver stupa reliquary at Dakden had already been destroyed long before. According to Situ this had been

done when the Geluk conversion had been ordered by the Fifth Dalai Lama at the instigation of his teacher Möndropa. Situ noted that although Dakden was now a Geluk institute, there were some old monks who had not given up the original Jonang tradition.¹²⁴ He made attempts to obtain copies of Jonang works, but they had been placed under seal by the order of the central government.¹²⁵ Situ felt great sadness at what had so quickly befallen Tārānātha's center, and lamented the degenerate times. But when he went to Jonang itself the next day he found about seven hundred Jonang nuns there who had not changed their tradition to that of the Geluk.¹²⁶

Twenty-five years later, in 1748, Tsewang Norbu and Situ spent time together in the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. Although Situ had clearly been very interested in the Jonang tradition for many years, it was his teacher Tsewang Norbu who now insisted that he accept the Zhentong view, which he taught him in great detail, apparently at the great stūpa of Bodhnāth.¹²⁷ Situ relates that Tsewang Norbu ordered him to uphold the profound view of the Zhentong, and that the acceptance of this view would create an auspicious pattern of events (*ten 'brel*) which would lead to Situ's longevity, and the vast spread of his activities.¹²⁸ Situ further mentions that there were several different brands of Zhentong, among which he adhered most closely to that of the Seventh Lord and Zilungpa, which was somewhat different than that of Dolpopa.¹²⁹ In the end it would be Situ, more than anyone, who would create the environment for the widespread acceptance of the Zhentong theories in the next century. As Smith already mentioned in 1970, "It was Si-tu who had blended the seemingly irreconcilable *gzhans tongs* and Mahāmudrā positions and spread them throughout the Dkārgyud-pa traditions of Kham's."¹³⁰

The eventual result of this revival initiated by Tsewang Norbu and Situ Panchen was the crucial role of the Zhentong and other Jonang teachings in the phenomenal nonsectarian (*ris med*) movement of the nineteenth century in Kham.¹³¹ This movement included such great masters as Dza Baltrul (1808–1887), Jamgön Kongdrul (1813–1899), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–1892),¹³² and later Mipham Gyantso (1846–1912).¹³³ From among them, Jamgön Kongdrul was the most assertive in his advocacy of the Zhentong viewpoint, which he fully incorporated into his own immensely influential works.¹³⁴ Kongdrul was also extremely devoted

to the Six-branch Yoga of the Kālacakra, in which he carefully followed the tradition of Dolpopa and Tārānātha.¹³⁵

The Zhentong teachings and the Jonang practice of the Six-branch Yoga have thus come down to the present day in large part through the transmission lineages of Kongdrul, Khyentse, and Mipham. It is this tradition which has reached a widespread audience, whereas the Jonang tradition proper, which has been preserved in the Amdo monastery of Dzamtang and its affiliated establishments, has remained quite isolated.

From the turn of the twentieth century until the present day the Zhentong tradition has been maintained by several of Tibet's greatest teachers, all from eastern Tibet, and all followers of the lineages taught by Kongdrul, Khyentse, and Mipham. Jamyang Chögyi Lodrö (1896–1959), the great heir to the nonsectarian movement, was sympathetic to the Zhentong view, and wrote a guru-yoga text focused upon Dolpopa.¹³⁶ The Nyingma master Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Rabsel Dawa (1910–1991), the most important disciple of Jamyang Chögyi Lodrö, was very partial to the Zhentong, as were the Kagyü master Kalu Rinpoche, Rangjung Kunkyab (1905–1989), and the Nyingma master Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (1904–1987).¹³⁷ Nowadays most Kagyü and Nyingma teachers follow the lines of explication and practice passed down by these three masters. As a result, among those Kagyü and Nyingma teachers who accept the Zhentong view, the Zhentong interpretations of Kongdrul and Mipham in particular are now the most widespread.¹³⁸ Outside of the Jonang tradition now centered in Dzamtang, none of Dolpopa's own treatises are still being transmitted. Not even the minimal reading transmission (*lung*) of the writings of Dolpopa himself seems to be current among present-day leading representatives of the Kagyü and Nyingma brands of the Zhentong.¹³⁹ When the Zhentong is taught by these teachers, the different works of Kongdrul and Mipham, which vary a great deal from the original teachings of Dolpopa, are the treatises of choice.¹⁴⁰ What is now taught as the Zhentong view in the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions represents a synthesis that has developed over the centuries, primarily in order to enable Dolpopa's most vital insights to be incorporated into the already established doctrines of the Great Seal and the Great Perfection. In the following chapter some of the most essential aspects of Dolpopa's own doctrine will be presented as a preface to the translations of his works that appear in part 2.