

Introduction

Unearthing the foundations of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy

Pascale Hugon and Kevin Vose

The contributions to this volume are the result of a panel on the theme “Tibetan Scholasticism in the 11th and 12th centuries” organized at the 15th Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies held at Emory University, Atlanta, in June 2008.¹ Our motivation for this panel came in great part from the recent surfacing of new material pertaining to this period, which opens the way to novel research on the development of Tibetan Buddhism in the early part of the Second Diffusion (*phyi dar*). In particular, the 2006 publication of the first 30-volume set of the *bKa' gdams gsuñ 'bum* by the dPal brtsegs Institute for Ancient Tibetan Manuscripts (*dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rñin źib 'jug khan*)²

¹ Three further papers were presented in the IABS panel at Emory: “Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po’s Subclassification of the Madhyamaka School” by Orna Almogi, “Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po on ‘Dialectics’ (*mtshan ñid*), ‘Secret Mantra’ (*gsañ sñags*), and the ‘View’ (*lta ba*)” by Nathaniel Rich, and “Challenging Candrakīrti: Phywa pa Chos kyi señ ge’s Criticism of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka” by Dorji Wangchuk. Owing to other commitments, these could not be included in the present volume. Thomas Doctor’s paper was originally presented in the panel “Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Models of Truth or Reality in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism.”

² The first 30 volumes appeared in 2006 and a second set of 30 volumes in 2007. A third set (vols. 61–90) has been published in 2009. An improved table of contents of the first 30 volumes appeared in appendix A of Kano (2007), and one of volumes 31–60 appeared in appendix A of

gives us access to a rich collection of texts stemming from authors belonging to the bKa' gdams pa school of Tibetan Buddhism, dating from the 11th to the 15th century – a mix of famous figures and so far unknown thinkers, whose works were for the most part hitherto unavailable, either considered lost or simply undiscovered. While the bKa' gdams pa scholars are remembered as the primary importers of philosophical or scholastic traditions into Tibet, their activities were complemented by rÑiñ ma pa scholars who approached similar philosophical issues from their commitments to a specific body of tantric literature. Chief among these rÑiñ ma pa scholars was Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po, a selection of whose writings were published in 1974, but whose “Collected Works” (*gsuñ 'bum*) were made widely available only in 1999, sparking renewed interest in this important figure.³ The IABS panel, organized by Pascale Hugon, Kazuo Kano, and Kevin Vose, was the first occasion to gather scholars investigating this newly recovered material and share our results on this key, but so far uncharted period of early Tibetan scholasticism.

In adopting the term “scholasticism,” we focus attention on a series of features characteristic of non-tantric Buddhism in Tibet, features that began to take shape during the first decades of the Second Diffusion, a period foundational to the development of Tibet's Buddhist orders. Previous scholarship on Tibetan scholasticism and scholasticism as a comparative category highlights the central importance of both adherence to tradition and rationality: scholastics treat philosophical issues within the bounds of authoritative texts, frequently in the guise of scriptural exegesis, and always through reasoned analysis.⁴ The study of dGe lugs pa

Kano (2009).

³ For a discussion of Roñ zom's *Collected Works*, see Almogi (2002). The most widely available edition of Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po's works is the *Roñ zom Chos bzañ gi gsuñ 'bum*, while two earlier editions were published in Khams by Padma kun grol and in California by the Yeshe De Project. As Almogi (2002: 78) reports, all three editions contain the same thirty-two works of Roñ zom.

⁴ Cabezon (1994) and Cabezon (1998).

and rñiñ ma pa scholastic traditions has given us a sense of the textual, philosophical, and didactic practices these Tibetan schools developed around Indian texts from the fifteenth century into the present, practices that contributed to the enduring success of these orders.⁵ The work of Sa skya Pañḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251) to develop an Indian-oriented scholarly method, consisting of exposition, composition, and debate, has also been explored.⁶ What remains unclear is the early history of Tibetan scholasticism. With the wealth of newly available bKa' gdams pa material, together with resources from early rñiñ ma pa, bKa' brgyud pa, and Sa skya pa scholars, we can now investigate this crucial period in order both to understand its dynamics and to provide a sense of its contributions to later developments in the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

A perusal of the *bKa' gdams gsuñ 'bum* reveals that early bKa' gdams pa authors, like their successors, concerned themselves with a limited range of Indian Buddhist literature: the “Perfection of Wisdom” sūtras, particularly as systematized by Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālamkāralokā*; the *pramāṇa* literature of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and their commentators; the “Maitreya” texts, in particular the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* and *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*; Madhyamaka treatises; and Vinaya texts. Patterns of explication, too, are familiar from later scholastic literature; in some cases, we can discover the creation of those patterns – regarding either their form or contents (or both) – in this early literature. One of the most striking features, though, is that we see several familiar themes treated to lively philosophical discussion, with unique and frequently competing conclusions. Among the reasons surely is the newness of much of this Indian literature. As Tibetans turned again to India just prior to the year 1000 to revive their Buddhist traditions, they discovered a wealth of literature either not in circulation or simply not yet created during their previous contacts with the subcontinent. A number of Tibetans' scholarly reputations were made on the basis of their translations of this new materi-

⁵ In addition to Cabezón's work, see Dreyfus (2003) and (2005).

⁶ See notably Jackson (1987) and Gold (2007).

al; the *bKa' gdams gsun 'bum* volumes show us additionally that translators and their followers immediately set about explicating, analyzing, and classifying these texts. The variety of conflicting interpretations that this new literature inspired bears witness to the creativity (sometimes at the expense of fidelity to their Indian sources) and vitality of these early Tibetan authors.

A number of texts that would become centrally authoritative for later generations of Tibetan scholastics entered Tibet only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; among these are Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra* and *Prasannapadā*. While the later Tibetan analysis of the superiority of Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka is familiar to many, in this formative period, Candrakīrti's authority was by no means universally accepted. As the contributions to this volume from Thomas Doctor, Georges Dreyfus and Drongbu Tsering, Kevin Vose, and Chizuko Yoshimizu show, Candrakīrti's early Tibetan supporters portray his philosophy in quite distinctive terms, emphasizing the incompatibility of his thought with that of Dharmakīrti; at the same time, we see several *bKa' gdams pa* authors remaining unconvinced by Candrakīrti due to this perceived incompatibility. Cabezón notes that the scholastic method is marked in part by the attempt to integrate rational and experiential religious domains.⁷ As can be witnessed in this volume, such tension came in this period to be embodied in the juxtaposition of Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti; the marriage of the two, a central characteristic of later Tibetan scholasticism, had yet to be achieved.

While Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's main treatises entered Tibet in the imperial period, eleventh century retranslations together with translations of crucial commentarial materials on these treatises revitalized Tibetan study of them, sparking a "new epistemology" (*tshad ma gсар ma*) in Tibet, centered at gSañ phu Ne'u thog Monastery (founded in 1073 by rÑog Legs pa'i śes rab). As will be seen in the contributions to this volume from Pascale Hugon and Jonathan Stoltz, this revival led to broad Tibetan explorations of the nature of knowledge, including the role of reasoning in religious pursuits. In addition to giving us a first-hand look at the

⁷ Cabezón (1994: 19–20, 190–191).

“new epistemology,” the newly recovered materials will allow us to assess the degree to which later generations of Tibetan epistemologists are indebted to gSañ phu’s innovations. The success of the “new epistemology” indeed marked gSañ phu as the pre-eminent training ground for generations of Tibetan scholars.

In addition to the “new epistemology” and Candrakīrtian Madhyamaka, a third crucial textual stream that entered Tibet during this same period was the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (*Uttaratantra*) attributed to Maitreya. Reputed to have been rediscovered, along with the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, by Maitrīpāda around the year 1000, this text became available in Tibet shortly after through rÑog Blo ldan śes rab’s translation. In Tibet, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* became the centerpiece of competing understandings of “Buddha-nature;” several enduring interpretations emerged within the early bKa’ gdams pa tradition, as seen in Kazuo Kano’s contribution to this volume. As Kano discusses, bKa’ gdams pa authors understood Buddha-nature to be in perfect harmony with Madhyamaka explanations of emptiness, while some early Tibetan interpreters saw a Buddha-nature endowed with the qualities of a Buddha to be an exception to the rule: Buddha-nature was empty only of defilements. These competing views in time would fuel the debate over “intrinsic emptiness” (*ran ston*) and “extrinsic emptiness” (*gžan ston*) in Tibet.

The degree of the impact of “new translations” on the forms of Buddhism surviving in Tibet from the imperial period – that would coalesce into the rÑiñ ma school – remains a conundrum. As Heidi Köppl’s contribution to this volume suggests, one pressing concern among defenders of “old” Buddhism was the relationship between Madhyamaka thought, particularly the “Yogācāra-Madhyamaka” that integrated the *pramāṇa* tradition, and the Mahāyoga tantras that are central to rÑiñ ma. At least in the treatment of Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po, this relationship is perhaps cognate to bKa’ gdams pa concern with the works of Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti: for Roñ zom, *pramāṇa*-infused Madhyamaka represents an undue preoccupation with reasoning, while Mahāyoga alone yields transformative religious experience.

The selection of papers presented here illustrates well the range of problems figuring among the core preoccupations of this time-frame, and hints also at their interconnection. A large place is devoted in this volume to thinkers belonging to the bKa' gdams pa school – many of them linked to gSañ phu Ne'u thog Monastery. The first of them is rÑog Blo ldan śes rab (1059–1109), the nephew of the monastery's founder and its second abbot, who embodies several levels of the scholarly enterprise: besides being renown for his translations – he earned the title of “Lo chen” or “Lo tsā ba chen po” (i.e., “great translator”) – he also authored an impressive number of exegeses, summaries and commentaries, and established lineages in several areas of Buddhist learning. Kazuo Kano's paper brings to the fore rÑog's contribution to the Buddha-nature teaching in his interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Kano provides a first-hand account of rÑog's view on the subject by offering a survey of key themes in rÑog's commentary, and brings to light the exegetical problems faced by this scholar in his attempt to reconcile the source-text with his own philosophical orientation. This involves, among the core issues, reading the *Ratnagotravibhāga's* teaching of Buddha-nature as an ultimate compatible with a Madhyamaka-oriented view of emptiness. rÑog's exegetical strategy and interpretation paved the way for later generations of scholars. Kano sketches in particular rÑog's impact on the bKa' gdams pa tradition by comparing a commentary on the same text by a scholar active a generation later, Phya pa Chos kyi señ ge (1109–1169), a comparison that, without undermining rÑog's indubitable influence, bears witness to a tradition in continuous evolution.

Although not all the material we could wish for has become available from rÑog's disciples – in particular, no epistemological work by these authors has yet surfaced – we are now in a position to examine their views on several topics, notably Madhyamaka. The massive *bsTan rim chen mo* (*Great Exposition of the Stages of the Doctrine*) of rÑog's student, Gro luñ pa Blo gros 'byuñ gnas, has been available for some time and includes lengthy discussions of Madhyamaka issues. To this, the *bKa' gdams gsuñ 'bum* adds several works of rGya dmar pa Byañ chub grags, including (in volume 31) an independent Madhyamaka composition, *dBu ma'i de kho na ñid gtan la dbab pa*. Exploring the possibilities for tracing

the development of Madhyamaka thinking among early gSañ phu authors, Kevin Vose's paper guides us through several interpretations of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, touching upon the readings of four generations of commentators: rNog, rGya dmar pa, his student Phya pa Chos kyi señ ge, and Phya pa's student gTsañ nag pa brTson 'grus señ ge. Vose shows how interpretations of Śāntideva's depiction of the ultimate were instrumental in early Tibetan divisions of Madhyamaka, with some authors aligning Śāntideva with Candrakīrti's views, while others chose to read him as agreeing with a logico-epistemologically oriented Madhyamaka. By showing the evolution of efforts to reconcile Śāntideva's views of the ultimate with the emphasis on logic characteristic of the gSañ phu lineage, Vose brings to the fore key aspects of the early development of Madhyamaka categories and shows their relevance to later discussions on the nature and origin of the Svāntarika-Prāsaṅgika divide.

Kano's and Vose's papers both take into account the views of Phya pa Chos kyi señ ge, the 6th abbot of gSañ phu Ne'u thog, who pursued his predecessors' endeavors at exegeses and commentaries on the texts whose lineages were initiated by rNog. While he emerges as an original interpreter of Madhyamaka, Phya pa is especially famous for his contribution to epistemology. The papers by Pascale Hugon and by Jonathan Stoltz both focus on Phya pa the logician. The surfacing of Phya pa's works on the subject offers a welcome opportunity to revise a number of "myths" propagated in the absence of first-hand material. We are now in a position to reassess his relation with the Indian tradition and the extent and orientation of his innovative input, which is to be understood in the more general framework of his Madhyamaka system. Early epistemological treatises like those of Phya pa demonstrate (along with variant interpretations of Indian sources – a number of which can be traced back, let us note, to the influence of Indian commentators) new themes of inquiry that would come to occupy a significant place in the work of later Tibetan scholars.

Hugon's paper deals with one such innovation, the so-called "theory of definition," of which the earliest comprehensive account presently available is found in Phya pa's two main works of epis-

temology. Hugon leaves aside the intricate details of this theory to adopt a historical perspective aiming at identifying possible sources and influences that may have led to the constitution and elaboration of this theory. She first puts to the test some traditional claims as to the arising of this theory – translation issues, cross-domain discussions – and explores the possibility of an influence not acknowledged in the tradition, located in Dharmottara’s commentarial works. Although the theory of definition likely originated in epistemological issues and is treated extensively in epistemological treatises, Hugon’s paper hints to its interconnection with Phya pa’s Madhyamaka agenda.

Stoltz takes up Phya pa from a philosophical perspective – and a critical one – throwing light on aspects of Phya pa’s typology of mental states and his understanding of dependence. Starting from a single analogical argument between Phya pa and a hypothetical opponent, Stoltz weighs the implications behind the analogy that involves, on the one side, conceptual cognition and its objects, concepts, and, on the other, a specific type of cognition termed “factive assessment” (*yid dpyod*), which brings about a correct cognition, although not by the recognized means that would qualify it as a “valid cognition” (*tshad ma*). Analyzing the different models of dependence that could be applied between the respective cognitions and their objects, Stoltz shows Phya pa’s difficulty in justifying his stance on the way factive assessment works. Although Stoltz takes a philosophical approach, his discussion of this argument reveals the impact of Phya pa’s historical context. He shows that Phya pa’s philosophical difficulties come from his reluctance to dismiss traditional categories (in this case, the accepted types of natural dependence, causality and identity), which leaves him in an awkward – and perhaps indefensible – position regarding his new typology of cognitions.

Whereas Phya pa’s influence in the domain of epistemology was long lasting, as can be seen from the works of his disciple gTsañ nag pa and later epistemological works attached to gSañ phu Monastery, many of his students turned their backs on his Madhyamaka views. This turnaround comes as a consequence of the Candrakīrtian “resurrection” brought about by the activities of

Pa tshab ṅi ma grags (1055–1145?). Pa tshab was not only the translator of Candrakīrti's major works, he was also active as a teacher, and founded a Madhyamaka lineage which came to dominate the Tibetan landscape. The paper written by Georges Dreyfus in collaboration with Drongbu Tsering constitutes a pioneer study of Pa tshab's thought based on three works attributed to Pa tshab published in the *bKa' gdams gsun 'bum* and a significant contribution to our knowledge of the early development of Madhyamaka thought in Tibet. Dreyfus and Tsering seek first to establish the authorship of the three works and examine their historical significance, particularly in view of the origin of the Svāntrika-Prāsaṅgika divide, which, they suggest, might have its source in the late Indian tradition. The authors' examination of the contents of these texts focuses on two themes, namely, can Mādhyamikas have any thesis and can they include valid cognition and related theories within their tradition? The paper portrays Pa tshab's views on these issues as a kind of skepticism, and deals with the probable reasons why, albeit a pivotal figure, Pa tshab was not an influential interpreter of Madhyamaka, particularly when compared with his students, rMa bya Byañ chub brtson 'grus and Žañ Thañ sag pa Byuñ gnas ye śes.

The papers by Thomas Doctor and Chizuko Yoshimizu bring into light the respective contributions of these two disciples of Pa tshab and their views on the controversial issues mentioned above. rMa bya came to play a pivotal role in the development of the Candrakīrti-inspired interpretation of Madhyamaka in Tibet. He was initially a student of Phya pa Chos kyi señ ge and as such stood in the circle of the gSañ phu epistemological school. His turn from his teacher Phya pa's *pramāṇa*-infused Madhyamaka to embrace the new Candrakīrti movement represents a major development in Tibetan Madhyamaka: based on his epistemological training, rMa bya was the first to begin integrating the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti tradition and Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka, a process that continues to occupy Tibetan Madhyamaka exegetes. Doctor's paper, based on a newly recovered work by rMa bya and supplemented with his only previously known text, situates the author in view of his hermeneutical framework regarding Yogācāra and Madhyamaka and takes up his explanation of the two truths. He demonstrates rMa bya's effort to reconcile the application of valid cognition with his Madhyamaka

anti-realist stance, in particular in his account of mere appearances (*snañ tsam*). Doctor shows that rMa bya, anticipating Tsoñ kha pa's views two centuries prior to that extraordinarily influential figure, sees Phya pa's brand of "Svātantrika"-Madhyamaka as holding to the conventional existence of "particular characteristics" (*rañ gi mtshan ñid*), while Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka avoids this conventional reification and so offers a superior account of "worldly" valid cognition within an empty world.

Also a (presumably direct) disciple of Pa tshab, Żañ Thañ sag pa's exact affiliation and lineage remain uncertain. The founder of Thañ sag Monastery in 'Phan yul, a renowned center of Madhyamaka studies, Żañ Thañ sag pa contributed to the advance of Candrakīrti-inspired Madhyamaka in Tibet. While we do not yet know whether he had any schooling at gSañ phu or perhaps learned logic from Pa tshab or Kanakavarman, Żañ Thañ sag pa displays a wide and deep knowledge of the Buddhist logico-epistemological system. As with rMa bya, this epistemological background plays a significant role in his reading of Madhyamaka. Yoshimizu's paper focuses on Żañ Thañ sag pa's approach to one of the most prominent questions that Madhyamaka must face, namely, that of the possibility of holding a thesis. This is linked, moreover, with the commentarial difficulty of accounting for Candrakīrti's use of the term "thesis" when referring to several of Nāgārjuna's statements. On the basis of his only available work, a newly recovered and complete commentary on Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, Yoshimizu examines how Żañ Thañ sag pa reconciles a commitment to logical argumentation with his denial that a Mādhyamika holds any philosophical thesis. Żañ Thañ sag pa, then, treats the question of philosophical thesis with regard to both the logicians' – Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's – discussions and those of Nāgārjuna's commentators. The particular status of negation is taken up in relation to this issue, as Yoshimizu examines Żañ Thañ sag pa's refusal to admit even negation as a thesis.

Clearly, a central concern for Madhyamaka scholars of this period was the place and role of epistemology: whether supportive of or antagonistic to the new Candrakīrti movement, bKa' gdams pa authors sought to utilize valid means of knowledge within re-

ligious pursuits, while still preserving the unique perspective of Madhyamaka emptiness. Heidi Köppl's examination of Roñ zom Chos kyi bzañ po's Madhyamaka presents a quite different concern, the superiority of Tantra to any "sūtra"-based viewpoint. Köppl investigates how Roñ zom's commitments to rÑiñ ma pa tantras lead him to consider Madhyamaka as a view inferior to that of Mahāyoga. Starting with Roñ zom's criticism of Madhyamaka, Köppl inquires into the author's singular view of relative truth as pure appearance and his description of appearances as "divine." She shows that Roñ zom's critique of Madhyamaka assumes the *pramāṇa*-infused variety, leading to the possibility that he would have endorsed Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka, with its utter rejection of any reification of ordinary appearances, which Roñ zom understood to be a precondition of seeing those appearances as "divine." While we have no evidence that Roñ zom knew Candrakīrti's work – he may have written prior to Pa tshab's promulgation of Candrakīrti in Tibet – Köppl's work suggests some of the larger forces at work in the development of scholasticism in Tibet.

The interplay of rÑiñ ma pa tantric commitments and the non-tantric literature entering Tibet in this period is certainly a fertile field for future research. Likewise, there is yet more to be discovered about the interaction of Madhyamaka and epistemology, *dbu ma* and *tshad ma*, that in later Tibetan scholasticism would come to be fused as "*dbu tshad*." The newly published texts provide a wonderful opportunity for further research. It is a desideratum that international collaboration continues on these abundant new materials so that individual studies may be woven into a broader and more precise picture of the intricate issues of this early period. The research presented here merely scratches the surface of this foundational stage in Tibet's development of Buddhist scholasticism, but we hope that it gives a sense of its vitality and far-reaching importance.

Bibliography

- bKa' gdams gsuñ 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*. Chengdu: dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rñiñ žib 'jug khañ, 2006–2009.
- Roñ zom Chos bzañ gi gsuñ 'bum*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khañ, 1999.
- Almogi, Orna. 2002. “Sources on the Life and Works of the Eleventh-Century Tibetan Scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po: A Brief Survey.” In *Tibet, Past and Present*, ed. Henk Blezer. Leiden: Brill, 67–80.
- Cabezón, José I. 1994. *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Cabezón, José I. (ed.). 1998. *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Dreyfus, Georges. 2003. *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- . 2005. “Where Do Commentarial Schools Come From? Reflections on the History of Tibetan Scholasticism.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.2: 273–297.
- Gold, Jonathan C. 2007. *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Pañḍita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Jackson, David P. 1987. *The Entrance Gate for the Wise (Section III): Sa-skya Pañḍita on Indian and Tibetan Traditions of Pramāṇa and Philosophical Debate*. 2 volumes. Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien.
- Kano, Kazuo. 2007. “A Critical Edition of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's *sPring yig bdud rtsi'i thig le*.” *Kōyasan daigaku mikkyōbunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 20: 1–58.
- . 2009. “An Annotated Translation of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's *sPring yig bdud rtsi'i thig le*.” *Kōyasan daigaku mikkyōbunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 22: 121–178.