

The Doctrinal Position of the Wisdom Tradition: Great Madhyamaka

It has now become possible to identify the specific school or tradition of Buddhism in Tibet that represents the doctrinal position of the Wisdom Tradition known today as Theosophy. It is the “Great Madhyamaka” or “Great Middle Way” (in Tibetan, *dbu ma chen po*)¹ school or tradition. This tradition, preserved for the last millennium in Tibet, has only become known to us in recent years.

Theosophy is said to represent a secret Wisdom Tradition that was once universal. But knowledge of its very existence long ago disappeared from public consciousness. It became hidden, or more colloquially, went “underground.” In recent centuries, it is supposed to have been preserved by a secret brotherhood located in Tibet. From two members of this brotherhood, H. P. Blavatsky learned of the existence of this Wisdom Tradition. Under their instruction, she made its existence known to the world, and brought out some of its teachings. She called these teachings Theosophy. They were greeted with much skepticism when they came out in the late 1800s, as would be expected of any allegedly secret teachings. Theosophy never claimed to be Tibetan Buddhism; but many, among its critics and supporters alike, thought that its teachings should be found therein.

The teachings found in Tibet are those of Mahāyāna or Northern Buddhism. They are usually thought of in terms of wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), coming in the lineage of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī through the teacher Nāgārjuna in the school or tradition called Madhyamaka, the “Middle Way.” The teaching of compassion (*karuṇā*), comes in the lineage of the bodhisattva Maitreya through the teacher Asaṅga in the school or tradition called Yogācāra, “Practice of Yoga,” where yoga means meditation.

As the teachings of Tibet became accessible in the last few decades of the twentieth century, it could be seen that these agreed with those of Theosophy on the fundamental teaching of compassion, but they did not agree on the basic doctrinal teaching of emptiness. This basic Madhyamaka teaching was accepted by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism as their doctrinal position. Thus, even though all schools accepted the Yogācāra teachings on compassion, they did not accept as ultimately true the Yogācāra doctrinal position. This position was characterized as Citta-mātra, “Mind-Only,” meaning that there is nothing but mind. Rather, following the basic Madhyamaka teaching of emptiness, Tibetan Buddhists held that the mind is empty of any inherent or ultimate existence. Holding the Madhyamaka doctrinal position, however, did not stop them in the least from adopting and applying the Yogācāra teachings on compassion. Indeed, nowhere else on earth has compassion been developed and cultivated to the extent it was in Tibet; so much so, that it is seen as Tibetan Buddhism’s most characteristic feature.

Similarly, Theosophy’s basic platform is “brotherhood,” the brotherhood of all humanity, a quite radical idea in the late 1800s when it was brought out. That this was based on the Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of compassion, the bodhisattva ideal, can be seen throughout the Theosophical writings, above all in *The Voice of the Silence*.² This small treatise is said to have been translated by Blavatsky from *The Book of the Golden Precepts*. These precepts, she says, “are written variously, sometimes in Tibetan but mostly in ideographs.”³ The language of these ideographs she calls “Senzar,” describing it as a secret sacerdotal language. From this language she also translated the “Stanzas of Dzyan,” on the origin of the cosmos and of humanity, published in her greatest work, *The Secret Doctrine*. She tells us that both of her sources, *The Book of Dzyan* and *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, form part of the same series.⁴ In her translation of parts of the latter as *The Voice of the Silence*, we find the key term “Ālaya” used eight times.⁵ In her translation of the “Stanzas of Dzyan” in *The Secret Doctrine*, “Ālaya” is featured in the last verse of the first stanza.⁶ This is a distinctive Yogācāra doctrinal term.

The term *ālaya*, usually understood to stand for the fuller *ālaya-vijñāna*,⁷ is the single most characteristic Yogācāra term. *Ālaya-vijñāna* has been translated as “storehouse consciousness,” “substratum consciousness,” “foundational consciousness,” or “mind basis-of-all.” It is defined by Asaṅga as *citta*, “mind,”⁸ as in *Cittamātra*, “Mind-Only,” the distinctive doctrinal position that is usually held to characterize the Yogācāra school or tradition. We find further that the distinctive Yogācāra doctrinal term *pariniṣpanna* is also used in the “Stanzas of Dzyan,” twice.⁹ This is one of three terms that together give the Yogācāra description of everything that is. Things partake of three characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*), or natures (*svabhāva*): the “imagined” (*parikalpita*), which is unreal, the “dependent” (*paratantra*), which is partially real, and the “perfected” (*pariniṣpanna*), which is real. Since *pariniṣpanna*, like *ālaya*, is not used elsewhere, these provide us with good evidence for tracing Theosophy’s doctrinal affiliation to the Yogācāra school or tradition of Buddhism.

However, Theosophy does not teach the doctrine of “Mind-Only” (*citta-mātra*), or its other name, “Consciousness-Only” (*vijñapti-mātra*). No, Theosophy clearly does not accept an ultimate consciousness.¹⁰ So what Theosophy teaches cannot be described as *vijñāna-vāda*, the “doctrine of consciousness” [as ultimate reality]. These three terms are used to characterize the Yogācāra doctrinal position. Despite using Yogācāra terms, this is not the doctrinal position of Theosophy. No more than the Mādhyamikas of Tibet does Theosophy accept the Yogācāra doctrinal position as ultimate. But neither can Theosophy be identified with the widely known Madhyamaka or “Middle Way” doctrinal positions, teaching emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

In recent years there has come to be known in the West a school or tradition that calls itself “Great Madhyamaka.” It is different from the two well-known forms of Madhyamaka, the Svātantrika Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. When the Madhyamaka teaching, the teaching of emptiness, first reached Tibet from India, it was in the form of what later came to be called Svātantrika Madhyamaka, the Madhyamaka that uses autonomous or independent inferences in its reasoning to

prove emptiness. This form of Madhyamaka comes down from the teacher Nāgārjuna through the commentator Bhavya (or Bhā[va]viveka). Then at the beginning of the twelfth century C.E., through the work of the translator Pa-tsap Nyima Drak, Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka came into Tibet.¹¹ This became the dominant form of Madhyamaka there. It comes down from Nāgārjuna through the commentators Buddhapālita and later Candrakīrti. In its reasonings to prove emptiness it employs a type of statement that shows the unwanted consequences of whatever may be postulated by others. So both of these forms of Madhyamaka prove emptiness, but by using different methods. Such are the two kinds of Madhyamaka that are described in the standard textbooks on tenets since the fifteenth century.¹² There is no mention of a third kind, Great Madhyamaka.

Great Madhyamaka is described in the section on tenets of *The Treasury of Knowledge*, written by the co-founder of the Ri-mé or nonsectarian movement, Jamgon Kongtrul, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It draws on earlier works by the Jonang teacher Tāranātha and by the Sakya teacher Shakya Chokden. An English translation of this section was published in 2007.¹³ The work by Tāranātha that it draws on, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, was also published in English in 2007.¹⁴ Jamgon Kongtrul first distinguishes the kinds of Madhyamaka, placing the two well-known kinds, Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, together as Rangtong Madhyamaka, and calling the third kind Shentong Madhyamaka. Great Madhyamaka is the original name for this used by the Jonang teacher Dolpopa, who first promulgated it in Tibet in the fourteenth century. The Tibetan term Rangtong (*rang stong*) means “self-empty”; Shentong (*gzhan stong*) means “other-empty.” They are descriptive terms used to distinguish the respective doctrines of emptiness.

Rangtong Madhyamaka, both Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, teaches the emptiness of “self-nature” (*svabhāva*), meaning real existence, of all *dharmas*, the elements of existence that make up the world, often translated as “phenomena.” They are “self-empty”; they do not ultimately exist. Shentong Madhyamaka also accepts this emptiness, but says that this is not the whole

picture. It adds that in ultimate truth there is something that is not empty of real or inherent existence, but that really exists. It is empty of everything other than itself; it is “other-empty.” Jamgon Kongtrul explains the differences between the two in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, here quoted from Ringu Tulku’s 2006 book, *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great*.

For both Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamaka, all phenomena included in the relative truth are emptiness, and there is the cessation of all fabricated extremes in meditation. Their views do not differ on these points. However, in relation to post-meditation, to clearly distinguish the tenet systems, merely in terms of the way they use terminology, Shentong says that the dharmata, or true nature, is there, and Rangtong says the dharmata is not there. In the ultimate analysis, using the reasoning that examines the ultimate, Shentong says nondual primordial wisdom is truly established, and Rangtong says primordial wisdom is not truly established. These two statements delineate their main differences.¹⁵

He is saying that for both of them, all conventional phenomena, our whole world, is empty, i.e., “self-empty,” and therefore does not exist in the ultimate sense. For Shentong Madhyamaka, however, the *dharmatā*, which is the inscrutable true nature of all things or all phenomena (*dharmas*), and primordial wisdom (*jñāna*), do exist in the ultimate sense. They are “other-empty,” i.e., empty of everything other than themselves. But these, for Rangtong Madhyamaka, are “self-empty” like everything else; hence they do not exist in the ultimate sense. As may be seen, the doctrinal difference between the two is significant. In the spirit of Ri-mé nonsectarianism, Ringu Tulku comments here:

So, their difference lies in the words they use to describe the dharmata and primordial wisdom. Shentong describes the dharmata, the true nature, as ultimately real, while Rangtong philosophers fear that if it is described in that way, people might understand it as the concept of a soul or atma. The Shentong

philosophers think there is a greater chance of misunderstanding if the enlightened state is described as unreal and void. Their debates rest on how to phrase the teachings to have the least danger of misinterpretation. Kongtrul finds the Rangtong presentation best for dissolving concepts, and the Shentong presentation best for describing the actual experience.¹⁶

It must be noted that the Shentong doctrinal position accepts the Rangtong doctrinal position, but the Rangtong doctrinal position does not accept the Shentong doctrinal position. The debates on this in Tibet, therefore, were historically not very conciliatory. For the numerically dominant proponents of the Rangtong position, the Shentong position was akin to the non-Buddhist *ātman* or soul doctrine of the Hindus, and thus was heretical. For them, i.e., for most Tibetan Buddhists, the same would be true of the doctrinal position of Theosophy.

The Shentong or Great Madhyamaka doctrinal position, like that of Rangtong Madhyamaka, and in agreement with that of Theosophy, says the entire phenomenal universe is empty of any inherent nature that would make it ultimately real, or exist in the ultimate sense. But for Shentong the real ultimates for which we have no adequate words do exist in the ultimate sense, being empty of everything other than themselves. This teaching is very much in agreement with what is taught in Theosophy. In its most basic statement, “The Secret Doctrine establishes three fundamental propositions,” the first of which is:

An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, “unthinkable and unspeakable.”¹⁷

Thus, both Great Madhyamaka and Theosophy are willing to postulate something that is ultimately real beyond the dualities of thought, beyond concepts.

Great Madhyamaka does not trace its origin to the teacher Nāgārjuna, and hence to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, as do both Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, but rather traces it to the teacher Asaṅga, and hence to the bodhisattva Maitreya.¹⁸ This is of much significance to the present inquiry. It means that Great Madhyamaka finds its origin in the five treatises of Maitreya, and in the exegetical works thereon by Asaṅga and his brother Vasubandhu. These, of course, are Yogācāra treatises. But here they are understood as teaching Great Madhyamaka rather than Cittamātra, “Mind-Only.” Their Yogācāra terms are here used to teach Shentong, “other-empty.” We now see how the “Stanzas of Dzyan” may use the distinctive Yogācāra terms *ālaya* and *pariniṣpanna*, and yet not teach “Consciousness-Only,” but rather a boundless and immutable principle beyond the range and reach of thought. Indeed, like Great Madhyamaka, the origin of these stanzas, too, is traced to Maitreya.

The “Book of Dzyan,” from which stanzas are given in *The Secret Doctrine*, is said by Blavatsky to be “utterly unknown to our philologists, or at any rate was never heard of by them under its present name.”¹⁹ This is because it is only a generic name, in which “Dzyan” is a Tibetan phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit term *jñāna*, meaning “primordial wisdom.”²⁰ As seen above, this is distinguished as ultimately real in Great Madhyamaka. While she gave us no clue of its actual name there in *The Secret Doctrine*, she did write in an earlier private letter to A. P. Sinnett:

I have finished an enormous Introductory Chapter, or *Preamble*, Prologue, call it what you will; just to show the reader that the text as it goes, every Section beginning with a page of translation from the Book of *Dzyan* and the Secret Book of “Maitreya Buddha” *Champai chhos Nga* (in prose, not the five books in verse known, which are a blind) are no fiction.²¹

The wording here could indicate either that the Book of Dzyan and the Secret Book of Maitreya Buddha are the same book or two different books, but the translation we have of the stanzas does not show two different portions. She may be referring to

the combined ancient Senzar stanzas with later Sanskrit glosses that she says she blended together in her translation.²² In any case, she here identifies the Book of Dzyan with the Secret Book of Maitreya, and distinguishes it from the known five books of Maitreya in verse. With this we no longer have to merely infer from the presence of distinctive Yogācāra terms that the source of her “Stanzas of Dzyan” is Maitreya. It is stated for us.

In conclusion, we now know that there exists a school or tradition of Buddhism in Tibet known as Great Madhyamaka, tracing its origin to Maitreya and using Yogācāra terms to teach an ultimate that is not consciousness, but is beyond it. It teaches the ultimate existence of something that is Shentong, or “empty of other,” and an ultimately existing primordial wisdom (*jñāna* or *dzyan*). We may reasonably identify this Great Madhyamaka as the doctrinal position of the Wisdom Tradition known today as Theosophy. We may say, in brief, that the doctrinal position of Theosophy is Great Madhyamaka.

Confirmation from a Mongolian Lama

Confirmation of this has come from a quite unexpected and independent source. Paul Brunton when visiting Angkor in Cambodia in the 1930s met there a Mongolian lama who was also visiting at that time. This Mongolian teacher told him of a secret tradition that is the same as the Wisdom Tradition known today as Theosophy. The information he gave came out in 1987 in Brunton’s posthumously published notebooks.

There is first a secret tradition which has combined and united Hinduism, the religion of many Gods, and Buddhism, the religion without a God. There is next an unbroken line of sages who held and taught this doctrine as being the real and final truth about life. . . . The tradition itself was limited by the mental incapacity of the masses to the circle of a few sages and their immediate disciples. Vedanta and Mahayana are corruptions of this pure doctrine, but of all known systems they come closest to it.²³

Regarding this unbroken line of sages, Brunton asked him “if they are the same adepts as those spoken of by H. P. Blavatsky.”²⁴ The Mongolian lama then gave an account of how Blavatsky came to study with them, and of her younger co-disciple, Lama Dorzhiev, who we can infer was this Mongolian lama’s teacher. About the adepts of Tibet, he said, “Their location was always a secret; even most of the High Lamas never knew it.”²⁵ What he told Brunton about their doctrine, through a translator, was to change his life. Brunton then gave out some of this to the world in modern English as “mentalism.”

Through the services of an educated Chinese disciple who was with him, we were able to converse about Buddhism and other matters. He gave out a teaching which formed the basis of mentalism and which was occasionally so subtle that it went above my head, but which I understood sufficiently to revolutionize my outlook. Some of its tenets were incorporated in the mentalism explained in my books *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* [1941], and *The Wisdom of the Overself* [1943].²⁶

Brunton carefully avoided using any Sanskrit terms when formulating this teaching, since he believed that it had to be given in modern terms.²⁷ Nonetheless, through stray comments he made, we are able to verify that the “mentalism” he derived from this lama’s teachings is in fact Yogācāra, or Cittamātra, “Mind-Only,” or Vijñaptimātra, “Consciousness-Only.”²⁸ He did not, however, regard mentalism as the ultimate truth, as he makes clear in a few places.²⁹ But when he wrote, in the 1940s, nothing was known of any teaching like Great Madhyamaka that used Yogācāra terminology to teach something beyond “Mind-Only,” or mentalism. He therefore took Yogācāra as “Mind-Only” and constructed his mentalism accordingly. It is clear that the teaching he got from this Mongolian lama was Yogācāra based. This provides independent confirmation that the doctrinal basis of the Wisdom Tradition known today as Theosophy is a Yogācāra teaching, a teaching that is ultimately understood as Great Madhyamaka.³⁰

Supplement: The Background of Great Madhyamaka**The Madhyamaka Background**

The fact that Great Madhyamaka traces its lineage back to Maitreya does not mean that it does not go back to Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna is regarded by all as the founder of Madhyamaka, in the sense of being the one who first formulated the Buddha's teachings given in the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*) *sūtras* into a philosophical school or tradition, the Madhyamaka or "Middle Way." Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the primary teaching of this tradition, whether Svātantrika Madhyamaka, Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, or Great Madhyamaka. For its understanding of emptiness as Shentong, or "other-empty," Great Madhyamaka utilizes the hymns of Nāgārjuna.³¹ It is in these hymns, they say, that Nāgārjuna reveals the highest understanding of emptiness.

Nāgārjuna's greatest work is the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*. This is normally understood, even by Great Mādhyamikas, to teach emptiness as Rangtong, or "self-empty." This teaching, that all things (*dharma*) are empty of any self-nature (*svabhāva*) that would allow them to exist on their own, is considered in Svātantrika Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka to be the highest understanding of emptiness. This teaching is also accepted in Great Madhyamaka, but as the next to highest. The question of exactly what understanding of emptiness Nāgārjuna ultimately intended is an open one. There is a brief text among "The Hundred and Eight Guidebooks of the Jo nang pas" that says Great Madhyamaka is the ancient tradition of Madhyamaka following the original texts of Nāgārjuna and his spiritual son Āryadeva, not yet divided into Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika.

Concerning the *dBu ma chen po'i khrid* ["The Guidance on the Great Middle Way"]: it was received by the bodhisattva Zla ba rgyal mtshan from the Newar Pe nya pa, one who belonged to the lineage of Nāgārjuna, father and son [i.e., Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva]. He taught it to rDzi lung pa 'Od zer grags pa, and he to Gro ston, who propounded it widely. There are some

who hold that this was the lineage of the *dBu ma lta khrid* [“The Guidance on the View of the Middle Way”] that came to the venerable Red mda’ ba from mNga’ ris, in West Tibet, but that is uncertain. This is [also] called the *gZhung phyi mo’i dbu ma* [“The Middle Way according to the Original Texts,” i.e., of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva], and so is the ancient tradition, not yet divided into Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika. That which is distinguished as the special doctrine of Red mda’ ba, however, is the unblemished adherence to the Prāsaṅgika tradition, that follows the texts of the glorious Candrakīrti.³²

While Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka was dominant in Tibet since the fifteenth century, preceded by centuries when Svātantrika held the field there, these divisions did not exist previously in India. There was simply Madhyamaka, with different teachers giving different emphases. Only later and retrospectively were their teachings classified as Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika. Moreover, in the earlier centuries of the first millennium C.E., even Yogācāra and Madhyamaka were not yet separate schools of Buddhism.³³ Indeed, we have Yogācāra writers producing commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s great work, the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, including even Asaṅga. None of these were translated into Tibetan, but a couple were translated into Chinese. Prof. Seyfort Ruegg writes:

It is to be noted that among the earlier commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s writings there are some by important masters of the Yogācārin/Vijñānavādin school. . . . The existence of such commentaries on the MMK [*Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*] by leading authorities of the Vijñānavāda clearly indicates that Nāgārjuna’s work was not considered to be the exclusive property of the Mādhyamikas in the narrow sense of a particular school, and that it was regarded as fundamental by Mahāyānist thinkers of more than one tendency.³⁴

So it is entirely possible that Great Madhyamaka was an early tradition of Madhyamaka using the Yogācāra terminology employed by Maitreya and Asaṅga to explain the original texts

of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, before the time of Buddhapālita and Bhā[va]viveka, who were later considered the founders of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika divisions, respectively.

As for the question of what understanding of emptiness Nāgārjuna ultimately intended, this will have to remain open. Despite the repeated assertions of many Tibetan lamas today that it is definitely the Prāsaṅgika understanding, and the fact that this dominated in Tibet for the last six centuries, this was not the dominant understanding in India. In Madhyamaka's original homeland the Svātantrika understanding was equally widespread, if not more so. Not only was Prāsaṅgika not the dominant understanding of Madhyamaka in India, but even Madhyamaka itself was not the dominant understanding of Buddhism there, as it was in Tibet. In India, the Yogācāra form of Buddhism was equally widespread, if not more so. We learn in standard histories of Buddhism that the pivotal Prāsaṅgika teacher Candrakīrti was continually defeated in debate by the Yogācāra teacher Candragomin over several years at Nālandā monastic university.³⁵ We may recall here that the Yogācāra commentaries on Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* never reached Tibet. All this serves to show that, historically speaking, no one understanding of emptiness is clearly demonstrable as being what Nāgārjuna ultimately intended. For this we will have to await the discovery of Nāgārjuna's own commentary.

It is a strange and inexplicable fact that Nāgārjuna's own commentary on his greatest work, the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, is apparently lost. The one attributed to him now found in the Tibetan canon, titled *Akutobhaya*, is not authentic according to Tsongkhapa and others.³⁶ It is a brief commentary, consisting of only 70 folios in its Tibetan translation as found in the Derge edition of the Tengyur. Had this brief commentary actually been by Nāgārjuna, they say, it would have been cited by all later commentators. Yet it is not cited by any of them, even though much of it is incorporated into Buddhapālita's commentary.³⁷ But the early biography of Nāgārjuna translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in 405 C.E. describes the *Akutobhaya* commentary, the original one, as very extensive, of 100,000 verses measure.

He [Nāgārjuna] explains the *Mahāyāna* in detail and composes the *Upadeśa* of 100,000 *Gāthās*. Besides, he writes *the Splendid Way of the Buddha of 5000 Gāthās, the great Śāstra* (textbook) *on the art of compassion of 5,000 Gāthās, the Madhyamaka-śāstra of 500 Gāthās*. He causes the spreading of the *Mahāyāna* doctrine far into India. He also composes the *Akutobhaya-śāstra with 100,000 Gāthās; the Madhyamaka-śāstra* is contained therein.³⁸

It would be easy for us to dismiss such seemingly extravagant numbers as fantasy, except that Kumārajīva actually translated the *Upadeśa* of 100,000 verses measure into Chinese, and this is extant today.³⁹ We therefore have reason to trust his very early account that Nāgārjuna's own original *Akutobhaya* commentary on the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, which Kumārajīva refers to as the *Madhyamaka-śāstra of 500 Gāthās*, consisted of the measure of 100,000 verses. But inexplicably, it is lost.

What we can deduce from the earliest available sources is that the basic understanding of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* was probably what later came to be called Prāsaṅgika, but that this approach using negative dialectic was not seen as contradictory to an approach using more positive language. That is, it was not exclusively Prāsaṅgika, as it became in Tibet for the Gelugpas. This may be deduced from the fact that the earliest available commentary, the brief *Chung lun* translated by Kumārajīva into Chinese along with the the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* in 402 C.E., takes a basically Prāsaṅgika approach.⁴⁰ The *Chung lun* is closely similar to the brief *Akutobhaya* commentary that was translated into Tibetan five centuries later,⁴¹ although in China it was not attributed to Nāgārjuna as it was in Tibet. It is now known that fully a third of the *Akutobhaya* is incorporated verbatim into the commentary by Buddhapālita.⁴² It is this commentary that came to be seen as the source of the Prāsaṅgika understanding of Madhyamaka, when Candrakīrti in his commentary defended it against the method used by Bhā[va]viveka in his commentary, later to become known as Svātantrika. The Prāsaṅgika method found in Buddhapālita's commentary, then, can be traced back to the *Chung lun* translated by Kumārajīva, our earliest extant

source. Kumārajīva obviously accepted it as correctly giving the basic import of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*. At the same time, he also obviously accepted the lengthy *Upadeśa* translated by him as correctly giving Nāgārjuna's import, a text known for its more positive approach to reality. Prof. Seyfort Ruegg writes:

Especially noteworthy are the references found in the *Upadeśa to a positive theory of reality (*dharmatā, tathatā, dharmadhātu, bhūtakoṭi*).⁴³

It is this positive theory of reality that Great Madhyamaka finds in Nāgārjuna's hymns, especially the *Dharmadhātu-stava*.⁴⁴ It may be that Nāgārjuna's original *Akutobhaya* commentary of 100,000 verses measure, like his *Upadeśa* of 100,000 verses measure, also includes positive descriptions of reality. We know at least that Kumārajīva apparently saw no conflict between the *Upadeśa* with its positive characterization of reality and the *Chung lun* with its use of the Prāsaṅgika dialectic of negations. This was before Madhyamaka was divided into Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, and may reflect the ancient tradition of "The Middle Way according to the Original Texts," as Great Madhyamaka called itself. For Great Madhyamaka, too, there is no conflict in using Prāsaṅgika dialectic to negate the ultimate reality of all phenomenal existence, and using positive terms for an ultimate reality beyond conception, as is done in some of the hymns of Nāgārjuna.⁴⁵

If Great Madhyamaka is in fact the ancient tradition of "The Middle Way according to the Original Texts," it would have drawn upon Nāgārjuna's now lost *Akutobhaya* commentary of 100,000 verses measure for its understanding of emptiness. The custodians of the Wisdom Tradition claim to have access to all such works as this one even now. Works of this importance were not lost, they say, but were withdrawn.⁴⁶ The fact that there is full doctrinal agreement between the Wisdom Tradition and Great Madhyamaka would point to this understanding being the original one intended by Nāgārjuna. The time may soon come when we once again have access to Nāgārjuna's own *Akutobhaya* commentary. Only then can we know for sure.

The Yogācāra Background

Great Madhyamaka traces its lineage back to Aśaṅga and Maitreya, as we learn from only recently available materials. In a 2007 Ph.D. thesis, Michael Sheehy provides a quotation from Ngag dbang Blo gros Grags pa's *Lamp of the Moon: A History of the Jonang Tradition* on the origin of Great Madhyamaka.

With the arrival of the venerable Ārya Aśaṅga (ca. 4th-5th cent.), the chariot tradition of the Great Madhyamaka of definitive meaning was elegantly distinguished and established within the three planes of existence. This was the founding of the definitive secret of the consummate intent of the victorious ones and has been praised as the supreme distinction between the provisional and definitive sections of the Mahāyāna sūtras.⁴⁷

Then, addressing a praise to Ārya Aśaṅga for doing this, Ngag dbang Blo gros Grags pa continues:

In particular, you transcribed the principal intended meaning of the final turning from the Regent Maitreya, the tradition of commentaries on the general intent of the sūtra sections of the Mahāyāna. These include the *Uttaratantra*, the two differentiations, and the two ornaments which together compose the *Five Treasures of Maitreya*. When you studied with these masters, you acquired each of the individual entrances of meditative concentration through merely studying the specific points of meaning. Since these teachings of Maitreya are the intent of the victorious one, they are the consummate definitive meaning composed according to irreversible advice. Exactly as is, this is the vast illumination of the view and meditation of the Gzhan stong Great Madhyamaka.⁴⁸

The writings received by Aśaṅga from Maitreya, then, form the basis of the Great Madhyamaka school or tradition. As is well known, these writings have always been described as Yogācāra, and have usually been thought to teach Mind-Only (*citta-mātra*).

If these texts really teach Great Madhyamaka, why are they so widely believed to teach Mind-Only? According to sources now available, the Mind-Only or Cittamātra understanding of Yogācāra arose with 500 earlier teachers including Avitarka. As explained in *The Treasury of Knowledge* by Jamgon Kongtrul:

The great exalted one of Jonang [Dolpopa] and his followers maintain that Asaṅga and his brother [Vasubandhu] were Madhyamaka masters and that their system of philosophical tenets is the Great Madhyamaka (*dBu ma chen po*).

You may wonder, in that case, who were the founding masters of the Chittamātra system? [The founders and promulgators of the Chittamātra system] were five hundred Mahāyāna masters, great exalted ones of earlier times, such as Avitarka, and others. “Others” means some of their followers and some later Proponents of Mere Cognition (Vijñaptimātra).⁴⁹

Jamgon Kongtrul’s source for this is a text by Tāranātha, who there explains further:

It was well known that there were five hundred Yogācāra masters, such as the great venerable Avitarka, Jñānātala, and others. Their treatises were not translated into Tibetan, in the same way that the treatises of the eighteen orders [were not translated into Tibetan].⁵⁰

Tāranātha makes clear in his *History of Buddhism in India* that these 500 teachers were the first Mahāyāna teachers, and hence preceded Maitreya and Asaṅga by centuries. He reports that they were all followers of the path of Yogācāra Cittamātra.⁵¹ Thus, Mind-Only or Cittamātra is not the teaching of Maitreya and Asaṅga, but arose earlier. Ngag dbang Blo gros Grags pa writes:

Accordingly, after these three councils on the Hīnayāna discourses had convened, it is said that five hundred teachers of

the dharma including the great honorable Avitarka and others came about as adherents of the Mahāyāna. These scriptural collections of the Mahāyāna including the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* and many of the Mahāyāna sūtras were then discovered in various regions, and these teachings were then kept and diffused. From these, the Mahāyāna tradition of the Cittamātra system that asserts actual existence (*dnngos smra ba'i sems tsam lugs*) arose.⁵²

This last statement refers to the tenet of the Mind-Only or Cittamātra system that consciousness (*viññāna*) is truly existent. This is the source of the confusion. Great Madhyamaka does not accept this tenet. Jamgon Kongtrul opens his chapter on Cittamātra tenets with this statement:

Chittamātras state that consciousness is truly existent.⁵³

The translator of Jamgon Kongtrul's text points out that according to him, this is the difference between Mind-Only or Cittamātra and Great Madhyamaka or Shentong Madhyamaka:

The opening verse is a concise statement of one of the Chittamātras' main tenets: they assert consciousness to be truly existent. According to Jamgon Kongtrul, this assertion distinguishes this tenet system from Shentong-Madhyamaka.⁵⁴

Great Madhyamaka holds not that consciousness (*viññāna*) is truly existent, but rather that primordial wisdom (*jñāna*) is truly existent. These two have often been confused, and thus the Yogācāra teachings of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu have often been taken as teaching Mind-Only or Cittamātra. But, says Jamgon Kongtrul, this is a mistake.

This is simply the mistake of those who speak deviously by not distinguishing between Vasubandhu's assertion that primordial wisdom is truly existent and the Cittamātra system's statement that consciousness is truly existent.⁵⁵

So the Great Madhyamaka tradition takes as its sources the Yogācāra works of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, but it does not understand them as teaching Mind-Only or Cittamātra like they are usually understood elsewhere.

The main point, then, is that Great Madhyamaka understands the Yogācāra texts differently than Mind-Only. This is true whether the Mind-Only understanding was taught by 500 early teachers including Avitarka or by some other teachers, and whether these teachers preceded or came after Maitreya and Asaṅga. Granting this, it will still be worthwhile to see how far the account of 500 early teachers including Avitarka from Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* can be verified.

The origin of Yogācāra is normally thought to lie with Maitreya and Asaṅga. They lived, agreeably to both traditional accounts and modern research, at least a couple centuries after Nāgārjuna. Thus, when references to Yogācāra ideas are found in a work by Nāgārjuna, the authenticity of this work is called into question. This work is the *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa*, which gives a sustained critique of Mind-Only ideas in its verses 22-56.⁵⁶ But the researches of Christian Lindtner, showing that this text is quoted as a work of Nāgārjuna's by many early Madhyamaka writers, have provided convincing evidence that it is in fact an authentic Nāgārjuna work.⁵⁷ Now the question is where did the Yogācāra Mind-Only ideas critiqued in it come from.

Yogācāra Mind-Only ideas are found in Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*. Tāranātha's account names this and several other *sūtras* as being brought out at the time of the 500 early teachers including Avitarka.⁵⁸ Lindtner's research agrees that the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* was sufficiently early to be Nāgārjuna's source for the Yogācāra Mind-Only ideas that he critiques, and in fact was.⁵⁹ This answers the question of where these ideas could have come from. But there is an important weakness in this picture. It is unlikely that any Buddhist writer would directly critique a *sūtra*, supposed to contain the words of the Buddha. They would only critique later Buddhist writers' interpretations of a *sūtra*. We are therefore practically obliged to assume that some teachers were then teaching Mind-Only

based on these *sūtras*. Thus some early teachers such as the 500 including Avitarka become not only plausible, but necessary. Their works have been lost, just like the works of the eighteen early Hīnayāna orders that, as said by Tāranātha above, were not translated into Tibetan.⁶⁰

Tāranātha tells us that Avitarka was the teacher of Rahula-bhadra, who was the teacher of Nāgārjuna.⁶¹ So the Mind-Only ideas promulgated by these early teachers reached Nāgārjuna directly. Nāgārjuna, after obtaining the Perfection of Wisdom or *Prajñā-pāramitā sūtras* from the Nāgas, and seeing the central role of the teachings on emptiness in these *sūtras*, was then in a position to say that emptiness was the highest teaching of the Buddha. So emptiness must also be what the Buddha primarily intended in the *Lañkāvatāra* and other Mahāyāna *sūtras* that had come out earlier, even if Yogācāra Mind-Only teachings are also found in them. Thus, the earlier teachers were wrong in taking Mind-Only as what these *sūtras* ultimately teach, and this needed to be countered. This Nāgārjuna did in his *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa*. He did this a couple centuries before Aśaṅga arrived on the scene. The Madhyamaka teaching, taking emptiness as the primary teaching of all the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, was thus in place when Aśaṅga arrived.

Great Madhyamaka fully agrees with Nāgārjuna's rejection of Mind-Only, and his making emptiness the primary teaching of the Mahāyāna. Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka was only furthered by Aśaṅga and Maitreya, not opposed by them. Aśaṅga spent twelve years in meditation trying to understand the import of the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras* that Nāgārjuna brought out.⁶² Maitreya then showed Aśaṅga how the path to enlightenment was hidden away in these Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras*, teaching him the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, a book destined to become the main textbook on the path used in all the Tibetan monasteries. Maitreya also taught Yogācāra treatises to Aśaṅga. Mahāyāna at that time still remained a single tradition. It was not until later that Madhyamaka and Yogācāra were seen as separate branches of Mahāyāna. Bhā[va]viveka was the first writer known to have distinguished Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as different schools,

specifically naming Asaṅga and Vasubandhu with Yogācāra, and opposing it.⁶³ Candrakīrti followed him in this, continuing to distinguish the two, and continuing to oppose Yogācāra.⁶⁴ Thus the distinction of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka coincided with what was later viewed as the separation of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika schools of Madhyamaka, of Bhā[va]viveka and Candrakīrti respectively. Great Madhyamaka traces its lineage back to before that separation, when the Yogācāra treatises of Maitreya were not regarded as conflicting with Madhyamaka, but only as further explaining it.

Just as Nāgārjuna had furthered the Mahāyāna teachings by showing that emptiness is their primary intent, rather than Mind-Only, so Maitreya and Asaṅga and Vasubandhu furthered the Madhyamaka teachings by showing that other-emptiness or Shentong is their ultimate intent, rather than self-emptiness or Rangtong. Such is the Great Madhyamaka position. According to this tradition, Vasubandhu wrote a great commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras* that explained them by way of the distinctive Yogācāra teaching of the three natures (*svabhāva*):⁶⁵ the “imagined” (*parikalpita*), the “dependent” (*paratantra*), and the “perfected” (*pariniṣpanna*). These three natures were given in slightly different terms in the “Questions of Maitreya” section of the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras* in 18,000 lines and in 25,000 lines.⁶⁶ This section was regarded by Dolpopa as the Buddha’s own commentary, by which the *sūtras* should be interpreted.⁶⁷ Vasubandhu did so in his commentary. In this commentary it is possible to distinguish emptiness in two different senses, said Dolpopa.⁶⁸ It is these that he widely promoted as self-emptiness or Rangtong and other-emptiness or Shentong.

Great Madhyamaka was known as the meditative tradition (*sgom lugs*) of the works of Maitreya, in contradistinction to the analytical tradition (*thos bsam gyi lugs*).⁶⁹ It was primarily an oral tradition that was transmitted privately, and thus long remained little known. This explains the lack of historical references to it until its revival in India by Maitrīpa in the eleventh century, and its subsequent transmission to Tibet, where Dolpopa spread it widely in the fourteenth century.⁷⁰

Notes

1. On Great Madhyamaka, see Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo*, pp. 7, 49, 88, etc.; Tāranātha, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, pp. 62 ff.; and Dolpopa, *Mountain Doctrine*, pp. 6, 56, etc.

2. To give just one example from *The Voice of the Silence*, see p. 71:

Now bend thy head and listen well, O Bodhisattva—Compassion speaks and saith: “Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?”

3. *The Voice of the Silence*, Preface, p. vii.

4. *Ibid.*, p. vi.

5. Of these eight occurrences of “Ālaya” in *The Voice of the Silence*, the first three are on p. 24:

Alas, alas, that all men should possess Alaya, be one with the great Soul, and that possessing it, Alaya should so little avail them!

Behold how like the moon, reflected in the tranquil waves, Alaya is reflected by the small and by the great, is mirrored in the tiniest atoms, yet fails to reach the heart of all. Alas, that so few men should profit by the gift, the priceless boon of learning truth, the right perception of existing things, the Knowledge of the non-existent!

The fourth is on pp. 49-50:

Of teachers there are many; the MASTER-SOUL is one, Alaya, the Universal Soul. Live in that MASTER as ITS ray in thee. Live in thy fellows as they live in IT.

The next two are on p. 57:

Thou hast to saturate thyself with pure Alaya, become as one with Nature’s Soul-Thought. At one with it thou art invincible; in separation, thou becomest the playground of Samvriti, origin of all the world’s delusions.

All is impermanent in man except the pure bright essence of Alaya. Man is its crystal ray; a beam of light immaculate within, a form of clay material upon the lower surface. That beam is thy life-guide and thy true Self, the Watcher and the silent Thinker, the victim of thy lower Self.

The seventh is on p. 67:

Know that the stream of superhuman knowledge and the Deva-Wisdom thou hast won, must, from thyself, the channel of Alaya, be poured forth into another bed.

The last is on pp. 69-70:

Yet, one word. Canst thou destroy divine COMPASSION? Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS—eternal Harmony, Alaya’s SELF; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal.

In addition to these, Blavatsky uses it in her note on p. 88:

The “MASTER-SOUL” is *Alaya*, the Universal Soul or Atman, each man having a ray of it in him and being supposed to be able to identify himself with and to merge himself into it.

6. This verse of *The Secret Doctrine*, Stanza 1, verse 9, is:

But where was the Dangma when the Alaya of the universe was in Paramartha and the great wheel was Anupadaka?

The *ālaya* is defined by Blavatsky here as “Soul as the basis of all, Anima Mundi” (p. 47), explaining that “Alaya is literally the ‘Soul of the World’ or Anima Mundi, the ‘Over-Soul’ of Emerson” (p. 48). So the *ālaya* is “Cosmic Ideation, Mahat or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul” of her chart summary following the first fundamental proposition of the Secret Doctrine (p. 16). It is the “Universal Over-Soul” in the third fundamental proposition of the Secret Doctrine, teaching “The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul” (p. 17). This would be the *ālaya-vijñāna*.

7. Great Madhyamaka makes a point to distinguish the *ālaya* from the *ālaya-vijñāna*, equating the former with the eternal *jñāna*, or primordial wisdom, and describing the latter as consciousness, or

vijñāna, which is ephemeral and is existent only conventionally, but not ultimately. Certainly, the sixth occurrence of *ālaya* in *The Voice of the Silence* shows this distinction where it says, “All is impermanent in man except the pure bright essence of Alaya.” Similarly, Blavatsky says in *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 48, “Alaya, though eternal and changeless in its inner essence on the planes which are unreachable by either men or Cosmic Gods (Dhyani Buddhas), alters during the active life-period with respect to the lower planes, ours included.”

8. *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy)*, by Asaṅga, translated into French by Walpola Rahula, English version by Sara Boin-Webb, Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 2001, p. 21.

9. The first occurrence of *pariniṣpanna* is Stanza 1, verse 6:

The seven sublime lords and the seven truths had ceased to be,
and the Universe, the son of Necessity, was immersed in
Paranishpanna, to be outbreathed by that which is and yet is not.
Naught was.

The other occurrence of *pariniṣpanna* is Stanza 2, verse 1:

Where were the builders, the luminous sons of Manvantaric
dawn? In the unknown darkness in their Ah-hi Paranishpanna.
The Producers of form from no-form—the root of the world—
the Devamatri and Svābhāvat, rested in the bliss of non-being.

On the term *pariniṣpanna*, usually incorrectly spelled as *paranishpanna* in *The Secret Doctrine*, but once correctly as *parinishpanna* (vol. 1, p. 23), see also, “Book of Dzryan Research Report: Technical Terms in Stanza I,” by David Reigle, found in *Blavatsky’s Secret Books*, pp. 73-81, or online at www.easterntradition.org.

10. On this point, that Theosophy does not accept an ultimate consciousness, see, for example, *The Secret Doctrine*, Stanza 1, verse 8:

Alone the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite,
causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsated unconscious in
universal space, throughout that all-presence which is sensed by
the opened eye of the Dangma.

The Mahatma Letters, letter #10, 3rd ed., p. 53:

If people are willing to accept and to regard as God our ONE LIFE immutable and unconscious in its eternity they may do so and thus keep to one more gigantic misnomer. . . .

“The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tenets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man,”
H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol. 3, p. 423:

Hence, the Arahats secret doctrine on cosmogony admits but of one absolute, indestructible, eternal, and uncreated UNCONSCIOUSNESS (so to translate), of an element (the word being used for want of a better term) absolutely independent of everything else in the universe; . . .

11. The fullest account of this and the role of Pa-tsap Nyima Drak (sPa-tshab Nyi-ma-grags) in it is found in “Spa-tshab Nyi-ma-grags and the Introduction of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka into Tibet,” by Karen Christina Lang, in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, edited by Lawrence Epstein & Richard F. Sherburne, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, pp. 127-141.

12. For an overview of textbooks on tenets, see “The Tibetan Genre of Doxography: Structuring a Worldview,” by Jeffrey Hopkins, in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre, Essays in Honor of Geshe Lhundup Sopa*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1996, pp. 170-186. To Jeffrey Hopkins we are also indebted for a complete translation of the largest such textbook, *Maps of the Profound: Jam-yang-shay-ba’s Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2003. With Geshe Lhundup Sopa, Hopkins translated a brief such textbook, dKon mchog ’jigs med dbang po’s *Precious Garland of Tenets*, published in *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, New York: Grove Press, 1976. This book was revised and reissued as *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1989.

13. Elizabeth M. Callahan, trans., *The Treasury of Knowledge, Book Six, Part Three: Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy*.

14. Jeffrey Hopkins, trans., *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*.

15. Ringu Tulku, *The Rì-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great*, pp. 9-10. I quote this from Ringu Tulku’s book rather than Elizabeth Callahan’s translation (see note 13 above) because I follow by quoting

Ringu Tulku's comment on this passage. Callahan's translation of it is, pp. 258-259:

The Rangtong and Shentong [systems] do not differ over the way that conventional [phenomena] are empty, nor do they disagree that the extremes of conceptual elaborations cease during meditative equipoise. They differ over whether, as a convention, dharmatā exists during subsequent attainment or not, and over whether primordial wisdom is truly established at the end of analysis or not. [The Shentong system] asserts that [if] ultimate reality were simply a nonimplicative negation, whereby its nature is not established, it would be an inanimate emptiness. [Shentong Proponents] present [ultimate reality] as being primordial wisdom empty of dualism, as being reflexive awareness. This is asserted to be the profound view linking the Sūtra and Mantra [systems].

16. Ringu Tulku, op. cit., p. 10.

17. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 14.

18. See the opening few verses of Tāranātha's *Supplication to the Profound Zhentong Madhyamaka Lineage*, at www.jonangfoundation.org. See also on this: Tāranātha, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, p. 62; Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge, Book Six, Part Three: Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 249; Ringu Tulku, *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great*, p. 214.

19. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. xxii.

20. See on this, *The Books of Kiu-te, or the Tibetan Buddhist Tantras: A Preliminary Analysis*, by David Reigle, San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1983, pp. 46-47.

21. *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, 1925; reprint, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1973, p. 195.

22. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 23.

23. *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*, vol. 10, *The Orient: Its Legacy to the West*, Burdett, N.Y.: Larson Publications, 1987, chap. 4, section 7, "The Secret Doctrine of the Khmers," p. 199.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

27. Paul Brunton, *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, new revised edition, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1942, pp. 99-100:

Although our unconventional presentation of this knowledge is a modern and Western one, its original source is an ancient and Indian one. Both silent texts and living voices which have informed our writing are mostly Indian, supplemented by some Tibetan documents and a personal Mongolian esoteric instruction. A million men may gainsay the tenability of the tenets unfolded here but none can gainsay the fact that they are Indian tenets, albeit little-known, without twisting the most authoritative ancient documents to suit their mediocre minds. If we do not quote those texts here it is because our readers are primarily Western and we do not wish to burden them with the troublesome necessity of exploring exhaustive glossaries for unfamiliar Sanskrit names.

Paul Brunton, *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, pp. 409-410:

This quality of the timelessness of truth thrust itself powerfully into the present writer's meditations one evening in a land of steaming jungles and dense forests, where forgotten Indian sages had carried their culture long ago. He sat amid the vast deserted ruins of ancient Angkor, in Cambodian Indo-China, . . . Was it not wonderful that the immemorial wisdom of these men, who flourished and taught when Europe lay benighted in the dark ages, could be known and studied today and would be known and studied yet again when another two millenniums had once more passed over this planet? Out of the burial-urn of the Past this same wisdom has been extricated. But because it has here been moulded in an ultra-modern form to suit both our time and need, its authenticity or truth may not be plainly recognizable to its present-day Indian inheritors. Yet there is not a single important tenet here which cannot be found phrased in the old Sanskrit writings. We are only the inheritors and not the discoverers of this ever-ancient but ever-new lore.

Paul Brunton, *The Wisdom of the Overself*, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1943, pp. 13-14:

Hundreds of texts were examined in the effort to trace and collate basic ideas. . . . The Ariadne's thread which finally led me through this metaphysical maze was indeed placed in my hands whilst visiting Cambodian China where I encountered amid the deserted shrines of majestic Angkor another visitor in the person of an Asiatic philosopher. From him I received an unforgettable personal esoteric instruction . . . All this is but a preamble to the statement that with these volumes a doctrine is presented which in all essential principles is not a local Indian tradition but an all-Asiatic one. . . . It would have been much easier to emulate a portentous academic parrot and merely write down what other men had written or said as it would have been more self-flattering to parade the breadth of my learning by peppering both volumes with a thousand Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese quotations, names or words. But life to-day points a challenging sword at us. I was too sensitive to the iconoclastic spirit of our age, too enamoured of the austere figure of truth rather than of her discarded robes, too troubled by what I had physically seen and personally experienced in this world-shaking epoch to be satisfied with anything less than a fresh living reconstruction.

28. Paul Brunton, *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 26:

Mentalism derives its name from its fundamental principle that Mind is the only reality, the only substance, the only existence; things being our ideas and ideas finding their support in our mind. Mentalism in short is the doctrine that in the last analysis there is nothing but Mind.

This is obviously a straightforward statement of Yogācāra understood as Cittamātra, or "Mind-Only." While he carefully avoided using these Sanskrit terms, we can derive them directly from his comment on the mentalist schools of China and Japan. In *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*, vol. 13, part 3, p. 96, para. 214, he writes:

The mentalist schools of Chinese Buddhism existed only from 600 A.D. to 1100 A.D. They were named the Fa-hsiang and the Wei-shih. The mentalist school of Japanese Buddhism was the Hosso.

Fa-hsiang is the name of the Yogācāra school in China. This school is also known as Wei-shih, meaning *vijñapti-mātra*, “consciousness only.” Hosso is the name of the same school in Japan. Moreover, we can find this in Angkor as well. In *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*, vol. 13, part 3, p. 2, he writes:

One thousand years ago the doctrine of mentalism was taught at Angkor, according to an inscription of that time which I saw there, the inscription of Srey Santhor. It likened the appearance of the doctrine in the world of faith and culture to the sun bringing back the light.

See the inscription from Vat Sithor from about 968 C.E., concerning a Buddhist prelate named Kirtipaṇḍita, given in David Snellgrove’s 2004 book, *Angkor—Before and After: A Cultural History of the Khmers*, Trumbull, Conn.: Weatherhill, and Bangkok: Orchid Press, p. 82:

“In him the sun of the doctrines of ‘Non-Self’ (*nairātyma*), ‘Mind Only’ (*cittamātra*) and the like, which have been eclipsed in the night of false teachings, shone once again in full daylight.”

Snellgrove adds in a note on this (n. 17, p. 226):

The preferred school of Buddhist philosophy is thus that of Yogacāra or ‘Mind Only’ (*Cittamātra*), representing the latest and ‘Third Turning’ of the Wheel of the Doctrine, as promulgated by the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the Sage Asanga

29. See on this, Paul Brunton, *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, pp. 362-363:

And we may now see the deep and practical wisdom of the early Indian teachers who prescribed yoga to those whose intellectual power was not strong enough to grasp the truth of mentalism through reasoned insight, for thus these men were enabled to arrive at the same goal through feeling, not through knowledge. . . . Yet we must never forget that mentalism is only a step leading to ultimate truth. . . . It is also a temporary ground which the questing mind must occupy whilst consolidating its first victory, the victory over matter. Once the consolidation is fully effected it must begin to move onwards again; it must leave mentalism! The

ultimate reality cannot consist of thoughts because these are fated to appear and vanish; it must have a more enduring basis than such transiency. Nevertheless we may see in thoughts, to which we have reduced everything, intimations of the presence of this reality and apart from which they are as illusory as matter. The further and final battle must lead to victory over the idea itself. Both materialism and mentalism are tentative viewpoints which must be taken up and then deserted when the ultimate viewpoint is reached. Then alone may we say: “*This is real.*” . . . Meanwhile it is essential to study well this basis of mentalism because upon it shall later be reared a superstructure of stupendous but reasoned revelation.

30. Further confirmation of this is found in “a work written in Chinese by a Tibetan, and published in the monastery of Tientai,” quoted by Blavatsky in, “The ‘Doctrine of the Eye’ & the ‘Doctrine of the Heart,’ or the ‘Heart’s Seal,’” in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, pp. 450-451:

No profane ears having heard the mighty Chau-yan [secret and enlightening *precepts*] of Wu-Wei-chen-jen [Buddha *within* Buddha], of our beloved Lord and Bodhisattva, how can one tell what his thoughts really were? The holy Sang-gyas-Panchen never offered an insight into the *One Reality* to the unreformed [uninitiated] Bhikkhus. Few are those even among the Tu-fon [Tibetans] who knew it; as for the Tsung-men Schools, they are going with every day more down hill . . . Not even the Fa-hsiang-Tsung can give one the wisdom taught in real Naljor-chod-pa [Sanskrit: Yogacharyā]: . . . it is all “Eye” Doctrine, and no more. The loss of a restraining guidance is felt; since the Tch’an-si [teachers] of inward meditation [self-contemplation or Tchung-kwan] have become rare, and the Good Law is replaced by idol-worship [Siang-kyan]. It is of this [idol- or image-worship] that the Barbarians [Western people] have heard, and know nothing of Bas-pa-Dharma [the secret Dharma or doctrine]. Why has truth to hide like a tortoise within its shell? Because it is now found to have become like the Lama’s tonsure knife, a weapon too dangerous to use even for the Lanoo. Therefore no one can

be entrusted with the knowledge [Secret Science] before his time. The Chagpa-Thog-med have become rare, and the best have retired to Tushita the Blessed.

Two sentences confirm this: “Not even the Fa-hsiang-Tsung can give one the wisdom taught in real NaIjor-chod-pa [Sanskrit: Yogacharyā]: . . . it is all ‘Eye’ Doctrine, and no more.” “The Chagpa-Thog-med have become rare, and the best have retired to Tushita the Blessed.” The term Fa-hsiang-Tsung is the name of the Yogācāra school in China. The term NaIjor-chod-pa is, as shown, the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term Yogācāra, or Yogacharyā. The term Chagpa-Thog-med is the Tibetan translation of Ārya Asaṅga, the founder of the Yogācāra school. Its meaning in this sentence is apparently followers of Asaṅga, i.e., of the “real” Yogācāra school. This would be, as we have seen, the Great Madhyamaka school or tradition.

Great Madhyamaka teaches Shentong, or “other-emptiness.” The Tibetan writer quoted here goes on to say, p. 452, that one should ultimately be enabled to see, “the faithful reflection of Self . . . First, this; then Tong-pa-nyi, lastly; Sammā Sambuddha.” He here brings in the Madhyamaka term Tong-pa-nyi, which is the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *śūnyatā*, “emptiness.”

31. See, for example, Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991, vol. 1, book 1, part 3, chapter 7, “The Two Truths According to Great Madhyamaka,” p. 216, where Nāgārjuna’s hymns are called eulogies:

One should know that the entire intention of the sūtras and the tantras, which are the scriptures of the Tathāgata, is subsumed in a single nucleus, just as butter is condensed from milk, and cream from butter, so that the climax of the philosophical systems, according to the causal vehicle of dialectics, is this Great Madhyamaka, supreme among vehicles. Its meaning is revealed in the texts of Maitreya, such as the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle*, and in the sublime Nāgārjuna’s *Collection of Eulogies*, which subsume the essence of the definitive meaning of both the intermediate and final promulgations of the transmitted precepts.”

32. From “gDams ngag: Tibetan Technologies of the Self,” by Matthew Kapstein, in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre, Essays in Honor of Geshe Lhundup Sopa*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1996, p. 282. Bracketed material is Kapstein’s.

33. On this, see Won ch’uk’s comments from his commentary on the *Samdhi-nirmocana-sūtra*, quoted by Tsong kha pa in his *Ocean of Eloquence*, translated by Gareth Sparham, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 49:

Since at that time [the time of Asaṅga] the doctrine was of one taste, there was no controversy between those asserting emptiness and those asserting existence (*bhava*). This is the reason why Ācārya Nye ba’i ’od (=Bandhu-prabhā/ Prabhā-mitra) said: “A thousand years ago the taste of Buddha’s teaching was one. Thereafter, mindfulness (*smṛti*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) gradually deteriorated and those asserting emptiness and those asserting existence (*bhava*) spread widely in the world.”

“Those asserting emptiness” are those who follow Madhyamaka, and “those asserting existence” are those who follow Yogācāra. For a good example of a text written before the separation of these two schools took place, and so reflecting their harmony, see Kambala’s *Āloka-mālā*, translated by Chr. Lindtner, in *Miscellanea Buddhica*, Indiske Studier 5, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1985; reprinted as *A Garland of Light: Kambala’s Āloka-mālā*, Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 2003.

Notice also that the full title of the famous Madhyamaka work by Nāgārjuna’s spiritual son Āryadeva, the *Catuḥ-śataka*, “Four Hundred [Verses],” is *Bodhisattva-Yogācāra-Catuḥ-śataka*, where Yogācāra clearly refers to the “yoga practice” (*yogācāra*) of a Bodhisattva, its original meaning, and not to the later separated school of that name.

34. David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, A History of Indian Literature, vol. 7, fasc. 1, p. 49, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981. The part omitted by me in the ellipsis is:

A portion of a commentary ascribed to Asaṅga on the beginning of the MMK is preserved in Chinese (Taishō 1565, translated in 543); it refers to Rāhulabhadra and comments also on the

preliminary stanzas to the MMK concerned with the eight negative epithets applied to *pralīyasamutpāda*. A commentary by Sthiramati is also preserved in Chinese (Taishō 1567, translated about 1000); it evidently knows Bhāvaviveka's commentary on the MMK. In addition, a commentary by Sthiramati's master Guṇamati which is no longer extant is known to tradition; it seems to have been known to Bhāvaviveka.

Tradition also knows a commentary on the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* by the Yogācāra master Dharmapāla that is no longer extant. See: Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology*, Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 26, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983, p. 281, n. 146. Dharmapāla's commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*, however, is extant, although in Chinese. See John P. Keenan's translation of its tenth chapter, *Dharmapāla's Yogācāra Critique of Bhāvaviveka's Mādhyamika Explanation of Emptiness: The Tenth Chapter of Ta-Ch'eng Kuang Pai-Lun Shih Commenting on Āryadeva's Catuhśataka Chapter Sixteen*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.

35. See, for example, *Indian Buddhist Pandits, from "The Jewel Garland of Buddhist History,"* translated by Losang Norbu Tsonawa, [Dharamsala]: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1985, p. 24:

Chandragomī held the Cittamātrīn view of Asaṅga and Chandrakīrti held Nāgārjuna's Prāsāṅgika Mādhyamika viewpoint as explained by Buddhapaḷita. It is said that they debated for seven years. The people witnessed the debate over the years and those who understood some of the arguments and viewpoints they expounded made up a song:

Ah! Nāgārjuna's texts,
 For some people are medicine
 But are poison for others.
 But Maitreya and Asaṅga's texts
 Are medicine for everyone.

36. See *Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence; Reason and Enlightenment in the Central Philosophy of Tibet*, translated by Robert A. F. Thurman, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 265-266, regarding the *Akutobhaya*, "No Fear from Anywhere":

As for the *No Fear from Anywhere*, in comment on the twenty-seventh chapter, it cites evidence from the *Four Hundred*: “As the revered Aryadeva declares: Very rarely does it happen that there are teacher, listener, and that worth hearing. Hence, in short, cyclic life is neither limited nor limitless!” This means that the *No Fear from Anywhere* is not an autocommentary, as is also recognized from the fact that not even the smallest fragment of its commentary is cited in the commentaries of Buddhapālita, Bhavaviveka, or Chandrakīrti.

See also *Mkhas grub rje’s Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, translated by Ferdinand D. Lessing and Alex Wayman, The Hague: Mouton, 1968, reprinted under the changed title, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, p. 89:

This *Akutobhaya* is maintained by the older catalogs, and by many persons following them, to have been composed by Nāgārjuna; but that is certainly not so, because there is not a single instance of its being quoted in the works of his disciples, and while commenting on the twenty-seventh chapter [of the *Prajñā-mūla*] it says, quoting the *Catuhśataka* (Toh. 3846), “Āryadeva also says.”

For a fuller statement of mkhas grub rje’s views on this, see *A Dose of Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the sTong thun chen mo of mkhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang*, translated by José Ignacio Cabezón, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 82-84.

37. See the study of the *Akutobhaya* by C. W. Huntington, Jr., “A Lost Text of Early Madhyamaka,” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*, vol. 49, 1995, pp. 693-767. He there writes on p. 708:

BP [Buddhapālita’s commentary] has clearly incorporated lines, phrases, lengthy passages and almost entire chapters from the earlier commentary. We know that BP borrowed from ABh [*Akutobhayā*], and not the reverse, because of the relative chronology of the two texts. When two translated texts are identical, as are these two in so many places, then we must assume that the original texts were also identical in these same places. In this case, out of a total of 4,399 lines found in the present edition of ABh, fully 1,437 were lifted verbatim and incorporated into the

body of BP. This means that almost exactly one third of ABh has been reproduced verbatim in BP.

38. *The Life of Nāgārjuna from Tibetan and Chinese Sources*, by M. Walleser, Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1979, p. 29. This book is a reprint of the article published in *Asia Major*, Hirth Anniversary Volume, 1923, pp. 421-455, where this quote occurs on p. 447. This passage was again translated by Richard H. Robinson in *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, Madison: [University of Wisconsin Press], 1967, p. 26:

Explaining the Mahāyāna at great length, he wrote the *Upadeśa* in 100,000 ślokas. He also wrote the *Buddha-mārga-alamkāra-śāstra* (?) in 5,000 ślokas, the *Mahāmaitri-upāya-śāstra* (?) in 5,000 ślokas, and the *Madhyamaka-śāstra* in 500 ślokas, and caused the Mahāyāna doctrine to have a great vogue throughout India. He also wrote the *Akutobhayā-śāstra* (?) in 100,000 ślokas, out of which the *Madhyamaka-śāstra* comes.

39. The first part of the *Upadeśa*, or *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, was translated from Chinese into French by Étienne Lamotte in five heavily annotated volumes totaling 2451 pages, as *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Louvain, 1944-1980. For an English study of it, see *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā-Śāstra*, by K. Venkata Ramanan, Tokyo, 1966. The latter part of the *Upadeśa* was not translated into Chinese completely, but only summarized by Kumārajīva. Although Lamotte later came to doubt that the *Upadeśa* was written by the same Nāgārjuna who wrote the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, his reasons for this were not convincing to other scholars, such as J. W. de Jong (see his review of Lamotte's vol. 3, in *Asia Major*, vol. 17, 1971, pp. 105-112). Venkata Ramanan in his book listed above was not convinced either. Since Kumārajīva probably lived only a century after Nāgārjuna, the traditions of authorship in his time would carry much weight.

40. The *Chung lun* was translated into English by Brian Bocking, *Nāgārjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

41. Huntington, pp. 705-706: "Close comparison of the texts of ABh and CL confirms that both commentaries stem from one original Indic source."

42. See note 37 above.

43. Seyfort Ruegg, p. 33. He here refers the reader to K. Venkata Ramanan's book (see note 39 above), pp. 16, 44-45, 251 sq.

44. English translations of Nāgārjuna's *Dharmadhātu-stava* have recently become available. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., translated it under the title, "In Praise of Reality," in the book, *Buddhist Scriptures*, edited by him, London: Penguin Books, 2004, pp. 464-477. Karl Brunnhölzl has given us a whole book on this hymn of 101 verses, under the title, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2007. It includes the commentary by the 3rd Karmapa. Here are verses 20-22 as translated by Lopez:

When a fireproof garment, stained by various stains, is placed in a fire, the stains are burned but the garment is not. (20)

In the same way, the mind of clear light is stained by desire. The stains are burned by the fire of wisdom; just that clear light is not. (21)

All the *sūtras* setting forth emptiness spoken by the teacher turn back the afflictions; they do not impair the element. (22)

45. Besides the *Dharmadhātu-stava* (see the previous note), in which this is frequent, see, for example, Nāgārjuna's *Acintya-stava*, "Hymn to the Inconceivable [Buddha]," verses 37-39. As edited and translated by Chr. Lindtner in his *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1982; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, pp. 152-153:

bhāvābhāvadvayātītam anatītaṃ ca kutra cit |
na ca jñānaṃ na ca jñeyaṃ na cāsti na ca nāsti yat ||
yan na caikaṃ na cānekaṃ nobhayaṃ na ca nobhayam |
anālayam athāvyaktam acintyaṃ anidarśanam ||
yan nodeti na ca vyeti nocchedi na ca śāsvatam |
tad ākāśapratikāśaṃ nākṣarajñānagocaram ||

[That which] has transcended the duality of being and non-being without, however, having transcended anything at all; that which is not knowledge or knowable, not existent nor non-existent, not one nor many, not both nor neither; [that which is] without foundation, unmanifest, inconceivable, incomparable; that which arises not, disappears not, is not to be annihilated

and is not permanent, *that* is [Reality] which is like space [and] not within the range of words [or] knowledge (*akṣarajñāna*).

Nāgārjuna then goes on in verse 45 to describe this ultimate reality as *svabhāva*, “inherent nature,” or “inherent existence,” *prakṛti*, “essential nature,” or “(primary) substance,” *tattva*, “reality,” *dravya*, “substance,” *vastu*, “a real thing,” and *sat*, “true being,” terms that are thoroughly negated by him as applied to everything else. This is especially true of the first one, *svabhāva*; the whole theme of Madhyamaka being that everything is empty of *svabhāva* (*svabhāva-śūnya*), inherent nature or inherent existence.

This hymn, along with three others forming the *Catuḥstava* of Nāgārjuna, has also been published in Sanskrit and English in the book by Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, *On Voidness: A Study on Buddhist Nihilism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995.

46. See *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, p. xxiii:

The members of several esoteric schools—the seat of which is beyond the Himālayas, and whose ramifications may be found in China, Japan, India, Tibet, and even in Syria, besides South America—claim to have in their possession the *sum total* of sacred and philosophical works in MSS. and type: all the works, in fact, that have ever been written, in whatever language or characters, since the art of writing began; from the ideographic hieroglyphs down to the alphabet of Cadmus and the Devanāgarī.

It has been claimed in all ages that ever since the destruction of the Alexandrian Library, every work of a character that might have led the profane to the ultimate discovery and comprehension of some of the mysteries of the Secret Science, was, owing to the combined efforts of the members of the Brotherhoods, diligently searched for. It is added, moreover, by those who know, that once found, save three copies left and stored safely away, such works were all destroyed.

47. Michael Sheehy, *The Gzhan stong Chen mo*, p. 66.

48. Michael Sheehy, *The Gzhan stong Chen mo*, p. 67.

49. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, p. 192. See also: Tāranātha’s *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, p. 72.

50. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, p. 364, n. 593.
51. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, trans. Lama Chimpa, Alaka Chattopadhyaya, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970, pp. 98-100. The translators give the Tibetan term in footnote 25, p. 100: *mal-'byor-spyod-pa-sems-tsam-pa*.
52. Michael Sheehy, *The Gzhan stong Chen mo*, pp. 66, 111-112.
53. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, p. 176.
54. Elizabeth M. Callahan, Introduction, in Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, p. 37.
55. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, pp. 39, 191.
56. The *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa* has been published in Tibetan and translated into English by Chr. Lindtner in his *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, pp. 180-217; verses 22-56 are on pp. 192-201.
57. Chr. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana*, p. 180.
58. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, p. 98.
59. Christian Lindtner, "The Laṅkāvatārasūtra in Early Indian Madhyamaka Literature," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*, vol. 46, 1992, pp. 244-279. The *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa* is discussed on pp. 260-264.
60. The works of the eighteen early Hinayāna orders apparently were lost long ago, as they were not translated into Chinese, either. On these eighteen early orders, see Vasumitra's *Samaya-bhedoparacanacakra*, translated by Jiryo Masuda as, "Origin and Doctrines of Early Indian Buddhist Schools: A Translation of the Hsüan-chwang Version of Vasumitra's Treatise," *Asia Major*, vol. 2, 1925, pp. 1-78.
61. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, p. 102.
62. According to the traditional histories of Buddhism compiled in Tibet, Asaṅga was unable to understand the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras* due to their great length and diffusiveness. After twelve years of meditation, Maitreya appeared to him and taught him how the path to enlightenment is found in them. This was then written in his book, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. For a convenient account of this, summarized from the histories by Bu-ston and Tāranātha, see Geshe Wangyal's book, *The Door of Liberation*, 1973 ed., pp. 52-54; 1995 ed., pp. 31-33.
63. Bhā[va]viveka's full critique of Yogācāra is found in the fifth chapter of his *Madhyamaka-hṛdaya* and his *Tarka-jvālā* commentary thereon. At the beginning of the latter he specifically names Asaṅga

and Vasubandhu. A more brief critique is found in his *Prajñā-pradīpa* commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, as an appendix to chapter 25. He also critiques Yogācāra in the fourth chapter of his *Madhyamaka-ratna-pradīpa*. Here is a bibliographic listing, by date of publication, of these sources:

- Lindtner, Christian. "Bhavya's Controversy with Yogācāra in the Appendix to *Prajñā-pradīpa*, Chapter XXV." In *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*, edited by Louis Ligeti, vol. 2, pp. 77-97. Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica, vol. 29. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984 (gives critical edition of the Tibetan text).
- Eckel, M. David. "Bhāvaviveka's Critique of Yogācāra Philosophy in Chapter XXV of the *Prajñā-pradīpa*." In *Miscellanea Buddhica*, edited by Chr. Lindtner, pp. 25-75. Indiske Studier 5. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1985 (gives English translation).
- Lindtner, Christian. "Bhavya's Critique of Yogācāra in the *Madhyamakaratna-pradīpa*, Chapter IV." In *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology: Studies in the Buddhist Analysis of Inference and Language*, edited by Bimal Krishna Matilal and Robert D. Evans, pp. 239-263. Studies of Classical India, vol. 7. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1986 (gives English translation).
- Lindtner, Christian. "Materials for the Study of Bhavya." In *Kalyāṇa-mitrārāgaṇam: Essays in Honour of Nils Simonsson*, edited by Eivind Kahrs, pp. 179-202. Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986 (includes critical edition of the Tibetan text of *Madhyamaka-ratna-pradīpa*, chap. 4).
- Lindtner, Chr. "Bhavya's Madhyamakahr̥daya (Pariccheda Five) Yogācāratattvaviniścayāvatāra." *Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. 59, 1995, pp. 37-65. Reprint, Adyar Library Pamphlet Series, no. 48, 1995. Also found in his edition of the whole text: *Madhyamakahr̥dayam of Bhavya*. Chennai: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 2001, pp. 58-71 (in Sanskrit).

64. Candrakīrti's critique of Yogācāra is found in chapter 6 of his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, verses 45-97, and his own commentary thereon. This text is not yet available in Sanskrit, although a manuscript of it is reported to exist in Lhasa. Its Tibetan translation, with commentary,

was published in the Bibliotheca Buddhica series, vol. 9, 1907-1912. Both the root text and commentary of this critique are available in a French translation, and the root text in several English translations. There are also two articles summarizing the critique. Here follows a bibliographic listing, by date of publication, of these sources:

- La Vallée Poussin, Louis de. "Madhyamakāvātāra: Introduction au Traité du Milieu, de l'Ācārya Candrakīrti, avec le commentaire de l'auteur, traduit d'après la version tibétaine." *Le Muséon*, n.s., vol. 8, 1907, pp. 249-317 (chaps. 1-5); vol. 11, 1910, pp. 271-358 (chap. 6, verses 1-80); vol. 12, 1911, pp. 235-328 (chap. 6, verses 81-165); unfinished (the Yogācāra critique is found in the second installment, pp. 324-358, and the third installment, pp. 236-255).
- Olson, Robert F. "Candrakīrti's Critique of Vijñānavāda." *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 24, 1974, pp. 405-411.
- Fenner, Peter G. "Candrakīrti's Refutation of Buddhist Idealism," *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 33, 1983, pp. 251-261 (includes English translation of *Madhyamakāvātāra*, chap. 6, verses 45-77).
- Batchelor, Stephen. In *Echoes of Voidness*, by Geshe Rabten. London: Wisdom Publications, 1983, pp. 47-91 (gives English translation of *Madhyamakāvātāra*, chap. 6).
- Huntington, C. W., Jr., with Geshé Namgyal Wangchen. In *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989, pp. 143-196; notes to this, pp. 218-267 (gives English translation of the whole *Madhyamakāvātāra*).
- Fenner, Peter. In *The Ontology of the Middle Way*. Studies of Classical India, vol. 11. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990, pp. 209-302 (gives English translation of the whole *Madhyamakāvātāra*, and includes Tibetan text).
- Stöter-Tillmann, Jürgen, and Tashi Tsering. In Rendawa Shönnu Lodrö's *Commentary on the 'Entry into the Middle,' Lamp which Elucidates Reality*. The Dalai Lama Tibeto-Indological Series, vol. 23. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1997 (includes English translation of the whole *Madhyamakāvātāra*).
- Padmakara Translation Group. *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakīrti's Madhyamakavatara with Commentary by Jamgön*

Mipham. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002.

Goldfield, Ari, et al. *The Moon of Wisdom: Chapter Six of Chandrakīrti's Entering the Middle Way, with Commentary from the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje's Chariot of the Dakpo Kagyü Siddhas*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2005 (includes Tibetan text).

65. Vasubandhu's commentary is a combined commentary on the 100,000 line, 25,000 line, and 18,000 line Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras*, called the *Śata-sāhasrikā-pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikāṣṭādaśa-sāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā-bṛhat-ṭīkā*. Tsongkhapa did not accept Vasubandhu's authorship of it, but said it was written by the much later Daṃṣṭrāsena instead (see *Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence: Reason and Enlightenment in the Central Philosophy of Tibet*, trans. Robert A. F. Thurman, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 247-248). However, Daṃṣṭrāsena may only have revised Vasubandhu's work. There had to have been in existence an early interpretation of the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtras* by way of the three natures, since this is exactly what Bhā[va]viveka refutes in his *Madhyamaka-hṛdaya*, where his major refutation of Yogācāra occurs. Here in chapter 5, verses 1-7, the Yogācāra position is stated, that he will go on to refute in verses 8 onward. In verses 5-6 the three natures are stated, and verse 7 says that this is how the Perfection of Wisdom is understood in Yogācāra. The rest of the chapter is his refutation of the three natures.

Moreover, Vasubandhu's disciple Diñnāga states clearly in his *Prajñāpāramitā-piṇḍārtha-saṃgraha* (*Collection of the Essential Meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom*) that the three natures are the basis for understanding the Perfection of Wisdom, and that in fact, there is no other teaching than this in these sacred texts:

prajñāpāramitāyāṃ hi trīn samāśrītya deśanā |
kalpitaṃ paratantraṃ ca pariniṣpannam eva ca || 27 ||
nāstītyādi-padaīḥ sarvaṃ kalpitaṃ vinivāryate |
māyopamādi-dṛṣṭāntaiḥ paratantrasya deśanā || 28 ||
caturdhā-vyavadānena pariniṣpanna-kīrtanam |
prajñāpāramitāyāṃ hi nānyā buddhasya deśanā || 29 ||

27. In the Perfection of Wisdom, the teaching is based on the three [natures]: the imagined, the dependent, and the perfected.

28. By the words, “it does not exist,” etc., all the imagined is refuted. By the examples of [being] like an illusion, etc., [is given] the teaching of the dependent.

29. By the fourfold purification [is made] the proclamation of the perfected. In the Perfection of Wisdom there is no other teaching of the Buddha.

The Sanskrit text quoted above may be found in the following editions, both of which agree completely for these three verses. The Tucci edition also includes Tibetan and English translations. I have given a more literal translation rather than Tucci’s looser translation, which was made before *prajñā-pāramitā* became standardly translated as Perfection of Wisdom, due to the work of Edward Conze. Tucci here translated it as the “gnosis.”

Tucci, Giuseppe. “Minor Sanskrit Texts on the Prajñā-pāramitā:

1. The Prajñā-pāramitā-piṇḍārtha of Diñnāga.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1947, pp. 53-75.

Frauwallner, Erich. In “Dignāga, sein Werk und seine Entwicklung.” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens, und Archiv für Indische Philosophie*, vol. 3, 1959, pp. 83-164; *Prajñā-pāramitā-piṇḍārtha-saṃgraha* on pp. 140-144.

66. The original Sanskrit text of this section was published in “Maitreya’s Questions’ in the Prajñāpāramitā,” by Edward Conze and Iida Shotaro, *Mélanges D’Indianisme a la Mémoire de Louis Renou*, Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968, pp. 229-242. An English translation may be found in *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, translated by Edward Conze, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975, pp. 644-652. The terms for the three natures used there, p. 238, are *parikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ*, *vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ*, and *dharmatā-rūpaṃ*, translated by Conze, p. 648, as “imagined form,” “discerned form,” and “dharmic nature of form.”

67. See Dolpopa’s *Bka’ bsdu bzhi pa’i rang ’gyel*, folio 615, in *The Collected Works (Gsuñ ’Bum) of Kun-mkhyen Dol-po-pa Śes-rab-rgyal-mtshan (1292-1361): Reproduced from eye copies of prints from the Rgyal-rtse Rdzoñ blocks preserved at the Kyichu Monastery in the Paro Valley, Bhutan*, vol. 1, Paro, Bhutan/Delhi: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1984. This same text is also found in *The Dzam-thang Edition of the Collected Works*

(*Gsung-'bum*) of *Kun-mkhyen Dol-po-pa Shes-rab Rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 5 (yā), collected and presented by Matthew Kapstein. Delhi: Shedrup Books, 1992, folios 269-329.

68. See the section, “Delineating well all emptinesses as the two, self-emptiness and other-emptiness,” in Dolpopa’s *Mountain Doctrine*, pp. 324-334, where Vasubandhu’s Perfection of Wisdom commentary is quoted on p. 330. It may be helpful to note that the term translated here by Jeffrey Hopkins as “non-entities,” is translated by others as “non-existence.”

69. On these two traditions of the works of Maitreya, see *The Blue Annals*, translated by George N. Roerich, 1949; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976, etc., pp. 347-350, for the account by 'Gos Lo-tṣā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (1392-1481); Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology, From the eleventh to the thirteenth century*, Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 26, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983, pp. 42-44, including the account by Gser-mdog Paṅ-chen Śākya-mchog-ldan (1428-1509); S. K. Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 269-271, for the account by 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas (1813-1899); Karl Brunnhölzl, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyü Tradition*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2004, pp. 461-462, for a summary of the meditative tradition lineage up to the present; and Cyrus Stearns, “Dol-po-pa Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan and the Genesis of the *Gzhan-stong* Position in Tibet,” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1995, p. 840, for a note by Jo-nang Kun-dga' grol-mchog (1507-1566) from a notebook by Bstan kha-bo-che (b. 1021) quoting his teacher Sajjana, the source of the two lines of transmission into Tibet.

70. Dolpopa believed that he was restoring the true teachings from the bygone “Age of Perfection” (*krta-yuga*), or “Age of Truth” (*satya-yuga*), called by other traditions the “Golden Age.” These had been lost through the faulty interpretations of later commentators who no longer had the true understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. Corroboration of Dolpopa’s claims comes from a most unexpected source, although one that may be doubted because of dating, namely, from the Hindu sage Gauḍapāda. Gauḍapāda was the teacher of the

teacher of Śaṅkarācārya, and hence his date depends on the date of Śaṅkarācārya. Śaṅkarācārya is generally placed around the seventh or eighth century of the Common Era, and no doubt most of the now extant writings attributed to him are from that time. However, there is considerable evidence that the original Śaṅkarācārya was born in the year 509 B.C.E. (this evidence is gathered and presented in my paper, “The Original Śaṅkarācārya”). This would make his teacher’s teacher Gauḍapāda a contemporary of the Buddha, following the traditional dating of the Buddha’s death as 543 B.C.E.

It is now well known, thanks to the research of Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya, that Gauḍapāda’s greatest work, the *Māṇḍūkya-kārika*, uses Buddhist terminology and ideas liberally (see *The Āgamaśāstra of Gauḍapāda*, University of Calcutta Press, 1943). These are found in the fourth and last section of that book, which has every appearance of being written at a later time than the first three sections. It has, for example, an opening salutation like would normally be found at the beginning of a work. This salutation, moreover, is addressed to the “best of the men,” a standard epithet of the Buddha. With all the other evidence that Bhattacharya provided, we may infer that Gauḍapāda wrote this after coming into contact with Buddhist ideas, or perhaps, after coming into contact with the Buddha himself.

In the “Replies to Inquiries Suggested by ‘Esoteric Buddhism,’” published in *The Theosophist*, vol. 5, 1883, is the section, “Sakya Muni’s Place in History” (pp. 38-43), which draws on unpublished esoteric records to give facts about the Buddha’s life and date. This section was presumably written by Blavatsky’s teacher, Morya, and was reprinted in the book, *Five Years of Theosophy*, and also in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 5, 1950, pp. 241-259. It is said therein (p. 256) that the Hindu Brahmans expected the coming of the Buddha, and at that time met him as an Avatar:

It is no better than loose conjecture to argue that it would have entered as little into the thoughts of the Brahmans of noting the day of Buddha’s birth “as the Romans, or even the Jews, [would have] thought of preserving the date of the birth of Jesus before he had become the founder of a religion.” (M. Müller’s *Hist. A. S. L.*, p. 263.) For, while the Jews had been from the first rejecting the claim of Messiahship set up by the Chelas of the Jewish

prophet, and were not expecting their Messiah at that time, the Brahmins (the initiates, at any rate) knew of the coming of him whom they regarded as an incarnation of divine wisdom and therefore were well aware of the astrological date of his birth. If, in after times in their impotent rage, they destroyed every accessible vestige of the birth, life and death of Him, who in his boundless mercy to all creatures had revealed their carefully concealed mysteries and doctrines in order to check the ecclesiastical torrent of ever-growing superstitions, there had been a time when he was met by them as an Avatar.

Meeting him as an avatar, it would have only been natural for the great Brahmin sage, Gauḍapāda, to have sought out the Buddha and received teachings from him. It may thus be that in Gauḍapāda's text we have the earliest direct record of the Buddha's teachings to have come down to us. Ironically, this text has come down to us within the Hindu tradition. In the Buddhist tradition, what we have is the orally passed down discourses of the so-called Hīnayāna tradition, only later written down. The discourses or *sūtras* of the Mahāyāna tradition are said by tradition to have disappeared forty years after the Buddha's passing, and then to have reappeared in later centuries. Proceeding on the assumption that the Buddha in fact taught Mahāyāna ideas during his lifetime, and that Gauḍapāda was there to hear and record them, some interesting facts emerge.

Dolpopa goes against the standard received Yogācāra teachings, insisting that the second of the three natures is illusory just like the first of them. It is not the case, says he, that the third or perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is the second or dependent nature (*paratantra*) when freed of the first or imagined nature (*parikalpita*), as Yogācāra is normally thought to teach. Only the third or perfected nature is truly existent. Neither the first nor the second are truly existent. This, claims Dolpopa, is the true original understanding of the Buddha's teachings on this. Gauḍapāda says the very same thing.

Gauḍapāda's *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, also known as the *Āgama-sāstra*, section 4, verse 73, reads:

yo 'sti kalpita-saṃvṛtyā paramārthena nāsty asau |
paratantrābhisamvṛtyā syān nāsti paramārthataḥ || 73 ||

That which exists conventionally as the imagined does not exist ultimately. [That which] may exist conventionally as the dependent [also] does not exist ultimately.

So Gauḍapāda, too, rejects the ultimate existence of the second or dependent nature, just like Dolpopa does, and in opposition to the standard Yogācāra or Cittamātra teachings as normally understood. Dolpopa, utilizing the Great Madhyamaka understanding of Yogācāra to do this, believed that he was restoring the original teachings of the Buddha. The evidence provided by Gauḍapāda may well corroborate this claim of Dolpopa's. Moreover, a verse quoted in *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 48, also agrees with this.

“No Arhat, oh mendicants, can reach absolute knowledge before he becomes one with Paranirvana. *Parikalpita* and *Paratantra* are his two great enemies” (Aphorisms of the Bodhisattvas).

It seems that all three, Dolpopa, Gauḍapāda, and *The Secret Doctrine*, agree in this distinctive doctrine of rejecting the ultimate existence of the second or dependent nature (*paratantra*), thus setting them apart from standard Yogācāra or Cittamātra. We may assume, then, that this Great Madhyamaka doctrine is a doctrine of the Wisdom Tradition.

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