Karma Phuntsho

Nominal Persons and The Sound of Their Hands Clapping

A Review of

THE SOUND OF TWO HANDS CLAPPING: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk by George B. J. Dreyfus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003
446 pages, ISBN 0-520-23259-3 (hardback) 0-520-23260-7 (paperback)
and
SELF, REALITY AND REASON IN TIBETAN PHILOSOPHY: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way by Thupten Jinpa, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002
248 pages, hardbound, ISBN 0-7007-1279-8

The two books under review relate to Geluk monastic education; the first one concern with pedagogy and educational practices and the second with Madhyamaka, the most important content of such education.[*]

The butter tea was ready. It was specially prepared for this occasion by my room teacher (*shag rgan*). A senior Geshe (*dge bshes*) accompanied me to the abbot's residence. As we entered, I made three full prostrations (*brkyangs phyag*), offered a silk scarf (*kha dar*) and kneeled as instructed while the Geshe presented me to the abbot with the flask of tea. Momentarily, the abbot's attendant served the tea to all three of us in small china cups. I was not supposed to sip it but gulp it down at once. It almost burnt my tongue and throat. The abbot asked me few questions, which the Geshe replied on my behalf. The abbot was particularly pleased to have a postulant from Bhutan, a country poorly represented in Geluk (*dge lugs*) monasteries. With no physical or mental unfitness to bar me from the holy community, he gave his blessings for my admission to the Jay College of Sera Monastery.[1]

George Dreyfus's *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* gives a vivid and extensive account and analysis of the education that follows the initiation I have undergone like many tens of thousands of Gelukpa monks. Interweaving his rich personal experience with the penetrative analysis of an established academic in his field, Dreyfus presents a thoroughgoing study of Tibetan monastic education, particularly in the Geluk tradition mixed with a saga of his own spiritual and educational journey in that tradition. An impressive work, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* reveals the formalities, modalities, strengths, weaknesses, challenges and prospects of the scholastic training prevalent in the major seats of Geluk school. It captures the aspiration, occupation, lifestyle and achievement of monks in Geluk scholastic centres and his personal quest for Buddhist scholarship in such a milieu.

Dreyfus's odyssey culminated in the highest degree of academic honour the Geluk tradition offers making Dreyfus, also known as Geshe Sangay Samdrup, the first Western person to obtain a traditional Geshe title. This book, as he rightfully claims (p. 5), treats the subject both from within and without, integrating rich personal experience with the academic skill of analytical and comparative thinking. It combines the criticality and inquisitiveness of an enquirer outside the tradition and the in depth understanding and familiarity of a member within the tradition.

[*]A version of this review was first published in *UKABS Buddhist Studies Review*, vol. 21, no. 2

[1] The Sera Monastery in exile is located in Byllakuppe, two hours drive west of the city of Mysore, South India.

Dreyfus starts by giving a comprehensive history of the Tibetan monastic and scholastic tradition and the organization and maintenance of monastic institutions, and the moving account of how his own membership began. He leads the reader on an intellectual journey into the long and arduous Tibetan monastic education, which the Geluk school in particular is well known for. Discussing the religious, pedagogical, social and political strands of the educational process culminating in the degrees of Geshe, and finally the dynamics of change it is confronted with in a globalised world and scattered diaspora, Dreyfus's work is aimed at portraying a complete and clear picture of the Tibetan monastic education. No one so far has undertaken such a project and only a few like Dreyfus have the knowledge and means to do it successfully.

Dreyfus's account, as he duly reminds us, is focussed on the three seats of the Geluk tradition, which are debating institutions (*rtsod grwa*) run in the style of corporates. Apart from minor reforms, the seats in India have retained the traditional form of administrative, social and pedagogical practices. The Nyingma (*rnying ma*) monastic college at Namdrolling,[2] which Dreyfus chose to represent the commentarial institutions (*bshad grwa*), is however a modern establishment styled on the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath. It is truly the best centre for an all round Tibetan Buddhist education focussing on the Nyingma tradition, but except for its pedagogical practice, it is run like a boarding school and thus does not reflect the settings of a traditional commentarial institution. Like the thriving centres at Serta and Yachen in Tibet today, most institutions belonging to the commentarial tradition consisted of unstructured shanties built by independent disciples and devotees encamped around a charismatic lama, and lacked a proper administrative and curricular organization. Thus, the monastic centres discussed here do not represent the set-up of and the lifestyle and education in most Tibetan monasteries, much less all.

In the course of his explanation of the Tibetan monastic polities and the religious education imparted therein, Dreyfus unpacks for us a number of underlying assumptions about Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. It particularly hits the 'virtual' image people in the West have of Tibetan monasteries as sanctuaries of peace and tranquillity filled with compassionate and enlightened souls. Far from being an island of peace and spirituality that most outsiders imagine, Dreyfus tells us that they are 'oceans housing all kinds of fishes' (p. 38). He shows us their human side with its shortcomings (gun culture, p. 55, punk monks, 38, corporal punishment, p. 58, materialism p. 58, 256, etc.) despite the rigorous religious training, which involves much hardship and austere living. Dreyfus even compares the severe discipline of the monasteries to an army boot camp training. This naturally leaves the reader wondering why the means and the end do not meet. Why do Tibetan monasteries, notwithstanding the intensive training in one of world's most pacifist and non-materialistic civilization, have a significant number of bellicose and materialist monks? My teachers told me that monks of Dargye monastery in Kham were almost all armed with guns as were the gangster monks (*ldab ldob*) in the three seats in Central Tibet.[3] It is not at all rare to come across rows and fights in the big monasteries. I have myself witnessed dozens of bloody confrontations between monks during my eleven years in Sera and Namdrolling, in strong contrast to merely two instances of shoving in rowdy bops during six years at Oxford. Tibetan history also contains numerous episodes of large scale monastic violence.

---

[2] The college officially known as Ngagyur Nyingma Institute is part of Namdrolling, the largest Nyingma monastery in exile.

[3] Personal communication with Khenpo Pema Sherab, 1995

Dreyfus, like Goldstein, explains such ills as unfortunate elements concomitant with 'mass monasticism'.[4] They are by-products of being 'the big ocean'; to put in a common Tibetan religious idiom, the *dge 'dun 'dus pa rgya mtsho*. However, one may also add to this the inefficiency in the methods of education to civilize the students. The educational curriculum and pedagogic techniques, particularly in the first few years of training in the main Geluk centres, are very professional and technical in nature rather than practical and liberal. Although the topics studied mostly consist of serious Buddhist metaphysics and soteriology, they are taught in a highly theoretical and pedantic style and are largely an extrovert art of academic learning rather than a religious training internalised to tame the mind and improve one's personality, or an education to broaden the perspectives of the pupil.

Geluk monks, as Dreyfus points out, spend years in the monasteries even without knowing what precepts they are suppose to observe (p. 114). It is not rare to find a monk running into his fourth year in a Geluk monastery still not knowing what the ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous actions are. Similarly in many non-Geluk monasteries such as the Dratshang (*grwa tshang*) of Namdrolling and Central Monk Body of Bhutan, monks have to devote almost all their time to liturgical training and duties so that they seldom have the opportunity and means to learn and practise the Buddhism of principles and values. Many do not even know the most fundamental of Buddhist concepts and values. Thus, most monasteries hardly succeed in imparting to their monks a value education and a philosophical and moral training like the one classically exemplified in the sequential cultivation of three kinds of discriminative knowledge (*shes rab rnam gsum*).

In Part II, Dreyfus studies the early educational practices and curriculum in the monastic centres assessing the role of literacy and memorization. Dreyfus looks into what constitutes literacy and how it is obtained and utilized in Tibet. He also gives a vivid picture of the memorization exercises underlining its importance in traditional education and the benefits he has personally reaped from adopting it (p. 96-7). Highlighting the vocality of Tibetan monastic education, here again, Dreyfus's account destroys the Western imagination of Tibetan monasteries as oasis of quiet and peace. He shows how they are full of a cacophony of sounds from memorization drills, ritual chanting, monastic music and the clapping of hands, thudding of feet and the roars and screams coming from the debate courtyards.

Dreyfus then discusses monastic curriculum and the role of commentary, interpretation, authority, oral transmission, meditation and their interrelationships in Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. He provides a clear survey of the scholastic curriculum in the major seats of the Geluk tradition presenting both its strengths and weaknesses. His clarification on the excesses of *yigcha* manuals in Gelukpa curriculum is particularly interesting given the qualms about it both among non-Geluk Tibetan scholars and Western academics. However, the curriculum at Namdrolling, unlike Dreyfus claims, is not centred on the collection of thirteen texts of mKhan po gZhan dga', who he also confounds with gZhan phan mTha' yas, the founder of Śrīsiṃha College at rDzogs chen (p. 148). Of the thirteen texts associated with mKhan po gZhan dga', *Abhidharmasamuccaya* is not in the curriculum and Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* is not included in the list. Thus, texts within gZhan dga's collection does not constitute even one third of the volume of the curriculum of Namdrolling's

[4] Goldstein (1998), 'The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung' in M. Goldstein and M. Kapstein, *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity,* Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 18-19

college. Curriculum at rDzong gsar and rDzogs chen monastic colleges however are said to have been centred on the thirteen texts.

Another comparison that can be made between the two traditions, which Dreyfus does not do in detail but which is very interesting and educationally significant, is concerning the moral guidance, which do not form part of the monastic curriculum *per se*. They are often given before, after or outside the structured curricular lessons. In the Geluk monasteries, such guidance focuses on how to cherish one's own tradition, to show commitment to one's system and to serve one's monastery. Membership in the monastery is taught to be seen as a privileged status and service to the monastery as a noble deed. This inculcates a strong sense of attachment and belonging to the monastery.

Like the answer Dreyfus received to his queries about meditation (p. 169), my teachers, who were leading Geshes in Sera, warned me that undertaking meditation with the hope of getting enlightenment in our degenerated age is being too ambitious. Were one to go and stay like Milarepa in the snows, one may only freeze to death. The prudent thing to do now is to study in the monastery, contribute to its communal success and pray to reach enlightenment when Maitreya comes to save the world. Such advices have deep influence on the students, making them both attached to the monastery and cordial and committed members. I remember a new monk in Sera gazing at the three-thousand strong congregation from the corner of the hall with elation and remarking, "What a great fortune to be sitting with this holy congregation?" It is primarily such admiration of their monastic community which has helped Geluk monasteries to thrive socially and economically. Some monks work as vendors for many years to throw a good party to the whole monastery and while others sacrifice their whole life for the monastery engaging in some drudgery. The Geluk monks are particularly well known for conducting their public relations with much civility.

In contrast, non-Gelukpas are less occupied with the success of their monastic communities. At every session in commentarial colleges such as the one in Namdrolling, moral guidance is given routinely before the curricular lessons in the form of preliminaries known as *kun slong kun spyod kyi rims pa*, the procedure of intention and behaviour. Students are reminded of what intentions and behaviours they should avoid and what they should cultivate in the pursuit of dharma in general and for the lesson in particular. The length and style vary from teacher to teacher but the students are always reminded to generate Bodhicitta and frequently to reflect on the four points of mind turning (*blo ldog rnam pa bzhi*): The rarity and preciousness of humanhood, the impermanence of life, the flaws of *saṃsāra* and the infallibility of *karma*.

Monks are also frequently told how important it is to internalise the Buddhist doctrine through practice and to meditate on it after learning it theoretically. In stark contrast to the Geluk attitude mentioned above, the Nyingmapas believe that drastic spiritual developments are possible even today and claim the rDzogs chen teachings to have become more effective in the degenerate age so that Buddhahood is obtainable even in one lifetime. Thus, all worldly pursuits are discouraged and meditation taught to be the most important undertaking after scholastic training. These advices instil in the students a strong inclination for unworldly spiritual goals giving rise to a great number of practitioners. However, as a consequence Nyingma monks tend to be socially inept and their monasteries are run very poorly with much less solidarity and cohesion than the Gelukpas.

Thus, the advices and admonitions received as adjunct to the actual curricular teachings and the values and achievements idealized in their communities play a major role in shaping their personalities and outlooks. Although the content of the curriculum in Gelukpa and Nyingma generally are not very different, there is certainly an ideological gap between the two resulting from the difference in these kinds of approaches and priorities.

The chapters 10, 11 and 12 form the crux of *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*. Dreyfus gives an elaborate treatment of the nature of Tibetan debate and its formulation in the greater context of Indian and Western forms of logic and dialectics. Discussing the procedures and rules of debate, he depicts the ritual that Tibetan debate is with its theatrical physical conducts and verbal exchanges, which often escalates to a spectacle involving much aggression and abuse, and occasionally blows. He explores the study and teaching of debate through the Collected Topics and its subsequent role in and relationship with the study of subjects such as epistemology and Madhyamaka. An account of the long Geluk educational process is unfolded interwoven with the art of debate, which is its main thread.

Dreyfus's exposition is thorough and captivating except perhaps for a rather simplistic remark that Geshe is the highest degree awarded by Tibetan Buddhist monastic universities/institutions (p. 2, 254). Although there is some truth in it, it simplifies the complexity of Tibetan educational systems, which his book seeks to unravel and does so successfully. There is no one common standard for degrees in Tibet and Geshe, as an abbreviation of *dge ba'i bshes gnyen* (Sanskrit: *kalyāṇamitra*) as he notes (p. 254), does not always refer to a degree. It is often used as a title, like the titles of Lopen (*slob dpon*) and Khenpo (*mkhan po*). Moreover, the Geshe title in Geluk monasteries is sometimes conferred on people with no proper academic credentials, as suggested by the pejorative epithet Tongo Geshe (*gtong sgo dge bshes*) or Party Geshe. Dreyfus passes this in silence but there is a significant number of Geshe titles given to candidates who goes through a symbolic exam and throws a party to the monastery.

In the final chapter of Part II, Dreyfus investigates into whether Tibetan debate is merely a pedagogical exercise or constitutes any critical inquiry. Maintaining the two cases to be a matter of personal opinion and pedagogical style, he argues that some Geluk scholars consider debate merely as a mnemonic tool and intellectual exercise to internalise pre-given truths. Geshe Rabten is portrayed as a teacher of this category who believed in debate and for that matter any educational enterprise as instruments to internalise rather than inquire, and to reiterate rather than reveal. On the other hand, Gen Nyima, the scholar who had to hold his right eyelid with his finger, is seen as an epitome of the latter type, who advocated a degree of Socratic enquiry. Gen Nyima, Dreyfus tells us, excelled in the art of questioning and accepted no answer as final. He accepted no absolute views and kept 'the pragmatic dimension of the inquiry in sight' (p. 288).

Dreyfus continues the discussion of the role of critical thinking and the room for rationality in Geluk monasteries in Part III of his book. He first assesses the role of rational enquiry in Tibetan monasteries placing it in the greater context of Tibetan world view and juxtaposing reason and rationality with popular cultures. From the many popular beliefs, Dreyfus elaborates on spirit worship, a practice which is deeply ingrained in the Tibetan society. Both in here and elsewhere,[5] Dreyfus poignantly narrates the controversy surrounding the cult of Shuk-den (*shugs ldan*), which has

[5] Dreyfus (1998), "The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel", *JIABS*, 21/2, pp. 227-270

divided the Gelukpa community and resulted in a ruthless murder of one of his teachers. Describing this dispute, in which Tibetan virtuosi of the highest order such as the Dalai Lama and his teacher were involved, Dreyfus remarks that Tibetan scholars saw no conflict between rationality and belief in spirits and many things scientifically unproven. He concludes that Tibetan reason and rationality is thus deeply embedded in their order of the world and culture. Dreyfus could perhaps have said a little more on how in fact Tibetans use their reason and rationality to support such beliefs and world order, as they do to prove previous and next lives.

Next, Dreyfus explores the limit of rationality in Tibetan monasteries and the constraints imposed internally by the rigidity of scholasticism and externally by orthodoxy influenced by socio-political concerns. He shows how Tibetan scholasticism is progressive in that it evolves through reinterpretation and reappropriation but only within the limitations set by orthodoxy. Debate and inquiry are constrained by social and political factors. He uses the case of Gedun Choephel (p. 280, 314), the maverick Geluk scholar, and Gen Nyima and Palden Drakpa to illustrate this grip of orthodoxy. Dreyfus concludes giving a brief overview of his study of Tibetan scholasticism and goes into an account of changes taking place in the scholastic centres driven by both globalizing trends as well as socio-economic factors. He also recounts his departure from the monasteries and his experience in the University where he missed debate but broadened his knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism through exposure to other traditions. The book ends with sixty pages of very informative endnotes, bibliography and an index but has numerous typographical errors in Tibetan transliteration (pp. 57, 59, 65, 83, 84, etc.).

The Sound of Two Hands Clapping is certainly a great achievement and compelling read, and Dreyfus, as always,[6] treats his subject with much passion and rigour. A personal story intertwined with intellectual journey into one of world's most exotic educational traditions, the book is both a unique and a significant contribution to the field of Tibetan studies. Dreyfus may have failed to be a Geluk protégé of his teachers (p. 331), but he has certainly succeeded in revealing their life and wisdom and explicating the intricacies and complexities of their culture with a remarkable zest. *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* is indispensable for those wishing to understand Tibetan scholasticism in general and the art of learning by clapping two hands in particular.

***

While George Dreyfus is the first Western Geshe, Jinpa is the first traditional Geshe Lharampa (*dge bshes lha rams pa*) to obtain a doctorate from a famous western academic establishment. Jinpa was a star scholar of Gaden monastery even before he became the personal interpreter for the Dalai Lama, a role that earned Jinpa much reputation. At the end of Jinpa's final exam, a prominent Geshe of Gaden is said to have taken off his hat and made a wish publicly that Gaden be filled by personalities like Jinpa (to which one may also add that later when Jinpa renounced his monkhood and married his wife, some witty monks of Gaden, with playful irony, remarked that the wish of the old Geshe never come true, lest Gaden would have no monks left).

Jinpa's illustrious career continued with his study at Cambridge University, which culminated in his doctoral degree. *The Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan*

[6] See also his other major work, Dreyfus (1997), *Recognizing Reality, Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations,* Albany: State University of New York Press

Philosophy is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation entitled, *Self, Persons and Madhyamaka Dialectics: A Study of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way Philosophy*. Combining his profound understanding of Tsongkhapa's thought, which he obtained through his monastic training in Tsongkhapa's writing as 'a living tradition,' and his extensive comprehension of philosophical literature, which he gained later, Jinpa presents a lucid and penetrating exposition of some selected topics of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought. Thus, he integrates the two approaches of what he calls his 'native's point of view' and 'contemporary philosopher's point of view' (p. 2-3) in reconstructing and reformulating Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka theories in a contemporary philosophical language.

The Introduction and Chapter I discusses the historical backdrop and context for development of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka theories as well as the textual context and the methodology for Jinpa's reappropriation and articulation of them. Jinpa emphasizes that much of the time, he 'listens to Tsongkhapa' (p. 2, 15) and let Tsongkhapa speak through 'his own voice' (p.5) uncluttered by later scholastic literature, which has dominated Geluk study of Madhyamaka both in the traditional monasteries and the West, or with too much digression into what Tsongkhapa's critics has to say. He chooses to undertake a wholistic reading of Tsongkhapa by seeking the intended meaning and overall cohesion and consistency in Tsongkhapa's philosophical enterprise.

A very interesting observation Jinpa makes in this regard is his distinction of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka vis-à-vis Geluk Madhyamaka (p. 5). It is particularly interesting in that it comes from someone of Jinpa's background and authority. The traditional Geluk scholars would reject such distinction for such distinction implies divergences between them and the founder, quite against their claim and belief. It is all the more significant because non-Gelukpa authors such as Mipham have also made similar division between Tsongkhapa and few other Gelukpas such as lCang skya on one hand and the mainstream Gelukpas on the other with regard to their ultimate understanding of Emptiness. One Nyingma mKhan po, brTson 'grus Phun tshogs, who also received training at Sera, went as far as to brand the mainstream Gelukpas as Neo-Gelukpas who have discarded Tsongkhapa's thoughts and who deceives the childish with self-invented false reasoning.[7]

Another assertion that Jinpa makes, which begs further explanation, pertains to the portrayal of Tsongkhapa as a great/foremost 'reformer' (p. 1, 12), though not a revolutionary (p. 12). Many authors on Geluk tradition seem to indulge in using this epithet for Tsongkhapa[8] while others tend to be cautious. Still others disapprove its use and have argued against it.[9] The problem is partly due to a linguistic gap. There is no Tibetan equivalent for the English terms 'reform' or 'reformer'. Application of such terms thus undoubtedly risk arbitrary imposition of a *emic* term across cultures as though it were *etic*. Tsongkhapa, truly an eminent luminary of Tibet, can be rightly attributed with regeneration and revitalization, which Jinpa does emphatically, for the contributions he made and changes he brought to Buddhism in Tibet. But on what

[7] mKhan po brTson 'grus Phun tshogs (1996), *Sher phyin 'chad pa'i sngon 'gro,* Byllakuppe: Ngagyur Nyingma Institute, p. 2: Blo bzang grags pa'i dgongs pa rtswa ltar dor / / rang bzos ltar snang rigs pa'i 'phrul 'khor gyis / / byis pa 'drid pa dge ldan gsar pa'i gzhung / / gzur gnas blo ldan su yis yid rton 'os //

[8] See for instance, Wayman (tr.) (1978), *Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real: Buddhist Meditation and the Middle View,* New York: Columbia University Press, p. 8

[9] See for instance, Kuijp, Leonard van der (1983), *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, pp. 24-5

grounds can we call Tsongkhapa a reformer that many other masters like Milarepa, Klong chen pa, Dol po pa, etc. are not? *Shing rta'i srol 'byed chen mo,* the concept which Jinpa refers to, is itself very loose application varying from context to context and people to people.

The rest of Chapter I spans the qualms Tsongkhapa had about the Madhyamaka theories prevalent during his days and how he arrived at his own understanding and interpretation of 'the perfect middle way'. Tsongkhapa, Jinpa says, was first and foremost concerned with a lack of analytical and philosophical rigour in Tibetan thinking. Jinpa depicts a picture of pre-Tsongkhapa Madhyamaka scholarship in Tibet as being marred by a philosophical naivety derived from literal reading of Madhyamaka literature and by an anti-rationalism inspired by an epistemological scepticism and tantric mysticism. Jinpa contrasts Tsongkhapa's highly philosophical and rational approach to this existing trend of his precursors, who he criticizes.

There is certainly no denying that Tsongkhapa excelled in the art of rational and critical enquiry and undertook his Madhyamaka analysis with much philosophical rigour. It is also true that he rightly accused some opponents, particularly practitioners and meditators, of insufficient rationalization and of their inclination toward non-analytical quietist meditation. However, would it be justified to tax the Mādhyamika who preceded Tsongkhapa in general, who include a great number of Sakya (*sa skya*), Kagyu (*bka' rgyud*) and Nyingma scholars, with a literal reading of Madhyamaka literature, philosophical naïvety and anti-rationalism?[10] Would Tsongkhapa have described his opponents with such words?

What Tsongkhapa considers literal reading was to the early Tibetan Mādhyamikas direct reading of the texts without any paraphrastic qualifications such as 'intrinsically existent' or 'conventionally non-existent', which the Gelukpas profusely added. They did not see the need for such paraphrases in the context of Mādhyamika analysis. But this does not turn them into scholars who stubbornly adhered to the literal meaning of the words without allowing any implied, contextual or figurative use of language. Furthermore, most of the earlier Mādhyamikas were also staunch rationalists, often conflating Candrakīrti's ontology and Dharmakīrti's epistemology, and distancing themselves from Hwa shang's Quietist/Simultaneist tradition. The problem of over broad negation that Tsongkhapa accused them of implies their excessive use of deconstructive analysis rather than the lack of it. The denial of the validity of everyday experience and of any thesis in Mādhyamika analytical discourse, which these scholars underscored, is a conclusion reached through a rigorous philosophical and rational inquiry. Thus, to accuse them of being philosophically naïve and anti-rational, to say the least, is a little amiss.

Jinpa gives a very succinct discussion of Tsongkhapa's deep concern about the no-thesis viewpoint and quietist trends and the consequent development of Tsongkhapa's own Madhyamaka thought, discussing its originality and the process through which Tsongkhapa arrived at it. The most crucial point of this process is of course Tsongkhapa's vision and consultation of Mañjuśrī, which Jinpa suggest could be seen as a methodological procedure. This mystical experience, for a tradition which claims the centrality of rationality and analytical acumen and disdains others for the lack of it, is very ironically the milestone which is to define Tsongkhapa's novel understanding of Emptiness and bring about profound changes to his philosophical thought.

[10] See also Jinpa (1999), "Tsongkhapa's Qualms about Early Tibetan Interpretations of Madhyamaka Philosophy", *The Tibet Journal,* 24.2, pp. 1-28

In Chapter II, Jinpa surveys Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka hermeneutics giving a list of strategies he used in delineating the parameters of negation at the beginning of the chapter (p.38). The most original hermeneutic strategy Tsongkhapa and his followers formulated with much urgency and repetition is perhaps the identification of the Madhyamaka object of negation or negandum. Tsongkhapa accused his precursors of over broad delimitation of Madhyamaka negandum and underscored the exact identification of the negandum. The negandum of Madhyamaka reasoning, according to him, is limited to ultimately, hypostatically or intrinsically existent entity (see Jinpa's Table 1). As a corollary, Tsongkhapa and his followers also stressed the application of qualifications such as 'ultimately' and 'hypostatically existent' to the negandum. These endeavours of narrowing the object of negation down to a reified construct and leaving the empirical phenomena unscathed by Madhyamaka anaylsis then tie up with his famous assertion of the validity of conventional reality. It is these points which the later Gelukpa critics such as Go rams pa bSod nams Senge, Zi lung pa Śākya mChog ldan, 'Ju Mi pham rGya mtsho and A mdo ba dGe 'dun Chos 'phel attacked accusing the Gelukpas of restraining the thoroughgoing Madhyamaka dialectic and its spiritually therapeutic impact by diverting its deconstructive analysis to a hypostasised target isolated from our day to day empirical world.

Chapter III contains the discussion of the pan-Buddhist concept of No-self and Tsongkhapa's hermeneutic manoeuvres for integrating his rather heterodox assertion of the conventional self, which is the object of our instinctive thought 'I am'. Jinpa says that (p. 72) Tsongkhapa, in contrast to the standard Buddhist view, adopts what might be called in modern western philosophical terms a non-reductionist view. In course of identifying the person and self that is rejected and maintained in Tsongkhapa's thought, Jinpa explains the nuances of Tsongkhapa's distinction of person and selfhood into eternal, unitary and autonomous self (*rtag gcig rang dbang can gyi bdag*), a self-sufficient substantial self (*rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod kyi bdag*), an intrinsically existent self (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa'i bdag*) and a conventional self (*tha snyad kyi bdag*). He only maintains the last category.

This is followed by a concise exposition of the five and seven-fold deconstructive reasoning used by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti to refute the concept of self and an analysis of Tsongkhapa's concept of intrinsic nature. Jinpa's clarification is outstanding on Tsongkhapa's understanding of *rang mtshan* as unique particulars, unique properties and intrinsic nature (p. 95), the last of which a Mādhyamika rejects according to Tsongkhapa, and the distinction of 'being intrinsic nature' and 'being existent by means of intrinsic nature'. Tsongkhapa uses the latter scheme particularly to rationally harmonize the general Mādhaymaka denial of intrinsic nature and the paradoxical presentation of Emptiness as intrinsic nature in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* XV/2.

Chapter IV and V deal with Tsongkhapa's radical assertion of conventional person or self, the mere 'I', and his criteria for conventional existence. Jinpa critically explores how Tsongkhapa in the absence of an intrinsic person, which is annulled by Madhyamaka scrutiny, theorizes a conventional self *qua* person that is the agent for all our moral actions and spiritual endeavours. No Buddhist, save perhaps the Vātsīputrīya personalists, may have argued so emphatically for the existence of self *qua* the object of I-consciousness. This position, which Jinpa calls conventional realism (p. 116, 168, 176), seems at least *prima facie* to go right at the face of the nominalism, which Buddhist generally adopted *apropos* of self and personhood. Moreover, by theorizing the conventional status of self and person and by probing into the status of conventional reality, isn't Tsongkhapa himself succumbing to an

implicit reification and the essentialist tendency which he accused other Buddhists of espousing. Can his acclaimed nominalism and conventionalism (p. 117) be sustained in the midst of his verification and objectification of the self that almost all Buddhists reject? In defining the self as a nominal construct, which is an atemporal generality separate from the aggregates, how accurate is Tsongkhapa's presentation to the worldly conventional view of self? An astute metaphysician may also argue about the compatibility of such a self with the empirical role a person plays as a moral agent. Jinpa's articulation of Tsongkhapa's thought is very stimulating and thought-provoking arousing many questions such as these.

Questions also can be raised on Tsongkhapa's concept of convention and its degree of objectivity but such would exceed the purpose of this review. The crux of Tsongkhapa's conventional theory is of course his three criteria for what is conventionally existent (p. 157). However, Tsongkhapa's definition is circular in that one must first establish what it is to be familiar with conventional cognition and agree on a valid conventional knowledge in order to understand what is conventional. Critics such as dGe 'dun Chos 'phel have also argued that this presupposes some form of homogenous and absolute conventional standard and authority among sentient beings, which is impossible.[11] The mention of the ultimate analysis, which probes into real nature of things, among the criteria for conventional existence also risks conflating the two perspectives of the ultimate and the conventional, a fault which Tsongkhapa accuses others of committing.

Jinpa further explains Tsongkhapa's nominalism through the metaphor of illusion and what may be called his scholastic interpretation of the metaphor in two ways. This is followed by a discussion of Tsongkhapa's procedures of avoiding the extremes of absolutism, nihilism and relativism and the soteriological dimension of No-self and reasons pertaining to it. While proceeding with the rejection of relativism, Jinpa mentions that 'Tsongkhapa does not reject the reality *out there*' (p. 175). This in a way succinctly summarizes Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka ontology and his theory of self and personal identity. This also leaves the readers, like his critics, with much disquiet and dissatisfaction. In singling out a hypostatic intrinsic nature as the only philosophical villain to be annihilated and in leaving the empirical world unscathed and indeed validated, and our ordinary sense of self and the world veritably confirmed, Tsongkhapa's description of things as nominal and fiction-like still eludes us and sounds like a mere rhetoric.

Jinpa however succeeds in unpacking Tsongkhapa's complex and abstruse standpoints with great clarity and acumen. It is a pioneering work on the topic of personal identity in Tibetan philosophy and, for all those interested in Tsongkhapa, this work unravels the most intricate of the thoughts of that lofty figure of Tibet. It will be a long time before another Tibetan will explicate his philosophical heritage with comparable insight and articulacy. My only disappointment is the price of the book (£45), which puts the book beyond the reach of many people, particularly in Asia. Yet, all in all, it is a remarkable work.

---

[11] See A mdo dGe 'dun Chos 'phel (1994), *dGe 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom,* Lhasa: Bod ljongs Bodyig dPe rnying Publishing House, vol. ii, p. 275-85