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Thesis Title: Nectar, Water, or Blood? A Buddhist History
of Perceptual Relativism

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Trinity term 2025

Acknowledgements

It is with great joy (and relief, it being my final task before submission) that I can now officially thank all of those special individuals who have been instrumental in bringing this thesis to a conclusion. First and foremost I must acknowledge the late Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, for his encouragement and guidance in helping me engage in an academic career. Rinpoche's passing is a huge loss to Tibetology and to Tibetan culture and religion; he is deeply missed. Next up are my two incredibly kind and generous supervisors Professor Jan Westerhoff and Professor Ulrike Roesler. From when I first had the fortune to work with Professor Westerhoff writing my MSt thesis at Oxford, until the present, he has been a constant support, endlessly generous with his time, brilliant intellect, and philosophical insights. His patience and human warmth have also been instrumental in bringing this dissertation to a conclusion. Professor Roesler has likewise been a continual and steadfast guide on this journey. Her meticulous eye for detail, stark common sense, scholarly rigour, and grounded approach to my writing has deeply enriched what may have turned into a much more abstract and obtuse thesis. From a practical perspective it is likewise incumbent on me to acknowledge the financial support from the Glorison Foundation on whom the first three years of my DPhil relied. In like fashion, thanks go to the Khyentse Foundation for supporting me generously through my final year of writing. Thanks are due to the Frederick Williamson Memorial Fund and Wadham College, for supporting my fieldwork in Tibet, and Venerable Irene Turner, Tara amongst us. I would also like to thank my fellow Sub Deans and colleagues in the Welfare Team in Wadham College: Mike Froggatt, Sarah O'Brian, Lynne Featherstone, Jane Buan, Lindsay Kennedy, Sankalp Gerad, and Nisrina Widari. Finally, to my dear friends in Oxford and elsewhere who have all offered so many individual acts of support and kindness, there will not be enough space here to do them justice. Kalina Nadoo and Isavella Vouza have made my life in Oxford enormously richer. Fellow Tibetologists Paula Chichester, George Fitzherbert, Lama Jabb, Ananda Lee, Tien Chen, Daniel Wojahn, Shawo Khacham, Darig Thokmay, Jacob Mortimer, and Daniel Ruin to name but a few of the wonderful scholars that have inspired and supported me during this doctorate. Last but by no means least, my family: Diane, David, Dawn, Martin. Special thanks go to my brother Jack Delaney (Lord of Gypsies), and to my wife Lara, to whom most thanks above all are due.

Abstract

The question of perceptual relativism—the notion that a single object can be perceived differently by various observers—has been fundamental to Buddhist philosophy throughout its history, both supporting and challenging key Buddhist ethical, metaphysical, and soteriological doctrines. This thesis maps the tumultuous relationship Buddhist philosophers have had with perceptual relativism in their intellectual history, through a specific example that became central to Buddhist epistemological discourse. This example concerns the perception of a river as nectar by gods, water by humans, and blood by hungry ghosts. Given its widespread use across Buddhist epistemological literature, this example provides a focused and revealing lens through which to examine the role of perceptual relativism in Buddhist thought.

Following this example's transmission across more than two millennia, the study begins with its earliest appearance in a Pāli text (*Petavatthu*, c. 2nd cent. BCE) and tracks its development through early Vinaya, Abhidharma, and Mahāyāna sources. It examines influential philosophical interpretations by Asaṅga, Vasubandhu (4th cent.), and Candrakīrti (7th cent.) with brief considerations of its usage by Daoshi (7th cent.) in China, and Japan by Kōbō Daishi (7th cent.). The main section focuses on Tibet, from Rongzompa's eleventh-century treatment through the vigorous debates between Gelugpa and Sakyapa traditions in the 14th-15th centuries, culminating in Ju Mipham's nineteenth-century interpretation.

Contemporary scholarship has discussed the philosophical implications of perceptual relativism and scepticism for Madhyamaka, using Western philosophical “analytical” frameworks (cf. Cowherds 2011), and several distinct Tibetan solutions (Wangchuk 2009, Yakherds 2021). This study offers the first comprehensive investigation of its historical development across Buddhist traditions. By mapping, contextualizing, and critiquing the

unique current of philosophical thought surrounding this example, the dissertation illuminates broader questions about the role of epistemic relativism in Buddhist thought, such as: Has epistemic relativism and scepticism always concerned Buddhists? To what extent did Tibetan exegetes innovate beyond their Indian predecessors? Furthermore, what does this two thousand year long conversation tell us about relativism itself? Can the sophisticated Tibetan frameworks for resolving perceptual relativism inform contemporary approaches to historiography and hermeneutics? Through exploring these questions, the study offers novel insights into this significant stream of Buddhist philosophical thought, and is a contribution to larger discussions on relativism within world philosophy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.5. The Problem

Is “everything” relative? If the premise applies universally, does it not undermine itself? The Buddha taught that all composites are deceptive, akin to a dream, but does this also apply to his perspective? These questions direct us to the age-old philosophical problem of relativism, and more specifically to perceptual relativism – the view that different perceivers have different perceptions of the same object. Perceptual relativism has been a consistent theme throughout Buddhist intellectual thought. It underscores and at the same time challenges many of Buddhism’s key ethical, metaphysical, and soteriological doctrines. It is still of great relevance in Buddhist monastic learning centres where the fine line between rampant “anything-goes” relativism, and “no-one-can-know” scepticism are fervently debated.

This thesis maps the tumultuous relationship Buddhist philosophers have had with perceptual relativism throughout the intellectual history of the Buddhist traditions, with a particular focus on South Asia and Tibet. The textual corpus related to this topic is vast, and to maintain focus, the present thesis follows one specific trope through its literary and exegetical history: the Example of the perception of a river, which can appear as water to humans, as blood to a class of beings known as “hungry ghosts”, and as nectar to the gods. This example (henceforth the Example) appears in sources of Indian origin from c. 2nd century BCE up until 21st century Tibet and can arguably be regarded as the most popular illustration of the problem of perceptual relativism, which makes it particularly suitable for our investigation.

Although this subject may seem of mere historical or Buddhological interest, such a narrow understanding would miss its underlying systematic and epistemological significance, as the

question of whether beings share the same objects of perception and environment is relevant to many fields. There are multiple closely related examples not only in Western philosophical discourse, but also from biology and animal cognitive science that evoke the same philosophical challenges as the Example. For instance, the berries from the *Antidesma bunius* tree taste bitter to a portion of the human population but sweet to the rest due to genetic makeup;¹ a flower may appear as red to a human, but as an ultraviolet non-red pattern to a bee, due to their ability to see ultraviolet light and inability to perceive red. This form of analysis has been spearheaded by von Uexküll (1864–1944) in his influential study of animal perception, spanning biology and neo-Kantian philosophy.² Von Uexküll articulated his concept of *umwelt*, “environment”, as the perceptual domain that species inhabit as distinct from simply the physical environment they occupy. He attempted to prove that all beings do not inhabit the same space and time and argued for the critical role that an individual’s perceptual capacities, experiences, and presumptions, inter alia, have on forming their unique *umwelten*. More recently, Young³ has brought the discussion into mainstream discourse and expanded upon von Uexküll’s findings based on contemporary developments in animal biology. Although these two scholars use different species and examples, their essential insight directly relates to the problem of the Example: What is the ontological basis for asserting a shared reality, when different species have radically different and yet apparently overlapping modes of perception? What are the criteria for evaluating the veracity of their cognitions?

Such questions directly challenge the “constancy hypothesis” discussed by cognitive scientists. This concept presumes the necessary consistency of a one-to-one correspondence between real external object and their perceptions. Under such an intuitive premise, objects

¹ Henkin and Gillis 1977.

² Von Uexküll 2010.

³ Young 2022.

must produce the same perception in all who perceive them. Every single instance of the Example that we shall see directly rejects this assumption.⁴

1.6. State of Contemporary Academic Scholarship

Contemporary scholarship on Buddhism has tended to explore the issue of perceptual relativism from two distinct approaches: the systematic and the textual-historical. It has been addressed systematically by considering the subject within the general framework of Buddhist doctrine, and within specific Buddhist traditions, schools of thought, and or thinkers. Alternatively, it has been considered in various historical contexts, through detailed textual analysis as an interesting subject of intellectual history, with less attention paid to the philosophical coherency of the ideas themselves.⁵

Within the former group, the study conducted by the self-termed “Cowherds” of the place of conventional truth (*samvṛtisatya*) within Buddhist philosophy stands out as the most thorough treatment of the issues surrounding Buddhist relativism and perceptual relativism.⁶

Within the Buddhist framework of the two truths, conventional and ultimate, the study attempts to resolve several salient questions on conventional truth. This includes what is true about conventional truth, how flexible is it, and how much can it be revised. The study does not attempt a textual or historical account, but rather ‘deploy[s] ideas and techniques from contemporary analytic philosophy’⁷ to resolve these fundamental philosophical questions. Several of the papers discuss the place of reliable knowledge or epistemic instruments

⁴ See the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s (1908–1961) influential account and rejection of this principle (English translation in Smith 2002: 8-9, & chapter 5).

⁵ The present investigation is based on primary sources in Sanskrit, Pāli, Tibetan, English translations of Chinese and Japanese sources, and secondary sources in western languages. Unfortunately, I have not been able to include Japanese scholarship on the subject.

⁶ Cowherds 2011. This study is a collection of essays by George Dreyfus, Bronwyn Finnigan, Jay Garfield, Guy Newland, Graham Priest, Mark Siderits, Sonam Thakchöe, Tom Tillemans, Koji Tanaka, and Jan Westerhoff.

⁷ Cowherds 2011: vii.

(*pramāṇa*)⁸ in the Madhyamaka system of Indian philosophy, first articulated by Nāgārjuna (c. 2nd cent. CE). Specifically, they address the tenability of specialised conventional knowledge within the thought of Nāgārjuna’s most influential Indian commentator, Candrakīrti (c. 6th cent.). This is an intriguing question, for, at face value, Candrakīrti appears to only accept the uneducated, or what he calls the “cowherd’s” (i.e. “the person on the straight’s”) basic non-analytical knowledge as being applicable to conventions. This view may suggest that what counts as conventionally true is simply what ordinary people accept, what is warranted for the world (*lokaprasiddha*), without giving special status to expert or specialist knowledge. This reading raises significant philosophical challenges – particularly around how to reconcile it with scientific and theoretical knowledge that goes beyond common understanding. Such a reading has concerned some scholars such as Tillemans and Gold as it appears to undermine the value of expertise.⁹ Tillemans believes Candrakīrti holds a “lowest common denominator” version of *lokaprasiddha* that does not allow for a ‘qualitative hierarchy’ of accurate views, leading to what he has described as the “dismal slough” of relativism.¹⁰ Tanaka has suggested that examining Candrakīrti’s position through the lens of paraconsistent logic might, however, help resolve these apparent tensions between common and specialised knowledge.¹¹ These studies all primarily rely on Western analytic philosophical tools in their analysis.

In contrast, Newman employs more detailed textual analysis to contest Tillemans account of Candrakīrti by re-evaluating an important scripture (the *‘I do not dispute with the world’*

⁸ This is a notoriously difficult term to satisfactorily translate into English. Since *pramāṇa* can refer to both the instrument that produces knowledge and the effect that is an episode of knowledge, we have opted for “epistemic instrument” or “reliable cognition”. For an overview of the translation terms proposed by modern scholarship see Jackson 1993: 168, note 5, and Yakherds 2021: 20-22.

⁹ Tillemans 2011, Gold 2015.

¹⁰ Tillemans 2019.

¹¹ Tanaka 2019.

sūtra) frequently quoted by Candrakīrti,¹² that highlights that the Buddha agrees with “the wise or learned”. As such, a qualitative hierarchy of opinions is tenable. By invoking the opinion of *loke paṇḍitānām* (*the wise in the world*), Candrakīrti does not accept all conventional knowledge. Newman suggests that the famous expression *lokaprasiddha* (*established for or by the world*) necessarily includes an evaluation of what is wise and learned.¹³ In a similar way Salvini also through recourse primarily to textual evidence suggests two levels of conventions within Candrakīrti’s thought: Those common conventions that are the domain of unspecialised knowledge, for example, that an eye sees matter; and conventions that require a more refined and specialised form of knowledge to access, such as the various Abhidharma categories.¹⁴

The most comprehensive study employing both systematic and textual-historical approaches to Buddhist relativism, also touching on the Example, is the recent two-volume work by the “Yakherds”.¹⁵ The pseudonym is a nod to the “Cowherds”, as the authors explore similar topics, particularly the question of the validity of a yakherd’s non-specialized knowledge and the role of epistemic warrant of conventions, this time with a focus on Tibetan Madhyamaka. Their research traces these themes in Tibetan sources from the 12th century, starting with Patshab Nyima Drak (1055–1145?), and concludes with the perspectives of two contemporary Tibetan scholars, Tashi Tsering and Yeshe Tapkhé. The study centres on the intense debates between Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), his followers, and Taktsang (1405-1477) in the 14th–15th centuries. Additionally, it incorporates these historical discussions

¹² This refers to an unnamed *āgama* quoted in Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamkāvātārabhāṣya* and *Madhyamakāvātāra*, and in his *Prasannapadā*. Newman shows that sections of this *āgama* have parallels in Gandhari, Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canonical sources (Newman 2024).

¹³ Newman 2024.

¹⁴ Salvini 2023.

¹⁵ Yakherds 2021. This study is a collaborative work made by José Cabezon, Ryan Conlon, Thomas Doctor, Douglas Duckworth, Jed Forman, Jay Garfield, John Powers, Sonam Thakchöe, Tashi Tsering, and Yeshe Tapkhé.

into modern Western philosophical debates on relativism. However, it does not examine many important Tibetan luminaries' views on the same subjects, such as those of Rongzompa (1042–1136), Réndawa (1349-1412), Gorampa (1429-1489), Shakya Chokden (1428-1507), Rongtönpa (1367-1449), and Ju Mipham Gyatso (1846-1912); nor does it include a detailed textual-historical treatment of the Indian antecedents to the discussion. This thesis attempts to fill in these missing pieces of the puzzle.

On the related question of intersubjective (dis)agreement among groups perceiving the same object, the studies by Tzohar (2018) and Kachru (2021) both touch on the Example and provide rich discussions mainly based on sources from the Indian Yogācāra school of thought.¹⁶ The former delves into *upacāra* or metaphors in Indian Buddhist thought in a somewhat synchronic approach to the sources, through a wariness of imposing inadequate diachronic, or (potentially unevidenced) ahistorical and sectarian models on the texts under examination. Tzohar treats his sources as multidirectional conversations, where texts respond to and assume each other. Kachru's work focuses on Vasubandhu's *Vimśikā* and is a refreshing 'exercise in the history of philosophy'.¹⁷ It takes seriously Vasubandhu's Buddhist cosmology as an alternate world-view within which we as modern readers may situate ourselves. He argues that understanding Vasubandhu's account of, for one the Example, requires more than just analysing his arguments but also appreciating the historically variable ways of being oriented in thought. The book thus pushes back against what Kachru perceives as an incuriosity about different worldviews and the nature of thought in other "premodern" intellectual contexts.

¹⁶ Tzohar 2018 includes many of the subjects discussed in his earlier paper titled 'Imagine Being a Preta: Early Indian Yogācāra Approaches to Intersubjectivity' (Tzohar 2017).

¹⁷ Kachru 2021: 189.

While all these studies provide important insights into various aspects of perceptual relativism within Buddhist thought, none integrate systematic and textual-historical approaches within a framework of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism's intellectual history across the *longue durée*. As a result, they ebb on demonstrating the central role of perceptual relativism throughout Buddhist history or the evolving and nuanced applications of the Example across different contexts. By contrast, the present study adopts a method akin to an archaeologist digging a preliminary trench to gain a representative sample of the excavation site. It traces the Example from a story found in a Pāli *sutta* that is traditionally said to have taken place in the 2nd century BCE, to 20th-century Tibet, with occasional forays into Chinese and Japanese sources. By digging this trench through this extensive body of scriptures, we aim to better understand the development of this pivotal concept in Buddhist thought.

While the first part of this study sets the scene by providing an overview of the use of the Example in (primarily) South Asian sources, the second and main part examines the Example in Tibetan sources, addressing its use by numerous prominent Tibetan scholars. Most of these figures already have dedicated monographs or introduced and annotated translations of their work, including Rongzompa (Köppl 2008), Réndawa (Roloff 2009), Tsongkhapa (Jinpa 2002), Khédруп-je (Cabezón 1992), Gorampa (Cabezón and Lobsang Dargyay 2007), Shakya Chokden (Komarovski 2011), and Mipham (Pettit 1999; Phuntsho 2005; Viehbeck 2014). While some of these publications provide translations of relevant sections of these authors' writings on the Example, none offer an in-depth analysis or place these texts in dialogue with other Tibetan accounts. This study addresses that gap by thoroughly examining each author's perspective on the Example, facilitating a dialogue among them, and situating their interpretations within the wider context of their philosophical thought.

We are thus interested to know what our trench, dug with the Example, will tell us about Indian and Tibetan philosophy. With regard to the Tibetan reception of Indian ideas, Seyfort Ruegg has suggested a useful distinction between the historically *Indian* components of Buddhist philosophy preserved within the Tibetan canon and *Indic* elements, which represent Tibetan developments that, while not directly rooted in historically Indian texts, can still be categorized as ‘*typologically Indian*’.¹⁸ This raises the question whether the Tibetan authors are mere exegetes of Indian thought, or whether they should be understood as independent thinkers. To what extent are the Tibetans innovative in their solutions to the problem of perceptual relativism in Yogācāra and Madhyamaka thought? Have the Example’s rampant relativistic and sceptical ramifications always concerned Buddhist luminaries? If not, why not? As one of the most significant topics in Tibetan polemics, the Example was commented on by nearly all major Tibetan Madhyamaka exegetes. How do their explanations diverge, and why? These authors often seem to anticipate or respond to earlier interpretations spanning centuries. These texts, in many ways, represent the crystallisation of thousands of oral debates spanning almost a millennium. This study hopes to bring some key moments of this 2000-year conversation to light, and thereby, perhaps, reveal something about relativism and its place within Buddhist philosophy.

1.7. Methodology

Within the broader field of the history of ideas, this study describes a significant strand of Indian and Tibetan conceptual history. It employs a *begriffsgeschichte* (*conceptual history*) approach to trace the Example through Buddhist literature. Our methodology is explicitly diachronic, acknowledging that each text and author existed within specific historical and intellectual contexts. The history of ideas, as defined by Lovejoy is ‘a duly analytical and

¹⁸ Seyfort Ruegg 2004: 328.

critical inquiry into the nature, genesis, development, diffusion, interplay and effects of the ideas which generations of men have cherished, quarrelled over, and apparently been moved by'.¹⁹ Following Lovejoy and Beiser,²⁰ this study is thus both analytical and critical: It analyses uses of the Example in their historical time and place, examining the authors' intention within their intellectual culture, while also critiquing them in terms of their overall philosophical coherency. The former approach allows us to transcend our contemporary analytic frameworks, the latter helps us not treat the claims about truth of ancient texts as of no significance in the present.²¹ Without attempting to meld these two approaches it will be quite impossible to gain a handle on the voice and intention of the authors, and their audiences within this extremely long and subtle conversation.

Our methodology thus does not simply line up the attestations of the Example chronologically, philosophically contextualise them, and repeat the conclusions of the authors; it also involves hermeneutical analysis to yield insights into the various interpretations of the Example. It covers both the historical development and the conceptual content. It does not presume to give an exhaustive interpretation of all the sources surveyed, but suggests what appears to be the most reasonable account. With full awareness of the dangers of attempting to uncover authorial intent and procrustean readings,²² our analyses shall in the main be descriptive, but, when necessary, also (re-)constructive.

In this regard, it is worthwhile noting the distinction between “internal” and “external” history that Tillemans borrows from the Hungarian philosopher of science, Imre Lakatos, and fruitfully applies to Tibetan luminaries such as Tsongkhapa. Internal history constitutes our conjectures about what a thinker may have said or intended to say, external history

¹⁹ Lovejoy 1940: 8.

²⁰ Lovejoy 1940, and Beiser 2016.

²¹ Beiser 2016: 510.

²² For more on the pitfalls of uncovering authorial intent, see Garfield, 2008a: 514, and Stepien, 2024: 58-60.

constitutes what we have records of them actually saying. Tillemans argues that while the history of Buddhist philosophy is often (perhaps rightly), primarily concerned with the latter, he argued for a degree of flexibility that incorporates the former.²³ In this regard he makes a distinction between the “thought₁” of a philosopher (external history, what is on the page), and their “thought₂” (internal history, the set of theories organised, sometimes posthumously, into a system). Thought₂ may at times bear little resemblance to thought₁, and yet thought₂ is not without value in the history of philosophy. This distinction between internal and external history relates to both sections of this thesis, the non-Tibetan and Tibetan sources on the Example, but holds particular relevance for the latter. While we strive to accurately portray the “thought₁” of our Tibetan luminaries, we believe limiting ourselves to this alone without attending to the underlying conceptual frameworks, implicit assumptions, and logical ramifications, “thought₂”, unnecessarily ties our conceptual hands behind our back.

Be that as it may, in contrast to our Tibetan sources, whose dates are more certain, the chronological placement of our Indian sources presents certain challenges. These often require careful conjecture regarding their dating. Nevertheless, this approach is not without meaning. We will present the most plausible and generally accepted chronologies for the materials surveyed. As Tzohar observes, the primary virtue of a diachronic approach is its ability to prevent critical historiographical pitfalls: anachronism, ahistorisation, and the problematic essentialisation of ideas.²⁴ This methodological care is particularly crucial in a philosophical tradition like Indian philosophy, which can sometimes appear to operate

²³ Tillemans 1990: 16-17, fn.48. Tillemans applies the distinction to Tsongkhapa’s writings, considering him a master of internal history, noting the complex systems, and somewhat artificially superimposed ideas he interjects into Indian texts without obvious textual basis. Yet, he cautions against judging him from the rigid standards of external history, for to do so we would deprive ourselves of the formative and foreign ideas he provides (Tillemans 1990: 16-17, fn.48.).

²⁴ Tzohar 2017: 11.

within a seemingly timeless space—potentially due to the perceived eternality (*sanātanatva*) of some of its concepts.²⁵

Having recognised these chronological challenges, it is worth underlining here that we agree with Eltschinger that intellectual trends are probably best understood within matrices that incorporate both the internal dynamics of a tradition such as inspiration, quotation, derivation, legitimation and those extra-intellectual political, social, economic factors that the ideas we study evolve within.²⁶ Would our account of the Example be improved by placing it into dialogue with broader trends in Indian and Tibetan social and economic history? Despite the inevitable challenges and the highly speculative nature of any one-to-one correlations, such an approach might indeed provide a more global picture of the Example's evolution.²⁷ However, we believe that thoroughly incorporating these broader contextual elements would render this already subtle and complex conceptual history unwieldy. Our prioritising of the many minutiae of philosophical detail that weighed in on our thinkers' ideas, prioritising the traditions' intellectual interior over the non-intellectual exterior, aims to set into relief this specific conceptual thread, and the related philosophical concerns in its immediate vicinity, without getting side tracked nor diluting the philosophical analysis that is the heart of this study.

²⁵ Gokhale 2013: 177. See Franco's rebuttal of Biardeau's (1969) endorsement of the cliché that history is absent in Indian philosophy (Franco 2013: 18-19).

²⁶ Eltschinger 2013: 174. One might also gather all these under the four broader categories of texts, arguments, meditative practices, and historical background (Westerhoff 2018: 2).

²⁷ See Harrison 2003 for a social account of the context in which early Mahāyāna sūtras were composed, Walser 2005 for an attempt to place Nāgārjuna in his social context, Eltschinger 2013 for a discussion of the social, economic and historical context surrounding the rise of Buddhist esoterism and Dharmakīrti's so-called logico-epistemological tradition, and the volume by Hugon and Kellner 2020a for a collection of essays that approach scholastic learning communities from a cross cultural perspective across Eurasia, including Buddhist communities in India and Tibet (see the essays by Cabezón, and Samuels) from the early medieval period. This volume is the product of several workshops that attempt to "re-think" learning communities, and aimed to 'bring social and historical aspects into the foreground, but at the same time, strove not to neglect the textual and intellectual dimensions of scholastic enterprises at their expense.' (Hugon and Kellner 2020b: Introduction, 6).

Towards this end, through scouring the Tibetan canon, the Pāli canon, what is available in English of the Taishō edition of the Chinese canon, multiple English translations of Gandhari works and numerous Tibetan oeuvres we have judiciously selected what appear to be the most philosophically interesting and impactful uses of the Example. We thus do not attempt an all-inclusive survey. Rather we begin with what appears to be the earliest instances of the Example, and end with the most developed contemporary Tibetan discussion of it. As with any study that attempts to cover such an extensive historical period, we have had to be selective. Certain figures who hold significance in the broader history of Buddhist thought may receive only passing mention or are omitted entirely—either because their engagement with the Example was minimal, or because doing justice to their contributions would exceed the scope of this dissertation. When relevant, such figures are acknowledged, with the intention of addressing these missing pieces of the puzzle in future research.

Within the body of literature we are excavating, there are several other similes closely related to the Example that often accompany it and also illustrate perceptual relativism. These include the Falling Hair Example, popularized by Vasubandhu (c. 4th-5th cent.) in his *Viṃśikā*, k.1, and Candrakīrti (c. 7th century) in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, VI. 54, which demonstrates the cognitive differences between someone with an eye disease, who perceives an area as though hairs were falling within it, and someone without the disease, who perceives the same area without such hair. An early Sautrāntika offers another example, we shall call it the Beautiful Women Example, depicting how various beings experience divergent emotions—jealousy, desire, pride—toward the same beautiful woman.²⁸ Similarly, Dharmakīrti (c. 7th century) in his *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti* also discusses the example of a beautiful lady being perceived as a corpse by a yogin, an object of desire by a

²⁸ See Chapter 2: 44-45.

lustly man, and food by a dog.²⁹ There are many more. While these examples are engaging and perhaps more accessible to modern readers, they will only be addressed when relevant to the Example, as they are used less frequently than our river example and therefore do not provide the same broad textual basis for tracing the philosophical currents and debates on perceptual relativism.

1.8. Thesis Overview

Our narrative is divided into two main sections. Section one covers sources on the Example outside of the native Tibetan milieu, mainly from India but with a few brief references to Chinese and Japanese sources (Chapter 2); and section two, the main part of this thesis, follows the native Tibetan accounts of the Example and brings them into dialogue with each other (Chapters 3-6).

The first section, chapter 2, identifies four principal doctrines the Example is used to illustrate in non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna contexts. It is used (i) to exemplify the ethical dimensions of the doctrine of karma, (ii) to support arguments for a Yogācāra-style form of idealism, (iii) to substantiate the Mādhyamika perspective on emptiness, and (iv) it serves polemical purposes in Buddhist historiography and hermeneutics. Chapter 2 thus traces the Example's story through organising the sources around these four core themes. While this, in the main, results in a fairly precise chronological order, this is not invariably the case. When the Example is used in the fourth core theme, for historiography and hermeneutics, we prioritise the shared theme over the strictly chronological placement of our texts, for this

²⁹ See the translation in Eltschinger et al. 2018: 53. Dignāga (c. 5th-6th cent.) also discusses this example in his *Pramāṇasamuccayaṅgī*, 5.5.47 (see Pind 2015: 56–58, 171–175). An even earlier instance of the Beautiful Women Example appears in Aśvaghōṣa's (c. 2nd cent. CE) *Saundarananda*, 13.52 (trans. Johnston 1932: 76), a passage also noted by Eltschinger et al. 2018: n133. This text begins by recounting the narrative of Nanda, whom the Buddha guides to overcome desire for his wife by demonstrating the superior beauty of celestial goddesses. In chapter 13, the text then employs this example of the various conceptions of a beautiful woman to illustrate the relativity of desirable objects. This story may be the seed from which the popular Beautiful Women Example grew.

section covers sources separated by 500 years. This thematic emphasis should offer greater analytical value than a rigid chronological order, as it reveals the conceptual connections and creative developments across different contexts and time periods, rather than merely documenting its sequential appearances. Through reference to a wide range of primary sources, the shift in discourse on the Example from primarily moralistic concerns (karma) to more fundamental questions of ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics and even historiography should become clear. The overall thrust of discourse highlights an increasing interest in these deeply philosophical themes, and eventually in the relativistic and sceptical ramifications of the Example.

The chapters in the second part of this thesis follow the periodisation scheme of Tibetan Madhyamaka proposed by Seyfort Ruegg. This framework proves particularly useful for conceptualising the trajectory of the Example, as virtually all instances we examine are embedded within Madhyamaka and Yogācāra discussions. This periodisation encompasses four phases of Tibetan Madhyamaka: an early phase (late 8th–early 9th centuries), a pre-classical period (late 10th–early 11th centuries), a classical-systematic period (14th–16th centuries), and a post-classical period (post-16th century). Chapter 3 begins with an introduction to Seyfort Ruegg’s periodisation, and a rationale why we have chosen to base our discussion around it. The chapter continues with the earliest native Tibetan discourse on the Example we have located, during the “pre-classical” period of Tibetan Madhyamaka. The discussion focusses on Rongzompa (1042–1136) an enigmatic luminary embodying several salient intellectual trends of the period. He saw in the Example an opportunity to ground and validate the transcendent perspective of Vajrayāna Buddhism, and the visions of its practitioners.

In chapter 4, we delve into the beginnings of the Gandenpa tradition (later known as the Gelugpa tradition). Although strictly speaking not a Gandenpa, we have chosen to cover

Réndawa (1349-1412) for two significant reasons. Firstly, until recently only a portion of his oeuvre has been available, making a comprehensive survey of his Madhyamaka contributions necessary and timely. Secondly, Réndawa exerted tremendous influence on Tibetan Madhyamaka studies in general, and particularly on the intellectual formation of the Gelug tradition's founders. His pivotal role as a bridge figure in the development of Madhyamaka thought makes his perspective on the Example especially relevant to our conceptual history. In his writings we see the antecedents to several core subjects that came to be the hallmark of Gelug exegesis, such as the warrant of conventional objects by conventional epistemic instruments. We also see a somewhat surprisingly simplistic account of the Example. Through delving into this figure's Madhyamaka exegesis and commentary on the Example we learn much about the intellectual culture that our next luminary, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), would receive and significantly refine. The discussion then focuses on Tsongkhapa's account of the Example, with reference to other aspects of his Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna works. It is hoped that thereby we more fully contextualise his intriguing and enigmatic account of the Example. The final section of this chapter focusses on the most extensive Tibetan commentary on the Example, by Tsongkhapa's fiercest apologist, Khédrupjé (1385–1438). Our narrative shall follow his lines of argument closely for they provide a brilliant “internal historical” account (following the Lakatos/Tillemans terminology) of Tsongkhapa's blueprint-like schema of the Example, turning it into a colourful landscape. The section concludes that the Tsongkhapa-Khédrupjé theory of the Example, and their epistemology more generally, do not imply foundationalism or realism, as they have been accused of by many Tibetan and contemporary academic commentators.

Chapter 5 focuses on the avalanche of criticism by Sakyapa teachers in response to the Tsongkhapa-Khédrupjé mereological interpretation of the Example. It surveys the alternative explanations of the Example by Taktsang Lotsawa (1405-1477), Gorampa

(1429–1489), and Shākya Chokden (1428–1507), collectively known as *Go shA stag gsum* in Tibetan. While these three exegetes all find similar faults with the Gandenpa’s explanation, they propose intriguingly nuanced alternative solutions, solutions that bring into relief the illusive boundary Mādhyakmikas seek to tread between epistemic arbitrariness or relativism, and a realist epistemology that grounds knowledge in an objective foundation. The chapter concludes by aligning these interpretations side by side and highlighting their own unique brands of perceptual relativism.

Chapter 6 focusses on what appears to be the pinnacle of the post-classical systematic period of discourse on the Example, with the ecumenical polymath Ju Mipham (1846-1912). Mipham’s solution weighs up the last 900 years of Tibetan discourse on the Example and provides an ingenious solution. His unique contribution is his endorsement that the “common object” of all the perceptions in the Example is the union of emptiness and appearances, that is a field of experience with infinite cognitive possibilities. He holds that the relative accuracy of perception is determined by its ability to access the inherent purity/equality of the appearance/emptiness field of experience. This synergistic reading highlights the ecumenical character of much of his discourse and of the non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement of his day, of which he was a leading figure. By closely following Rongzompa it also reinforces a uniquely Nyingmapa approach to Madhyamaka—it synthesizes Madhyamaka with the Great Perfection by highlighting the ultimate unity of the two truths.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by first noting areas for future research. It offers three models by which we may conceptualise the long and subtle conversation we have presented. Firstly, a germination model, suggested by Westerhoff for Indian philosophy,³⁰ that recognises the

³⁰ Westerhoff 2018: 282.

conceptual seeds planted in early Buddhist discourses that germinate into much richer discussions not as pollutions of the original, but as necessary organic outcomes. Secondly, the story of the Example is compared to the history of a certain golden coin that traverses the centuries acquiring ever-greater value and significance. Finally, we relate the multi-directional conversations on the Example to Hugon’s distinction between personal networks—which rely on direct interpersonal connections—and intellectual networks, which extend across longer periods, with links in the chain not necessarily being contemporaneous.³¹ The study concludes by proposing a possible synthesis between the Tibetan interpretations of the Example, and argues for the relevance of such Tibetan solutions for hermeneutical projects more broadly, including for example historiography.

This thesis uses phonetic spellings for Tibetan and Indian proper names, based on the conventions proposed by the “Tibetan and Himalayan Library” and the “International Association for Sanskrit Studies”.³² The Wylie spellings of Tibetan names are provided in Appendix III. I have adopted the principle of capitalising the root letter of Tibetan proper names and work titles. Technical terms occurring in Indian and Tibetan philosophy are provided in brackets, with the Indian term preceding the corresponding Tibetan term.

³¹ Hugon 2021: 139-141.

³² For the Tibetan and Himalayan Library conventions see <https://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php>. For the IAST conventions, see Plunkett, et al. 1985.

Chapter 2: A Story of the Example Before its Arrival in Tibet

2.1. Overview

This chapter initiates the first leg of our journey, the Example as it appears outside of and prior to its arrival in the indigenous Tibetan philosophical milieu. This, it is hoped, shall provide the foundation for the subsequent discussions in the remaining chapters of perceptual relativism and the Example, in Tibet. This chapter, then, maps a chronology of the Example's appearance in non-Tibetan sources. Beginning with its earliest (currently known) instances in the *Petavatthu* (c. 2nd cent. BCE), the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (1st-3rd cent. CE), the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (2nd-4th cent. CE), the *Dazhidu lun* (5th cent. CE), and the **Nyāyānusārasāstra* (5th cent. CE). The discussion then enters the illusionistic world of Yogācāras and Mādhyamikas. It surveys philosophical works by Asaṅga (4th/5th cent.), Vasubandhu (5th cent.), Candrakīrti (7th cent.), Jñānavajra (c. 10th or 11th cent.), and Jayānanda (12th cent.). We will also briefly digress to the use of the Example for historiographic and hermeneutical purposes in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (c. 2nd-3rd cent. CE), and by Kūkai (9th cent.) in Japan. As the discussion maps out the chronology of these attestations it also discusses the philosophical themes addressed in them. It shows that all of the instances of the Example found in these texts underscore one or more out of four core themes: (i) the ethical and psychological aspects of karma, ii) yogācāra-style idealism, iii) Madhyamaka-style emptiness, and (iv) Buddhist historiography and hermeneutics. While all of these doctrines may appear somewhat diverse, the Example is their common thread that calls into question the “consistency hypothesis” in relation to a shared world, as mentioned in the introduction.³³ Each instance of the Example is read within the exegetical context of

³³ For more on the consistency theory in relation to Yogācāra doctrine, see Lusthaus 2002: 77, fn. 19.

the text in which it is found, and conclusions are drawn through considering this larger conceptual framework.

2.2.1. The Ethical Ramifications of Perceptual Relativism

The first Buddhist doctrine that the Example is utilised in the service of is to teach the ethical and psychological implications of karma. The aspect of ethics follows from the pan-Buddhist notion that sentient experience, saturated with pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations, whether physical or mental, is the effect of previous deeds. At the psychological level, and building upon this first premise, this implies that our own reactions to, and individualised modes of perceiving those very sensations are also a result of what we are deeply habituated to. By extension, even the kinds of objects we have access to and that induce such personal perceptions are the karmic fruit of physical and mental behaviour.

The premise that individuals possess unique streams of sensation (Pāli/Skt. *vedanā*) and perceptual capacities as karmic effects is traditionally held to be a characteristic of sentient life that is only perceivable by beings who have developed specific types of clairvoyance (Skt. *abhijñā*), such as the historical Buddha. This knowledge, it is said, affords direct perception of such subtle and obscure phenomena as the previous and future lives of beings, and thus the behavioural causes that propel beings into various births and environments that induce corresponding sensations and perceptual capacities and tendencies.³⁴ Since this component of sentient experience is considered intrinsic to life and only directly known by an extremely limited number of people, Buddhist teachers sought to legitimise and bolster their doctrine of karma through relying on authorities their audiences already accepted, first

³⁴ This knowledge is found within the three knowledges articulated in Pāli suttas such as the *Samaññaphala Sutta* of the Dīga Nikāya (Walsh 1995: 107); and in the ten knowledges of the Mahāyāna, for instance in Vimuktisena's *Abhisamayālaṃkāravṛtti* (see Sparham 2015 vol. IV: 80; and Dayal 1970: 148-149).

and foremost the historical Buddha.³⁵ Legitimising this doctrine seems to be the primary purpose of the various scriptural passages we will examine that use the Example to teach the psychological and ethical aspects of karma.

Our discussion shall begin with Buddhist scriptures from India and China. While these all ostensibly represent authoritative figures propounding on the values of avoiding negative actions and performing positive ones the style or genre of these texts are not uniform. The first three, the *Petavatthu*, the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, are all narrative oriented works (with the former two being less philosophical in outlook than the latter); whereas the *Dazhidu lun*, and the **Nyāyānusāraśāstra* are far more complex and philosophically orientated texts.³⁶ The latter two are particularly pronounced Abhidharma orientated compositions, with characteristic matrices and catechetical discussions. The chronological arrangement of them in the following discussion hopes to highlight the increasing philosophical weight that the Example came to acquire in the conceptual development of Buddhist philosophy.

i. **The *Petavatthu* (c. 2nd cent. BCE)**

The first and ostensibly earliest canonical source that contains the Example is the *Petavatthu* ('Tales of the Departed'),³⁷ which is a compilation of fifty-one accounts of the woes of hungry ghosts.³⁸ These texts are found in the fifth and last division of the Pāli *suttapiṭaka*,

³⁵ For sources of authority other than the Buddha in the Pāli canon see the *Mahāpadesasutta* in Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012: 545-547. For an interesting discussion on sources of authority in Tibet see Kapstein 2000: 17-20.

³⁶ Although this division is not without its problems as 'Indian narratives have a peculiar penchant for incorporating into themselves elements that we would label philosophy.' See Doniger 1984: 128.

³⁷ See E. Hardy (1984) and N. A. Jayawickrama (1970) for critical editions of the *Petavatthu* and its commentary, the *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*. The *Petavatthu* and its commentary by Dhammapāla have been translated in Horner and Gehman (1974), and Kyaw and Masefield (1980); while the *Petavatthu* without the commentary is found in Gnānānanda Thera (2013). There are three notable modern dissertations on the *Petavatthu* that examine it through various interpretive frameworks and have proven useful for this study: Shirkey (2008), Egge (2013), and McNichol (2019).

³⁸ On the term 'preta', see McNicholl's discussion of the inaccuracy of this term for South Asian Buddhist literature. (McNicholl 2019: 5-6.). In this thesis we shall use both hungry ghost (*yi dwags*) and preta to denote this group of beings.

the *Khuddakanikāya* or ‘Miscellaneous Collection’, a mixed bag of some fifteen texts with dates ranging from the earliest known dissemination of the Pāli canon to later periods in the development of the Tipiṭaka.³⁹ There is no counterpart to the *Khuddakanikāya* in the Chinese translations of the *āgamas*.⁴⁰ However, the Sarvāstivādin Tripiṭaka did contain a Sanskrit *āgama* that had an equivalent to the *Petavatthu* called the *Pretāvadāna* found in the *Kṣudrakāgama*; fragments of this text were discovered in Turfan.⁴¹ In the *Petavatthu* there is a reference to the Moiryas and to their king Piṅgalaka that Dhammapāla in his mid-6th century CE⁴² commentary the *Petavatthu Aṭṭhakathā* (a section of the larger *Paramatthadīpanī* commentary)⁴³ considers to have lived during the reign of Aśoka.⁴⁴ As such it seems to belong to the last section of texts that would be included in the Pāli canon and to have been compiled after the reign of King Aśoka.⁴⁵ K.R Norman and McNichol tentatively date the text to approximately the second century BCE.⁴⁶ There generally appears to be agreement that the text is a collection of common fables that were likely already in circulation for centuries.⁴⁷

The *Petavatthu* has a counterpart the *Vimānavatthu* (‘Tales of the Mansions’) that is a compilation of stories of beings born in celestial mansions as divinities. Both compilations contain accounts of inquisitors asking the hungry ghosts or divine beings what karma had caused their current rebirth. In these stories, the Buddhist virtue of generosity (*dāna*) plays

³⁹ Buswell and Lopez 2014: 435.

⁴⁰ Buswell and Lopez 2014: 876.

⁴¹ Sander and Waldschmidt 1980, 227–233, and K.R. Norman 1983: 72.

⁴² I am following Norman’s estimation of Dhammapāla’s dates. See Norman 1983: 137.

⁴³ It is also sometimes referred to as the *Vimānavatthuvañṇanā* or the *Vimalatthivīlāsīnī*. See Horner: 1974: xv.

⁴⁴ This commentary is translated in Horner and Gehman 1974 and has three sections for each tale: 1) a frame story in prose, 2) the canonical verses of the story, and 3) a brief summary of the verses; the first two Dhammapāla attributes to the Buddha. This is also noted by McNicholl 2019: 16.

⁴⁵ Horner and Gehman: 1974: (Gehman) x.

⁴⁶ Norman 1983: 71, McNicholl 2019: 14.

⁴⁷ Norman 1983: 71-72, McNicholl 2019: 14-15.

a major role and the accounts are therefore seen as moralistic lessons mainly for the laity, encouraging their support of the saṅgha as evidenced by the negative karma associated with being miserly to monks.⁴⁸

The Example appears in three of the fifty-one vignettes of the *Petavatthu*.

Uttara's Mother: II.10

Ghost: Bhante, it has been 55 years since I died in the human world. I have not eaten anything or drunk water since then. Please give me some water, I am very thirsty.

Monk: There is this cool water in the Ganges River flowing down from the Himalayan Mountains. You can take some from here and drink. Why do you ask me for water?

Ghost: Oh Bhante, if I take from the river, it turns into blood. That is why I am asking for water.

Monk: Now what evil deed did you do by body, speech, or mind so that the water of rivers now becomes blood for you?

Ghost: I had a son named Uttara who was a disciple of the Supreme Buddha. He donated robes, alms, food, shelters, and other supplies to monks. I did not approve of what he did, so I got angry and cursed him by saying, "Hey Uttara, may the food and everything you give be received as blood in your next life!" Because of this action, the water of rivers become blood when I take it.⁴⁹

As McNicholl notes, Dhammapāla holds that Uttara lived after the Buddha's *paranirvāṇa*.

He considered the story to have occurred during the period of the First Council, and asserted

⁴⁸ Horner and Gehman: 1974: xv, and (Gehman): xi.

⁴⁹ Translation quoted from Gnānānanda Thera 2013: 57-58. The full passage in Pāli is as follows in Jayawickrama 1977, 39: *Uttaramātupetavatthu. 1 Divāvihāragatāṃ bhikkhuṃ Gaṅgātīre nisinnakam taṃ petī upasaṅkamma dubbhaṇṇā bhīrudassanā, 2 Kesā c' assā atidīghā yāva bhūmāvalambare kesehi sā paṭicchannā samaṇaṃ etad abravī: 3 Pañcapaṇṇāsavassāni yato kālakatā ahaṃ nābhijānāmi bhuttaṃ vā pītaṃ vā pana pāṇiyāṃ dehi tvaṃ pāṇiyāṃ bhante tasitā pāṇiyāya me ti. 4 Ayaṃ sītodikā Gaṅgā Himavantato sandati piva etto gahetvāna kim maṃ yācasi pāṇiyāṃ. 5 Sacāhaṃ bhante Gaṅgāya sayāṃ gaṇhāmi pāṇiyāṃ lohitaṃ me parivattati tasmā yācāmi pāṇiyāṃ. 6 Kin nu kāyena vācāya manasā dukkaṭaṃ kataṃ kissa kammavipākena Gaṅgā te hoti lohitaṃ. 7 Putto me Uttaro nāma saddho āsi upāsako so ca mayhaṃ akāmāya samaṇānaṃ pavecchati cīvaraṃ piṇḍapātaṃ ca paccayaṃ sayanāsaṇaṃ. 8 Tam ahaṃ paribhāsāmi maccherena upaddutā: yaṃ tvaṃ mayhaṃ akāmāya samaṇānaṃ pavecchasi cīvaraṃ piṇḍapātaṃ ca paccayaṃ sayanāsaṇaṃ, 9 Etaṃ te paralokasmim lohitaṃ hotu Uttara tassa kammavipākena Gaṅgā me hoti lohitaṃ ti.*

that the story only became part of the collection during the Second Council.⁵⁰ McNicholl also observes that this account of Uttara and her mother has a Sanskrit parallel in the *Avadānaśataka* 46 (stabilised in the fourth century CE).⁵¹ As such, just as the Beautiful Women Example may have its origins in the story of Nanda and his wife,⁵² this account of Uttara and his mother may be one of the seeds from which the Example grew.

The *Petavatthu* continues:

The Ghost Serini: III.6

Man: You are naked, ugly, and very thin. Your ribs and veins are sticking out from your body. Who are you?

Female Ghost: I am a ghost. I did evil when I was in the human world. As a result, I have to suffer in the ghost world.

Man: What evil deed have you committed by body speech or mind to make you suffer here?

Female Ghost: In the human world, I had plenty of wealth and opportunities to collect merit. But I was very greedy and did not give anything to anybody. Now, as a result of my greed, if I get close to a river to drink, the river appears empty to me and full of sand. As I go towards the shade of a tree to rest, the spot becomes scorched by the sun.⁵³

Large Group of Ghosts: IV.10

Moggallana Bhante: You are naked, very thin, and ugly. Your rib bones are pressing against your skin. Who are you?

Ghost: Bhante, we are ghosts. When we were in the human world we did evil deeds. After death we were reborn in this ghost world and now suffer very much.

⁵⁰ Kyaw and Masefield 1980: 149-151.

⁵¹ McNicholl 2019: 26-27, and 120-122. Also, See Kyaw 1980, 149–152.

⁵² See Introduction, fn. 29.

⁵³ Gnānānanda Thera 2013: 72-73. Pāli in Jayawickrama 1977, 57: *Seriṇṇipetavatthu* 1 *Naggā dubbhṇarūpāsi kisā dhamanisanthatā upphāsulike kisike kā nu tvaṃ idha tiṭṭhasī ti.* 2 *Ahaṃ bhante peṭī 'mhi duggatā Yamalokikā pāpakammaṃ karitvāna petalokam ito gatā.* 3 *Kin nu kāyena vācāya manasā dukkaṭaṃ kataṃ kissa kammaṃvippākena petalokam ito gatā ti.* 4 *Anāvatesu tiṭṭhesu viciniṃ addhamāsakaṃ santesu deyyadhammesu dīpaṃ nākāsim attano.* 5 *Nadiṃ upemi tasitā rittakā parivattati chāyaṃ upemi uṇhesu ātapo parivattati.*

Moggallana Bhante: What evil did you do by body, speech, and mind to have come to this ghost world?

Ghosts: There were many virtuous people and opportunities for collecting merits but we did not give anything. Now we have been roaming for half a month suffering from thirst.

When we feel very thirsty, we go to the river to drink. When we get close to it, the water appears as if it has dried up and all that is left is dry sand. When we are scorched by the sun, we go to the shade of a tree. Once, we get there the shade disappears and the sun beats down.⁵⁴

Each of these accounts illustrates how actions done in a past life lead to various results in the present, but implicitly we may also note a certain epistemological idea that relates to the second, i.e. the psychological aspect of karma. The hungry ghosts are at first conscious of what humans generally perceive to be water, and yet in the latter two accounts in the *Petavatthu* here, the ghost's negative karma causes them to be unable to obtain or even see the existent water for it now appears as dry sand.

In terms of ontology, these passages do not use the Example to illustrate anything about the ontological status of water, pus, dry sand and the like. That said, in the account of Uttara's Mother her negative karma causes the water to actually become blood for her. It thereby indicates that the nature of a perceived object can transform under the influence and through the power of the ripening of karma of the individual perceiver. This is a point that the 15th century Tibetan scholar Khédrupjé (1385–1438) will discuss in favour of his interpretation of the Example, as we will see in Chapter 4.

⁵⁴ Gnānānanda Thera 2013: 110-111. Pāli in Jayawickrama 1977, 90-91: *Gaṇapetavatthu 1 Naggā dubbhaṇṇarūpāttha kiṣ dhamanisanthatā upphāsulikā kisikā ke nu tumhe 'ttha mārisā. 2 Mayam bhadante pet' amhā duggatā Yamalokikā pāpakammaṃ karitvāna petalokam ito gatā. 3 Kiṃ nu kāyena vācāya manasā dukkaṭaṃ kataṃ kissa kammavipākena idaṃ dukkhaṃ nigacchasi. 4 Anāvaṭesu tittesu vicinimh' addhamāsakaṃ santesu deyyadhammesu dīpaṃ nākamha attano. 5 Nadiṃ upema tasitā rittakā parvattati chāyāṃ upema uṇhesu ātapo parivattati.*

The question remains whether the perceptions of the dry riverbed and of blood are mistaken perceptions (Skt. *mithyājñāna*, *viparyayajñā*), or whether they are accurate perceptions of the respective personal environments, that through the power of karma have in reality drastically changed from that of humans? Neither the *Petavatthu* nor its commentary by Dhammapāla explicitly answer these questions. This is most likely because the main purpose of the narratives contained in this simple text is to induce confidence in the certainty of actions leading to good and bad results in the future. This is not, however, to dismiss the message of this text as a purely moralistic narrative. As Shirkey argues, to do so would dismiss the subtler aspects of the ‘moral universe the *Petavatthu* envisions’, and of the practical training in ethics that is instantiated in the audience via such Buddhist narratives.⁵⁵

ii. **The *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Vinayavastu* (1st -3rd cent. CE)**

The next instance of the Example teaching the doctrine of karma is the *Vinayavastuni Bhaiṣajyavastu* (*'dul ba gzhi las/ sman gyi gzhi*), or ‘The Chapter on Medicines from the Chapters on Monastic Discipline’.⁵⁶ The passage quoted below is from the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, the only vinaya lineage that spread in Tibet. Within this enormous corpus of monastic rules, the *Vinayavastu* constitutes one of its four divisions, and within it the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, “The Chapter on Medicines” is the sixth of seventeen chapters. This section of the text, while discussing certain rules to be followed by monastics, also discusses them in the context of the types of medicines and foods that are appropriate. Its style is highly narrative, containing various stories about the Buddha’s and other personalities’ previous

⁵⁵ Shirkey 2008: 16.

⁵⁶ Several Sanskrit manuscripts of this text are existent. One of these was discovered in the 1930’s, the Gilgit manuscript, published by Nalinaksha Dutt (1942-50) that contains only about half of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, and another Sanskrit manuscript has been identified by Klaus Wille (see Hartmann & Wille 2014a: 146, 149-151, and 2014c, 250), but this is only fragmentary. The *Vinayavastu* was translated into Chinese by Yijing (735-713) in the 8th century. The Tibetan translation was completed during the 9th century by Sarvajñādeva, Vidyākaraṇa, Dharmākara, and Pelgyi Lhünpo. It also exists in Mongolian translation. Fumi Yao has translated this text into Japanese (2013) and English (2021) from the Tibetan.

incarnations.⁵⁷ The date of composition of this Vinaya collection is rather vague, the corpus as we now have it is approximately dated to the first few centuries of the common era.⁵⁸

A variation of the Example appears in the context of a discussion between the Buddha and five-hundred hungry ghosts. The ghosts ask the Buddha for a gift of water, and he indicates the Ganges river, encouraging them to simply drink it. They reply:

This river, commonly used by all,—

For us, the Bhāgīrathī [river] is dry!

It is filled with the defilement of blood,

We see it guarded by those holding clubs and armed with weapons in their hands.⁵⁹

The Example in this context illustrates principally two perspectives of the river: that of the Buddha, other humans, and the deity of the Ganges who all see it as water, and that of the five-hundred hungry ghosts.⁶⁰ The text then goes on to explain that this is due to the negative karma of these beings created in a past life that has caused them to become hungry ghosts and to be so obscured as to be unable to perceive the water. The text also includes a description of the hungry ghosts that is shared with the standard one often seen in śāstra literature, such as Nāgārjuna's *Suḥṛllekha*,⁶¹ with the ghosts possessing miniscule mouths,

⁵⁷ The Mūlasarvastivāda Vinaya is known to be particularly rich in narratives (much more than other Vinayas). They have been extracted and summarised by Jampa Panglung with reference to their parallels in the Pāli Jātakas and *Mahāvastu*, and the Chinese canon. See Panglung 1981.

⁵⁸ Fumi 2021: chapter i. para 1.

⁵⁹ D 1, 153.a: *yi dgas rnams kyis gsol pa/ chu bo skye bo kun gyis nye bar spyad bgyi ba/ /skal ldan shing rta 'bab 'di bdag cag rnams la skams/ 'di ni khrag gi dri mas gang zhing lag pa na/ /dbyug pa dgra star bcas pa thogs pas 'di bsrungs mthong /*

⁶⁰ The mention of the river being guarded by beings brandishing weapons is perhaps one of Vasubandhu's sources for his famous account of hungry ghosts seeing a river guarded by beings holding weapons in his *Viṃśatikāvṛtti*, see below.

⁶¹ Tharchin and Engle 2012: 104-105. (Nāgārjuna *Suḥṛllekha* k. 91-94). McNicholl believes that despite a few descriptions of *pretas* in early sources such as in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna Sūtra*, an early Mahāyāna text (c. 150 – 400 CE), where hungry ghosts are occasionally described as having almost god-like divine forms,

gigantic bellies, and the like. As with the *Petavatthu* this brief allusion to and use of the Example underscores the reality of karma, the ethical usage, and that an individual's perceptual capacities and tendencies are affected by and coloured by such karma, the psychological aspect of the doctrine. Once more questions of the ontological status of water and the veracity of the various perceptions is not explicitly mentioned. However, given that the Buddha is generally considered one who has "awoken" to reality, his perception of the river would presumably have been taken to be the accurate one.⁶² Those that contradict it, therefore, cannot be. While this is not explicit, the underling meaning appears clear: the river is perceived by the Buddha, but is not by the ghosts due to their negative karma. As such, their cognitions are mistaken as they do not perceive the reality in front of them.

iii. The **Āryamahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* (3rd - 5th cent. CE)⁶³

This famous and popular sūtra is the Mahāyāna version of the Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasutta*.⁶⁴ Although both share similar events and teachings, the Sanskrit version contains specific Mahāyāna doctrines such as that of buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*), and a unique presentation of the four wrong views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*, *log par lta ba*) that consider the aggregates as permanent, happiness, pure, and self. Instead of the common teaching that to view one's aggregates as possessing such qualities is a mistake, this sūtra

the standard hungry and grotesque description of *pretas* as a category had become standardised by the early centuries of the common era. See McNicholl 2019: 88-89.

⁶² While there is much debate, particularly within Yogācāra and Madhyamaka discourse, on whether the Buddha has perceptions of conventional objects like rivers, this is not the place to discuss this. For an extensive discussion, see Almogi 2009.

⁶³ See Habata 2007, for a detailed study in German of most of the extant Sanskrit fragmentary manuscripts of this text, an annotated edition of certain fragments, together with the parallel Tibetan and Chinese versions. The three sets of Sanskrit manuscripts analysed are dated to approximately the 5th or 6th century CE. Additionally, fragments of a Gāndārī version of this sūtra have also recently been discovered, reportedly in caves near Bamiyan Afghanistan, and are now included in The Schøyen Collection. However, this version seems to be a different version when compared to those that are known in Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan. See Allon and Salomon 2000: 271. There is also a Sanskrit edition by Waldschmidt 1950 that has been consulted.

⁶⁴ Walshe 1995: 231-278.

presents the view that one's buddha-nature actually possesses these qualities.⁶⁵ It is approximately dated to the 3rd to 5th century CE, by Nakamura.⁶⁶ Coming from a far more philosophically dynamic period in India, it may come as no surprise that its philosophical content is far richer than the *Petavatthu* and *Bhaiṣajyavastu*. Since the Chinese version does not include the Example, and I have been unable to identify the Sanskrit parallel, my translation is from the Tibetan version:

Child of the lineage, in this fortunate eon an infinitely great number of sentient beings are born as hungry ghosts, for food they eat vomit, grease, flesh, pus, blood, excrement and urine, saliva, and mucus. Their lifespan is infinite, 10,000 years or up to 100,000 [years, during which] they do not even hear the word 'drink', not to mention seeing it with their eyes and drinking it. If from a distance they do see water, when they go close to it and look, it immediately turns into hot coals and/or pus and blood. If it does not transform, there are many people wielding swords and spears, and they are not permitted to go close. If rain hits their body, it turns into fire. Such is the fruitional result of their negative karma.⁶⁷

Here again the stress on the moralistic and psychological results that are the inevitable result of negative karma is evident. However, once more there is no sign that the perception of the

⁶⁵ There are several versions of this sūtra translated into Chinese, by Faxian and Buddhahadra in 418 CE, and a longer version by Dharmakṣema in 423. There are also several version of this text in Tibetan: one called *'Phags pa yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po theg pa chen po'i mdo* translated by Jinamitra, Jñānagarbha, Devacandra (or Bendé Tsendra), a few folios of the sūtra referred to by the same name exists as a separate sūtra in the bKa' 'gyur translated by Kamalagupta and Rinchen Zangpo; and the text that concerns us the *'Phags pa yongs su mya ngan las das pa chen po'i mdo*, that is a translation from Dharmakṣema's Chinese translation by Wang Pap Zhün, Gewé Lodrö, and Gyatsö Dé. It has been translated into English by Yamamoto (1973) from Dharmakṣema's Chinese version, which was later edited and revised by Page (1999), Blum (2013) has also translated it from the same Chinese version.

⁶⁶ Nakamura 1987: 212. Nakamura also notes that there are several more precise opinions on its date. For instance, Matsumoto notes that it was composed between 200-300 CE in Kaśmir (See Nakamura 1987: 212).

⁶⁷ lHa sa, 368: 245b.7-246a.4. *rigs kyi bu/ bskal pa bzang po 'dir sems can tshad med mtha' yas pa snyed yi dwags su skyes te/ zas su skyugs pa dang/ tshil dang/ sha dang/ rnag dang/ khrag dang/ bshang gci dang/ mchil ma dang/ snabs za zhing/ tshe'i tshad lo khrid phrag tshad med pa brgya stong snyed kyi bar du skom gyi ming yang ma thos na/ mig gis mthong zhing btung ba lta ci smos/ gal te rgyang nas chu mthong ste/ drung du 'gro bar gzas na'ang phyin ma thag tu me mur dang/ rnag khrag tu 'gyur ro/ ci ste ma gyur na'ang mi mang po ral gri dang mdung thogs shing srung ste nyer mi ster ro/ /gal te char pas lus la phog na mer 'gyur te/ de ni mi dge ba'i las kyi 'bras bu rnam par smin pa'o/*

hungry ghosts is considered unreal or illusionistic, nor a discussion of the ontological nature of water.

iv. **The *Dazhidu lun* (c. 5th cent.)**

The Example can also be found in the monumental *Dazhidu lun*, ‘The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom’ (**Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*).⁶⁸ This enormous compilation of Mahāyāna doctrines comments on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* and is questionably attributed to Nāgārjuna himself, although many doubt the ascription as there is no record of the work in any Sanskrit or Tibetan text. It has nevertheless been seen as an authoritative Mahāyāna text in China from the time of its translation by Kumārajīva (344–413 CE) at the very beginning of the 5th century.⁶⁹

The Example appears in the context of a discussion whether the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas fulfil the wishes of sentient beings without exception. During the discussion an opinion is proposed that the Buddha did completely fulfil the wishes of beings, but beings are unable to realise this.

Finally, some say that Śākyamuni did indeed fulfil the wishes of beings but that the latter did not profit from them. [*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*]. Thus it is said in the *P’i-mo-lo-kie king (Vimalakīrtisūtra)*: “The Buddha tapped the earth with his toe and at once his field (*kṣetra*) was adorned with the seven jewels. [And the Buddha said to Śāriputra]: My Buddha-field is always like that, but because there are many bad people, it appears to be different from a Buddha-field.” Also, when the nāgarāja impartially (*samacittena*) makes it rain, the rain is water for humans, but for the pretas, it is burning embers.⁷⁰

The equation here in the *Dazhidu lun* of the Example with the various discordant perceptions of the Buddha’s environment or *kṣetra*, holds within it several relevant epistemic premises:

⁶⁸ See Zacchetti 2021, for an up-to-date study on the *Dazhidu lun* and the history of the larger *Prajñāpāramitā*.

⁶⁹ See Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, for his annotated translation of the first section and chapter 20 of the second. There also exists an unpublished English translation of Lamotte’s work by Gelongma Karma Migme Chödrön, 2001.

⁷⁰ Chödrön 2001: 1594-1595.

the Buddha's perception of his realm is accurate, while those who do not see it in such a way, are misperceiving it. Likewise, the humans accurately perceive the rain, whereas, the preta's do not and are mistaken. The Example is thus used again to substantiate the claim that it is the cognitive limitations of beings that do not allow them to see reality, and highlights the psychological aspect of karma. The Example here also seems to illustrate that it is due to the pretas' negative karma that the rain sent to beings 'impartially' by the nāga king is experienced as something painful and burning, the ethical aspect of karma. Little is explicitly said of the ontological nature of the Buddha's *kṣetra*, or of the rain. But taking the whole context into consideration, it appears to be saying such objects are not mere nonexistent entities, for the Buddha accurately perceives and thus certifies the existence of his own realm, whatever its exact ontological status may be.⁷¹

v. **The *Nyāyānusāraśāstra (c. 5th cent)**

Our next text will illustrate perceptual relativism, with what appears to be a reference to the Example, and is certainly the most philosophically minded use of it that we have so far encountered. The **Nyāyānusāraśāstra* (Ch. *Shun zhengli lun*, 'The Conformity with Correct Principle') was written by Saṃghabhadra in the 5th century, a period characterised by the growing popularity of Yogācāra(-style) doctrines. Saṃghabhadra was a Sarvāstivāda Vaibhāṣika and a contemporary of Vasubandhu. He wrote the text as a polemical critique of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. It criticizes many of Vasubandhu's non-Sarvāstivādin arguments and his presentation of Vaibhāṣika doctrines by drawing on the

⁷¹ Another important Chinese work, the 7th century *Fayuan zhulin* ('A Forest of Pearls from the Dharma Garden'), by Daoshi also contains the Example (English translation in Shinohara 2019: vol. 1, 228.). It appears within a detailed categorisation of more than 36 different types of ghosts, each born with particular characteristics due to the specific negative actions that they created. This detailed description of the ghost realm comes from the *Saddharmasṃrityupasthāna Sūtra*, and constitutes a section of a larger description of all six realms of saṃsāra. Such is the subject of a discursive meditation, designed to engender understanding in the meditator of the cause and effects of actions. For more details See McNicole 2019: 23-24 and Stuart 2012: 50-53.

important and colossal Abhidharma treatise the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.⁷² The text as a whole is a typical Abhidharma treatise with characteristic philosophical depth.

The following passage, translated by Bhikkhu Dhammajoti, includes a brief allusion to the Example in the context of Saṃghabhadra's discussion of the Dārṣṭāntika⁷³ view that object-domains (*viśaya*), the spheres upon which consciousnesses operate, are non-existent ultimately.

Since *duḥkha* and *sukha* arise through the strength of conceptualization (*vikalpa*), it is known that object-domains (*viśaya*, *spyod yul*) are not existent entities at the absolute level (**svabhāvena aparīṣpanna*). For, the Buddha in the *Māgandika-sūtra* speaks of lepers feeling pleasure when touched by fire of *duḥkha*. He also says that a *rūpa* may be called an agreeable mental object for a given being, but not for other beings. Moreover, the pure and the impure are not existent at the absolute level (*aparīṣpanna*): this is because beings of the same homogeneity (*sabhāga*; i.e. of the same species, e.g. human beings)⁷⁴ differ from those of other [homogeneity] (i.e. of another species, e.g. beings in hell) in the way they experience the pure and the impure. Since purity and impurity cannot be apperceived in a determinate manner, both pure and impure objects are not existent at the absolute level.

[In contrast], those conforming to logical reasoning (**yuktavādin*, i.e. the Sarvāstivādin) assert thus: All object domain is existent at the absolute level.⁷⁵

Although the Example is not explicitly spelled out in this passage, the allusion to beings of the same homogeneity perceiving as pure what those of a different homogeneity perceive as impure indicates the same kind of perceptual relativism found within the Example. Saṃghabhadra also uses the principle of intersubjective perception across realms to illustrate the Dārṣṭāntika position on ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*), and to refute the objective nature of cognitive objects (*ālambana*, *dmigs yul*). To formulate the Dārṣṭāntika's doctrine

⁷² The *Nyāyānusāra* is now only extant in its Chinese translation by Xuanzang (602–664), but shorter sections of the Sanskrit are available in Sthiramati, Pūrṇavardhana, and Yaśomitra's commentaries on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

⁷³ A system with strong affiliations with the Sautrāntika, see below.

⁷⁴ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 49: 'In the Sarvāstivāda, *sabhāgatā* or *nikāya-sabhāga* is a *cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra* which causes the similarities in appearance, inclination, etc., among members of the same species.'

⁷⁵ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 45.

in a syllogism: Object-domains and cognitive objects do not exist ultimately because pure and impure objects are perceived differently by different classes of being. For instance, a river may be perceived as pure delicious water by humans but as impure pus by hungry ghosts. The ethical and psychological aspects of karma are not explicitly emphasised here, but they are assumed. For beings of different realms have such different experiences and perceptions of objects in virtue of their *sabhāga*, which is a result of karma. The purpose of this text thus differs from those previously surveyed; it is more focused on the ontological nature and epistemic conditions involved within intersubjective experiences. We have explicit mention of the epistemic mechanism that causes beings to perceive things so very differently: it is the *vikalpas* of beings that project different identities onto objects, with the result that they may have pleasant and unpleasant feelings about them. As Dhammjoti goes on to clarify, Saṃghabhadra's discussion and allusion to the Example is very close indeed to (and yet does not explicitly teach) the full Yogācāra doctrine that external objects are mere appearances to mind, a position that we will turn to shortly.⁷⁶

In sum, all the authors of the texts just cited, from the 2nd cent. BCE India, to 5th cent. CE China and 5th cent India, saw the Example as underlining and illustrating the ethical and cognitive dimensions of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of karma: one reaps what one sows via cognitive experiences of joys and woes. However, the Example is not explicitly used in any of these texts to illustrate illusionism or illusionistic epistemology, themes Yogācāra and Mādhyamika authors saw it as clearly exemplifying. We shall now turn to Indian philosophers traditionally associated with these schools of thought, for we aim to trace a conceptual shift: moving from authors who viewed the Example primarily as

⁷⁶ Sharygin 2024, also discusses this passage by Saṃghabhadra in his analysis of proto-Yogācāra doctrines within the Sautrāntika/ Dārṣṭāntika position. He offers a slightly alternate reading of the Chinese of the final statement ‘both pure and impure objects are not existent at the absolute level’: ‘For instance, 不成實 can be translated rather as *apariniṣpatti* or *asiddhatva*, which would then mean “not proven/established [as real]”, not “not existent at the absolute level” (*apariniṣpanna*)’ (Sharygin 20024: 373-374, fn.39).

emphasizing ethical considerations to those who recognized it as revealing deeper insights about ultimate reality.

2.2.2. A Shift Towards Illusionism

The following eight pages do not directly address the Example but provide an extended excursus explaining the transition to how the Example came to be understood in Yogācāra contexts. To highlight the growing illusionistic and idealistic tendencies within Abhidharma schools—evident in Saṃghabhadra's explanation above—and the additional layers of meaning thereby applied to the Example, this discussion first tracks the shift toward illusionism and away from what may be considered Abhidharma-oriented realism.⁷⁷ In this exploration of the development and application of the Example outside of Tibet, the next most relevant doctrine, therefore, can be roughly categorized as “idealism”, particularly that associated with the Yogācāra philosophical system.⁷⁸ While the first texts that we will examine are by the perceived founding figures of this tradition, Asaṅga and his half-brother Vasubandhu (4th-5th cent. CE), there was clearly a shift towards idealism already occurring prior to their arrival in south Asia.

As its name indicates, the Yogācāra system is generally understood to lay a particular emphasis on the ‘Practice of Yoga’ (*yogācāra*), and specifically meditative training, as can be seen in the enormous attention given to the various stages of meditative training found in

⁷⁷ I use the term illusionism to denote how, broadly speaking, Mahāyāna philosophers of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka persuasions describe the deceiving and unreal nature of conventional phenomena, including matter and consciousness. I do not use it in the sense found in the philosophy of mind to deny conscious phenomenological experience. The term realism is used here and below in the general sense that material objects have a mind-independent status. See Bronkhorst 2009: 118-152 for a discussion of Mahāyāna illusionism.

⁷⁸ In this thesis, I use the term idealism to refer, in the general sense, to the theory that cognitive stimuli do not possess a mind-independent status. This is close, although not identical, to what western philosophy sometimes calls “subjective idealism” to denote Berkeley’s form of idealism. For more on the differing interpretations of this term and theory for the Yogācāra system, see pp.48-49 below. For further information concerning the Yogācāra system, see Powers 1991 and Potter 2009 for extensive bibliographic information; and for specific treatments of the system see Conze 1973, Carpenter 2014, and Westerhoff 2018.

its treatises.⁷⁹ As such, it represents assertions about reality that correspond with the meditative experiences of adepts of Buddhist meditation. The system's principal progenitors, as noted, are widely regarded as Asaṅga and Vasubandhu,⁸⁰ two half-brothers originally from present day Pakistan who both wrote important treatises on this system. Traditionally, Asaṅga is considered the author of the *Yogācārabhūmi*⁸¹ and *Mahāyānasamgraha*, and Vasubandhu of the *Viṃśikā* and *Triṃśikā*. The commentaries to these texts by Dharmapāla and Sthiramati are also important for this tradition. The works of all these philosophers became incredibly influential in Tibet and China. Canonical sources for this system include Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (although the latter is not referenced or quoted in any of the works attributed to Asaṅga or Vasubandhu). The *Daśabhūmikasūtra* contains possibly the most important term for this system, *cittamātra* or 'mind-only'.⁸² *Cittamātra* is not only used as an alternative name for the system but may also be considered its most characteristic doctrine: that all existence is not other than mind.⁸³ This notion is further elaborated through the system's trisvabhāva theory. The first nature, *paratantrasvabhāva* (dependent nature), denotes compounded entities that arise through reliance on other causal factors. The second, *parikalpitasvabhāva* (imagined nature), encompasses the conceptual constructions superimposed upon dependent phenomena—most notably, the assumption that they exist independently of consciousness. The third, *pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva* (perfected nature), represents the ultimate reality for this system: the absence of imagined nature within dependent nature, or the emptiness of phenomena with

⁷⁹ Particularly in Maitreya/Asaṅga's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and *Yogācārabhūmi*.

⁸⁰ Westerhoff 2018: 151.

⁸¹ However, many modern scholars now consider this to be a heterogeneous compilation by many different individuals, although one need not necessarily exclude Asaṅga from their group.

⁸² See for instance the *Daśabhūmikasūtra: cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam* (Vaidya 1967: 31).

⁸³ In the next section (pp.48-49) we shall discuss the two dominant readings of this doctrine in contemporary scholarship, namely epistemological idealism, and ontological idealism.

respect to mind-independent existence. For instance, simply put via the Example itself: water, pus, and nectar are dependent natures (*paratantrasvabhāva*) relying on causes and conditions, their externality is an imputed nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) as they are not external to consciousness, and the emptiness of the imputed nature in the dependent nature (that is, water, pus, and nectar not being external to cognition) is the perfected nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*).⁸⁴

As mentioned above the doctrine that everything that is perceived is mental, is not in essence very far at all from the Abhidharma-Dārṣṭāntika's notion that everyday objects perceived by our senses and mind do not exist on the level of ultimate truth. It is quite reasonable to assume that such a doctrine of "mind-only" naturally grew out of the Ābhidharmika's deconstruction of phenomena into infinitesimal *dharmas*. This approach describes ultimate reality as momentary physical and mental properties or elements.⁸⁵ Such *dharmas* are indivisible either physically or mentally, and are thus what actually exists. One reasonable outcome of the assertion that object-domains and cognitive objects do not really exist, as seen in the passage by Saṃghabhadra above, is that perceptions of these objects must, therefore, be somewhat misleading. If that is the case, what exactly are all these seemingly external objects? The Yogācāra solution is quite radical, giving up entirely the theory of ultimately existing momentary material *dharmas*, they propose there are in fact no real outer objects intruding upon consciousness. Just as it is with seemingly external objects in dreams. However, before delving into the Yogācāra's idealistic ontology and illusionistic epistemology (that the Example was used to legitimise) the discussion shall first take a closer look at Abhidharma ontology and its related epistemological framework: the conceptual steppingstones Yogācāra authors found unsatisfactory and sought to transcend. The

⁸⁴ For more on these three *svabhāva*, see Conze 1973, Carpenter 2014, and Westerhoff 2018.

⁸⁵ See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 6: 4, Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: 1891-2.

discussion will begin with a particular focus on the Sarvastivāda Abhidharma followed by a brief survey of how the Sautrāntika system may have evolved out of it. In analysing the possible Abhidharma influence on the idealistic notions that are so characteristic of Yogācāra discourse, and for which the Example plays an important role, Sarvastivāda doctrine is particularly relevant and useful. This is because together with the Theravāda Abhidharma it is the only school of Abhidharma of which we have a complete record of their treatises. That said, we will not be addressing the Theravāda Abhidharma as it seems to have exerted little influence on Indian Abhidharma after spreading to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE, as soon thereafter the tradition evolved somewhat in philosophical isolation from India.⁸⁶

The Sarvastivāda and the Theravāda were both schools that evolved out of the Sthaviranikāya, one of the two members of the very first split of the Buddhist *saṅgha* after the second council around 100 years after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, the other being the Mahāsāṃghika school.⁸⁷ The Sarvastivāda (the “theory that everything exists”) is named after its principle and clearly most provocative assertion: everything that has ever existed will always exist. That is, the past, present, and future of any given existent always exist. This rather surprising idea is not without merit, and is set forth to bolster several fundamental Buddhist ideas such as the function of karma over several lives and the continuity of a single individual throughout one lifetime. For if one is to accept the momentariness of all conditioned phenomena as the fundamental fabric of existence, one may reasonably ask: what indeed is it that allows for the instances of objects that have now passed to effect and produce a later instance of themselves, if they have indeed ceased and no longer exist? This issue bears on actions created in a past life reaping future results, but also simply one

⁸⁶ Westerhoff 2018: 44. Also see Ronkin 2004 for an in-depth study of Theravāda Abhidharma.

⁸⁷ See Lamotte 1988: 124-140.

moment of a thought producing the next moment of thought. Surely, that which has ceased cannot exert any influence on anything? The Sarvāstivādin answer is that because the action created in a past life or the previous thought still exist, they are still quite capable of producing results. Perhaps it is similar to how our past state of youthfulness may now affect our present clinging to our body. The theory also accounts for statements made by the Buddha about past phenomena that one may view with renunciation since such past-objects are conditioned and have perished. It also supports a cornerstone of Buddhist epistemology, that consciousness necessarily has an object. Since we undoubtedly conceptualise about past and future objects, such objects must be existent as our consciousness of them is self-evident.⁸⁸

Now for reasons of lack of space and direct relevance, the discussion shall not investigate the various refutations of this rather provocative idea.⁸⁹ It shall instead turn to another of this school's interesting and unique assertions concerning the simultaneity of cause and effect during cognition of an object, as this relates more directly to the discussion of where the Yogācāra idealistic view may have grown from. This intriguing assertion argues that in certain instances cause and effect exist simultaneously, and calls on commonly observable objects for its authenticity, such as a flame and its light, the former although a cause of the latter clearly is simultaneous with it. Another example is a bundle of reeds that have been placed together and mutually cause each other to stand upright.⁹⁰ Or perhaps we can simply consider the three legs of a tripod: a single leg causes the other legs to stand upright and vice versa, while all of the upright legs abide contemporaneously.

⁸⁸ Westerhoff 2018: 61-2.

⁸⁹ For more on this topic, see Westerhoff 2018: 62-3.

⁹⁰ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2009: 157, 160. The former example is by Saṃghabhadra, the latter is Asaṅga's and thus strictly speaking not by a Saravāstivādin.

Such examples illustrate and deal with a much more pressing epistemological issue the Sarvastivādins were concerned about: within a universe of ever changing momentary and infinitesimal *dharmas*, by the time a cognition is activated by a material object external to it, the object that imposed its presence on consciousness must surely have ceased if all *dharmas* are momentary. This is like the time lag that occurs in broadcasting television. By the time a scene or event is represented in a “live” television show on a traditional television, due to the necessary time lag that occurs as the picture signals are transmitted via radio waves into aerials and then into television sets that transform them into pixelated images on the screen, the initial scene will have changed. The unreality of “live” TV seems a fitting example to illustrate that for Kṣaṇikavādins – proponents of *dharmas* being strictly momentary⁹¹ - direct or “live” perception (*pratyakṣa*) is not actually possible. It is to account for these unwanted consequences (direct perception not being possible, and perceptions with non-existent objects being possible) that the Sarvāstivādins propose the theory of the simultaneity between an object, a sense faculty (causes), and their corresponding consciousness (effect).⁹²

Related to their momentisation and atomisation of reality into fundamental *dharmas*, the Sarvāstivādins were also obliged to make a distinction between the ontological weight of fundamental *dharmas* and that of everyday transactional objects. This led to the classification of phenomena into substantial existents (*dravyasat*), and imputed existents (*prajñaptisat*). The former are considered ultimates and objects of perception, the latter considered relatives and objects of conception. For the Sarvāstivādins, if a given object disappears to the face of the mind when it is physically broken apart, or mentally dissected, its substantiality or ontological weight must be fairly limited, being a mere projection onto

⁹¹ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 136.

⁹² Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 136.

more fundamental components.⁹³ Vasubandhu posits pots and chariots as instances. What does in fact remain before the mind even if it is broken up physically, or mentally dissected, would then be much more fundamental. Instances of substantial existents on the physical plain are *rūpa* or matter, and on the level of consciousness, any of the four non-physical *skandhas*.⁹⁴

One may naturally then ask, what level of matter are we talking about here that is said to be fundamental and able to produce consciousness? Are these Sarvāstivādins just referring to these fundamental atoms composed of *rūpa* or more coarse collections of mud, for example? Moreover, if the causal objects producing perception are infinitesimal atomic *dharmas*, how do these produce our perception, since we are obviously unable to perceive such tiny entities? For Sarvāstivādins like Saṃghabhadra, the gross *rūpa* producing a perception is not a new form acquired through assemblage, but rather it is the collection of individual atoms themselves, each offering its share in the collective that together has the power to produce perception.⁹⁵ As such, the gross *rūpa* is a substantial existent or *dravyasat*. Perhaps it is like how the members of one team of a tug of war individually are unable to win against the opposing team, but collectively through the summation of all of their strength, they may.⁹⁶ The Sautrāntika's rejection of this claim shall be discussed shortly.

The solutions proposed by the Sarvāstivādins to account for the problems of the impossibility of direct perception and the perception of non-existents in a world of momentary and infinitesimal *dharmas* (via the theory that everything exists, the concurrency of cause and effect, and the assertion that collections of atoms produce perception) are not

⁹³ Although there are varying degrees of existential weight ascribed to the *prajñapti*, see Westerhoff 2018: 72-3.

⁹⁴ *Abhidharmakośa* 6:4, Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: 1891-2.

⁹⁵ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 147

⁹⁶ Yaśomitra gives the example of many people pulling a large log in his *Sphuṭarthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (Shastri 1970: 46).

viable for Sautrāntikas, later-Dārṣṭāntikas, or Yogācāras. Before turning to the latter, the next step on the conceptual ladder leading to Yogācāra idealism after the Sarvāstivādins is that of the Sautrāntikas and Dārṣṭāntikas.⁹⁷

A large portion of what is more commonly known of Sautrāntika doctrine comes from Vasubandhu's so-called "Sautrāntika-commentary"⁹⁸ on his own root text the *Abhidharmakośa* that purports to present the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibāṣika system, an orthodox and conservative group within the Sarvāstivādins.⁹⁹ As such, our understanding of the Sautrāntika system is rather limited as there are no extant treatises by these masters that predate Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. What little we can glean is often from the presentation of their tenets by authors who seem to have held divergent doctrinal affiliations.¹⁰⁰ However, research by Bhikku Dammajoti has improved our understanding immensely in this regards, particularly through his work on Saṃghabhadra's **Nyāyānusāra* in which the author extensively quotes the Sautrāntika master Śrīlāta's work.¹⁰¹ That said, Sautrāntika's are generally considered to be those who do not accept the Abhidharma treatises as *Buddhavacana* (or even as authoritative), place great emphasis on the actual sūtras,¹⁰² and reject the theory that everything exists.

As for the Dārṣṭāntikas, there has been much debate within modern scholarship concerning their relationship with the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas. What now seems to be clear is that masters associated with this school are best considered as belonging to two groups:

⁹⁷ On the conceptual progression from Abhidharma philosophy to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, see Siderits 2007: 105, 146-148, 180ff; and on doxographies in general see Westerhoff 2018: 21-24.

⁹⁸ So called since for the most part the positions Vasubandhu takes in his *Bhāṣya* are those of the Sautrāntika. See Xuanzang's student Fa bao's comments in Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: 10.

⁹⁹ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 6.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, Saṃghabhadra, Yaśomitra, and Vasubandhu. Although the latter's doctrinal affiliation, particularly when he wrote the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, is a subject of debate. See below.

¹⁰¹ See Bhikku Dammajoti 2007.

¹⁰² This follows Yaśomitra's definition found in Westerhoff 2018: 73, see Shastri 1970: 15, for the Sanskrit.

early-Dārṣṭāntikas, such as Buddhadeva and Dharmatrāta, who accepted the *theory that everything exists*, and later-Dārṣṭāntikas being Vibhajyavādins (those who hold the status of existence of the three periods of time is to be distinguished) who did not.¹⁰³ Based upon Przyluski’s theory, many scholars have considered the term Dārṣṭāntika to be pejorative and used by their opponents, and that of Sautrāntika to be used by masters of this school when referring to themselves.¹⁰⁴ However, the rationale behind this theory was convincingly refuted by Jayatilleke and by Bhikku Dammajoti.¹⁰⁵ It now also seems clear that by the time of the 5th or 6th century the two terms, Sautrāntika and Dārṣṭāntika, do appear to have been considered as referring to the same philosophical system, although this was not the case centuries earlier.¹⁰⁶

Leaving the difficulties around the exact connection between the Dārṣṭāntika and Sautrāntikas aside, let us turn to the main point under analysis: how the Yogācāra idealism, and its related use of the Example, may have grown out of certain philosophers’ (for convenience they shall be referred to as Sautrāntikas) rejection of Sarvāstivāda tenets. The discussion shall first analyse their rejection of the Sarvāstivāda realist epistemology, which accepted that causal stimulus and resultant perception subsist in the same instant, this will be followed by their rejection of the Sarvāstivāda substantialist ontology.

In accepting the momentariness of all compounded things and rejecting the theory that everything exists, Sautrāntikas (and later-Dārṣṭāntikas) needed another solution to account for how perception could perceive non-existent objects and that would account for the self-evident fresh and lucid perception of objects by our senses, despite sense objects not being perceived “live”. The solution was thus two-fold: (i) on the one hand they would assert that

¹⁰³ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 5, 10, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Przyluski 1940: 250.

¹⁰⁵ Jayatilleke 1963: 381-382, Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 7-10.

¹⁰⁶ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 12, 14.

non-existent things may be perceived through asserting the existence of representations (*ākāra*); (ii) on the other hand, the appearance of vividness and immediacy of perception is accounted for via the existence of reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*),¹⁰⁷ the structurally in-built continuous function of consciousness to simultaneously observe itself as it observes an object.¹⁰⁸ This differs from introspection (*saṃprajānyan*), the capacity to distinguish and recognise various mental states, that may or may not be involved in any given cognition.¹⁰⁹

As for the former solution, if an object has indeed entirely ceased to exist at the time of its perception, that perception must be realising a non-existent object. This, it is argued, is achieved through the *ākāra* or representation of the ceased object, that the consciousness is generated in the aspect of. It is through the representation of an apple, let us say, having been impressed upon an eye consciousness by the apple (still unnoticed at this time) that a succeeding moment of visual perception grasping apple arises. From the latter an inference by mental consciousness, or strictly speaking memory, of the initial apple is produced: that is, apple casts its aspect, a representation in the eye consciousness arises, perception notices, and finally an inference is drawn.¹¹⁰

As for the Sautrāntikas' positing of reflexive awareness as a solution to the problem of the apparent "real-time" appearance of sense objects, this theory argues that the apparent real-time and direct experience of an object is actually a real-time experience of perception.¹¹¹ A live experience of experience itself and not of an external object, which has actually ceased at this time. It is this live experience of one's personal perception that imbues perception

¹⁰⁷ Westerhoff 2018: 67, 69-70.

¹⁰⁸ Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 159.

¹⁰⁹ See Bhikkhu Anālayo 2020 for a discussion on the interrelatedness of mindfulness (P. *sati*) and introspection (P. *saṃpajañña* S. *saṃprajānyā*, T. *shes bzhin*) in the early discourses.

¹¹⁰ See the Sautrāntika-Dārṣṭāntika master Śrīlāta's explanation translated in Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 154.

¹¹¹ Bhikkhu Dammajoti 2007: 159.

with a sense of liveliness and immediacy.¹¹² The classic example given to illustrate this dual function of consciousness to know outside and itself, is of how a lamp may illuminate outer objects and itself simultaneously. Reflexive awareness is also used to account for memory of the subjective experience itself, as opposed to the mere memory of the object.

As novel as both these two solutions are, they clearly introduce an anti-realist approach to epistemology. One in which, although still accepting the existence of external objects, recognises that our seeming live and direct perceptions of an outer world are, to a degree, misleading. As such, even if we never in reality have live perceptions, we do know a real external world through valid inference.¹¹³ The Sautrāntika's position does not go as far as that of the Yogācāras who utilise these two solutions to take the next step and reject the idea that we have contact with an external world. However, the Sautrāntika arguments do move one anti-realist epistemic step closer to the full blown Yogācāra assertion that all of our perceptions of external objects are falsidical.

The analysis shall now look at the Sautrāntikas move away from the Sarvāstivādin substantialist ontology and thus, it is argued, towards Yogācāra idealism. Bhikkhu Dammajoti has found four interesting reports of the Dārṣṭāntika claim that it is possible to have knowledge of non-existent cognitive objects (*asadālabanam jñānam*), a claim that seems incompatible with the assumption of an utterly independent outer world activating all our cognitions. The first are cognitions of the classic Indian examples for unreal objects, such as a whirling firebrand, a mirage, and an imaginary city of Gandharvas. The second are cognitions of objects that may or may not generate afflictions. The Beautiful Women Example is suggested. Through cognition of her various positive or negative emotions may

¹¹² Bhikkhu Dammajoti 2007:

¹¹³ The Sautrāntika's view was thus described by Mādhavyācāraya in his *Sarvādarśanasamgraha* as *bāhyārthānumeyavāda* (Agrawal 2002: 26) 'the doctrine of the inferability of external objects'. As noted by Bhikkhu Dammajoti 2007: 136.

arise in her observers: respect by her child, greed by the lustful, jealousy by a woman sharing her husband, and compassion by sages who see her beauty as transient and soon to induce pain, and the like. Since such diverse afflictions may arise from such an object, it must be unreal, not able to independently impress an absolute and unique impression on all consciousnesses that may encounter it. The third cognition of a non-existent posited is that of a mental sensation (*vedanā*) that conceptually constructs a total non-existent, such as that conceiving of a person (*pudgala*). These three reports are all found in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.¹¹⁴ The fourth we have already encountered above in Saṃghabhadra's report that in contrast to the Sarvāstivādins the Dārṣṭāntikas contend that object-domains (*viśaya*) and cognitive objects (*ālambana*) do not really exist, since pure objects and impure objects 'cannot be perceived in a determinate manner.'¹¹⁵ In the passage quoted above there was the somewhat terse reference to beings of different realms or homogeneity perceiving such things in utterly distinct ways.¹¹⁶

Leaving aside an analysis of the veracity of such arguments and Saṃghabhadra's astute responses (arguing cognitions always have existent objects),¹¹⁷ what seems plain from these four examples is that the Sautrāntikas were not satisfied with the Sarvāstivādin substantialist ontology. One that demanded ultimately real objects impinge themselves upon consciousness in order for consciousness to function, the impressions in consciousness of entities, it turns out, did not in fact need real entities to be involved at all. The (later-Dārṣṭāntika-)Sautrāntika master Śrīlāta even extended his deconstructionist ontology to consciousness. For him consciousness was also fictitious and unreal as it depended on other

¹¹⁴ *Mahāvibhāṣā* 228b, 288b, 599b, as cited in Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 49 (for the translated passages and relevant commentary see 44-45).

¹¹⁵ See p.32 above.

¹¹⁶ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 45

¹¹⁷ See Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 47-48.

factors to be conscious and thus was not invariably so. That is, since consciousness is only activated under certain conditions it is not intrinsically conscious, discourse on it was therefore not *paramārtha* but *samvṛtidesānā*. For him only the *dhātus* were real.¹¹⁸

Another facet of this shift towards Yogācāra idealism that can be seen in Sautrāntika ideas, is their rejection that it is the individual atomic *dharma*s themselves that produce perception. As we saw Saṃghabhadra argue above: it is the collection of infinitesimal *rūpas* themselves assembled in a certain way that produces perception and that are substantial existents (*dravyasat*), a new substance gained through the aggregation of the atoms is not responsible. The Sautrāntika Śrīlāta rejected this claim, and instead proposed that it is a unified collection (**sāmagrī*, **saṃaghāta*) that collectively is able to produce perception, a new substance that is more than the sum of its parts. One may indeed question how a large group of atoms can produce a perception whereas a single atom cannot, if there is no new substance gained by any of the individual atoms through their aggregation? They could not as individuals so why as a group if there is no change in their individual natures? That is, from their independent state to their mutual-dependent state no additional substance (*ātmātīśaya*) is acquired,¹¹⁹ as the form and nature of the individuals is identical before and after assemblage. Śrīlāta suggests this is similar to the capacity for sight by a group of blind people, either as individuals or as a group they are always incapable of sight.¹²⁰

In brief, the Sautrāntikas, unsatisfied with Sarvāstivāda substantialist ontology and realist epistemology, conceptually distanced themselves from them. In terms of epistemology, to account for perception of non-existent already-ceased-*dharma*s they proposed perception via representations and thus did not accept live and direct perception at all; for them, the

¹¹⁸ Interestingly this is in contrast to Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* where he accepts the *āyatana*s as real, see the translation of this assertion in the **Nyāyānusāra* by Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 23-24.

¹¹⁹ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 147.

¹²⁰ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 142.

impression of live perception was an illusion brought about through the incredible speed at which *dharmas* arise and cease, and through the innate capacity for consciousness to be reflexively aware of itself (a capacity that indeed is live with its percept, that percept just happened to be perception and not an outer world). As for ontology, they proposed many commonly observable cognitions of illusions to illustrate that ultimately real *dharmas* were not invariably necessary for awareness to engage with objects, and that even when an existent composed of minute atomic *dharmas* did produce a perception it was not those ultimately real atoms producing perception but rather a new substance acquired through their conglomeration, that was more than the sum of its parts. Moreover, the assumption that ultimately existent cognitive objects and sense data produced afflictions and uniform cognition in any who observed them, was undermined by the case of the multivarious apprehensions in the Beautiful Women Example, as well as the case of the Example discussed in this thesis, both illustrating the utterly indeterminate manner in which the same object may be conceived and perceived.

There are other so-called Sautrāntika positions that may suggest themselves as also being precursors to full-fledged Yogācāra tenets, for example, their position on permanent seeds of wholesome actions carried by the mental continuum that cannot be destroyed, a position which has clear resemblances with the Buddha nature theory so important for Yogācāra philosophers.¹²¹ However, this discussion has chosen to focus specifically on those positions of which evidence exists from the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra* that “provide a wealth of information on the doctrines of the early Dārṣṭāntika and the Sautrāntika”,¹²² and not solely those found in Vasubandhu's so-called “Sautrāntika” *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. This appeared necessary as our understanding of the Sautrāntika

¹²¹ Westerhoff 2018: 81-82.

¹²² Bhikku Dammajoti 2007: 2.

system has until recently been primarily based on Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya*, given the absence of other complete texts preserving a comprehensive and systematic exegesis on this school of thought for comparative purposes.¹²³ It is even possible that the *Bhāṣya* was written when its author was no longer subscribing to this school's views,¹²⁴ and may have had certain doctrinal agendas in mind, preparing the philosophical groundwork and building a conceptual bridge for Yogācāra and Mahāyāna thought, as argued by Westerhoff.¹²⁵

The analysis has also attempted to show an increasing interest by Ābhidharmikas in relativity and in a less substantialist ontology and realist epistemology, and a related move away from the mere ethical and psychological usages of the Example – thereby outlining a shift in the current of thought (and consequent use of the Example). This shift is a conceptual one: a move in a philosophical direction by certain individuals motivated by similar philosophical and doctrinal concerns, which would eventually lead to the theory of illusionism that became so important for the Mahāyāna generally, and particularly for Yogācāra-style idealism, a subject we shall now turn to.

2.3.1 Idealism: The Example Proves External Objects Cannot Produce Cognition

The Yogācāra's principal idea then, that all adherents and interpreters of it would seemingly accept, is the denial that external objects impinge upon and produce consciousness. This may mean an entirely idealistic rejection of the material world, or a less radical rejection of the notion that the objects we perceive are of a different nature to our cognitions. The former

¹²³ Westerhoff 2018: 82. What does exist of Śrīlāta's work, on several occasions actually differs from Vasubandhu's views in his *Bhāṣya*. See Bhikku Dhammajoti 2007: 21, 24, 26.

¹²⁴ It has been argued that many of the so called Sautrāntika views may have come from Yogācāra sources such as the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (Kritzer 1999, 2003); however, it seems more likely that many of these views actually had early Abhidharma and Sarvāstivāda antecedents and need not have come from Yogācāra, especially at a time when the Buddhist milieu of the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra were the same. See Bhikku Dhammajoti 2007: 2-23.

¹²⁵ Westerhoff 2018: 82-83. Alternatively, for a rationale why Vasubandhu did indeed express his own religious and philosophical commitments in his *Bhāṣya* see Bhikku Dhammajoti 2007: 29.

has come to be regarded as “ontological idealism”: everything without exception is mental (with clear ontological commitment); the latter “epistemological idealism”: everything we have contact with is mental, behind that contact there is nothing that can be said or is even relevant for analysis (with zero ontological commitment).¹²⁶ In the following discussion of several Yogācāras’ use of the Example, it is not always immediately clear if these authors are using the Example to illustrate “ontological idealism” or “epistemological idealism”. We shall for arguments sake, use the terms “mind-only”, “idealism”, and “Yogācāra-style idealism” as catch all terms that cover both of these positions, we shall not attempt to show how any of the passages or arguments surveyed may lean towards “ontological idealism”, or “epistemological idealism”. Such a discussion would require a more in-depth analysis than is possible here, and would lead us too far afield.

Of the many instances of important Yogācāras who employed the Example that will follow, all use it in the general service of idealism as discussed above and to substantiate their doctrine of mind-only that rejects the mind-independent status of cognised objects. Since there are a number of arguments set forth to do this, with some building upon others, the discussion shall be organised around the arguments themselves with reference to the texts that contain them.

i. The *Drastically Divergent Cognitions Argument*

Of the many examples employed by Yogācāra authors to substantiate their claim of mind-only, the Example is just one among many. It is frequently used in an argument that I will refer to as the *drastically divergent cognitions argument*: external objects cannot produce consciousness, because a single object may be perceived in utterly distinct and even

¹²⁶ For arguments establishing the former reading of Yogācāra based on Vasubandhu’s *Vimśikā* see Kellner and Taber 2014, and for the latter see Lusthaus 2002: 4-6ff.

contradictory ways, just as flowing liquid may be perceived as nectar by gods, water by humans, and pus and blood by hungry ghosts.¹²⁷ The *drastically divergent cognitions argument* is a good point of departure in discussing the various arguments for mind-only that the Example is used to exemplify, as many of these elaborate or build upon it. The earliest instance of the Example in this argument appears to be that within Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, in its second chapter called 'Characteristics of What is to be Known'.¹²⁸ In this section, Asaṅga seeks to establish through a protracted discussion involving scripture and reasoning that objects of knowledge are not external to consciousness. The Example appears in one of the scriptures cited but unfortunately the name of the scripture is not stated.¹²⁹ In answer to the question how is one to consider external objects as non-existent since they clearly appear, the passages explain:

As the Bhagavan has said:

If bodhisattvas possess [the following] four *dharmas* they will come to understand that for all cognitions [external] objects (*artha, don*) do not exist. This will be understood through (1) the fact that discordant consciousnesses [may arise in relation

¹²⁷ The earliest usage of the Example to underscore this argument appears to be in the lost *Abhidharmamahāyānasūtra* / *Mahāyānābhidharmasūtra*, considered by Asaṅga to be the primary source for his *Mahāyānasamgraha*. See Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 34. Several of the Chinese translators even considered the *Mahāyānasamgraha* as a section of the *Abhidharmamahāyānasūtra*, as is evident from their colophons. For example, see the translation by Keenan 1992: 119. Although the sūtra is no longer existent in the Tibetan or Chinese canons, various short passages of it can be found in many Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan canonical commentaries. Brunnhölzl has conducted preliminary research into this text and compiled a helpful summary of the various instances that he has found of it in these canons, and the diverse philosophical assertions that are being argued for in its name. See Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 33-60.

¹²⁸ The *Mahāyānasamgraha* exists in a Tibetan translation by Jinamitra, Śilendrabodhi, and Yéshé Dé (8th century) and four different Chinese translations, that by Buddhaśāta (531 CE), Paramārtha (563), Dharmagupta (609), and Xuanzang (648-49). Three complete translations of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* have appeared in modern languages, namely in French, Japanese, and English, respectively, Lamotte (1973), Gadjin M. Nagao (1982, 1987), and Keenan (1992).

¹²⁹ According to Brunnhölzl both K'uei in his *Ch'eng wei shid lun shu chi* (Taishō 1830, 488c9) and Kaba Peltsek in his *gSung rab rin po che'i gtam rgyud dang sha kya'i rabs rgyud* (D 4357, 293b.7-294a.4) consider this passage containing the Example to have been taken from the lost *Abhidharmamahāyānasūtra*. See Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 185, n. 161.

to a single object]. For example, just as a hungry ghost, animal, human, and god in relation to a single entity perceive completely distinct cognitions.¹³⁰

To conclude this section Asaṅga summarises his arguments by quoting several pithy verses, the first of which is a gloss of the Example and its ontological implications:

Since hungry ghosts, animals, humans,

and gods have different minds [i.e. perceptions]

concerning a single entity, each according to the class [of beings to which they belong] (*rigs rigs su*)

it is maintained that [external] objects do not exist.¹³¹

Vasubandhu's commentary, the *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, merely fleshes out Asaṅga's argument and use of the Example.

The passage “Hungry ghosts, animals, and humans, as is fitting for each (*ji ltar 'os 'os su*),” means that what animals see as water, hungry ghosts see it as pus, that seen by humans as impure, pigs and other animals see it as pure. And when humans find certain foods pure, gods find them impure. In this way, one thing is seen differently by different minds, and therefore one should hold that [external] objects do not exist.¹³²

¹³⁰ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 15b: *bcom ldan 'das kyis ji skad du byang chub sems dpa' chos bzhi dang ldan na rnam par rig pa thams cad kyis don med pa khong du chud par 'gyur te/ rnam par shes pa mi mthun pa'i rgyu mtshan nyid shes pas ni dpe (= dper?) na yi dags dang/ dud 'gro dang/ mi dang lha rnams kyis dngos po gcig la rnam par rig pa tha dad pa mthong ba lta bu*. For the remaining three dharmas, and an alternative translation, see Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 184.

¹³¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 16a: *yi dags dud 'gro mi rnams dang/ lha rnams ji ltar rigs rigs su/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyr/ don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/*. The Sanskrit contained in Jinaputra's *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* reads: *pretatiryagmanuṣyāṇāṃ devānāṃ ca yathārhatāḥ / tulyavastumanobhedād arthāniṣpattir iṣyate*, (Tatia 1976: 42). Keenan's (1992: 96) translation from the Chinese reads: ‘Hungry ghosts, animals, humans, all gods—each have their own different ideas about a single object, concluding that the object [they conceptualize] is valid.’ This verse (and the following five verses) according to Brunnhölzl (2018: vol. 1, 36) actually come from the *Abhidharmamahāyānasūtra*. This first verse among the six is often quoted in later Tibetan commentaries, such as Tsong kha pa's *dBu ma dgongs pa rab gsal* (Tsongkhapa 1993: 340.). The same verse, with minor variations, also appears in chapter eight (XIII.20), of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* in the context of establishing the viability of nonconceptual wisdom (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*). See Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 35b.

¹³² Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, D 4050, 180b.3-4: *yid dgas dud 'gro mi rnams dang/ /kha rnams ji ltar 'os 'os su/ /zhes bya ba ste/ dud 'gro rnams kyis chu la/ yi dgas rnams kyis thang du dang/ mi rnams kyis mi gtsang ba dang/ dud 'gro phag la sogs pas gtsang bar mthong ba dang/ mi rnams la zas de dag gtsang ba*

Asvabhāva (c. 6th cent.)¹³³ in his *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana* further elaborates on the *drastically divergent cognitions* argument when commenting on the Example, by arguing that specific objects cause their corresponding specific and exclusive perception (and thus not a collection of diverse perceptions).¹³⁴ This seems to be based on the Abhidharma notion that every entity possesses its own unique *svabhāva*, and that it is this very *svabhāva* that produces specific perceptions of it.¹³⁵ If this is the case it is quite impossible for a single entity (*bhāva*) to produce two utterly distinct perceptions, because it is impossible for an existent to possess two different *svābhavas*. To illustrate this very point the Example is then used:

The passage “hungry ghosts, animals, and humans, etc.” refers to how a single river may be seen by hungry ghosts, due to the ripening of their own karma, as being filled with pus and so forth. That very same [river] seen by fish and other animals is considered by them a drink and a dwelling place. Humans perceive it as sweet, pure, and cool water, and they bathe in it, drink it, and enter it. But the gods who have entered the meditative absorption of the sphere of infinite space,¹³⁶ see it as space, because they have shattered the perception of matter. It is unsuitable that many mutually contradictory consciousnesses arise from a single [external] entity (*bhāva, dngos po*).¹³⁷

la/ lha rnam la de dag mi gtsang ba de ltar byas nas/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad par mthong bas na don rnam grub pa med par 'dod par bya'o/, (also translated in Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 374).

¹³³ This is Lindtner’s date, however, Kurihara has dated him to after Dharmakīrti and the middle of the 7th century on the basis of Asvabhāva’s use in his *Ālokamālāṭīkāhrdānandajanaṇī* of two distinctive Dharmakīrtian doctrines. See Kurihara 1989: 1015.

¹³⁴ See Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. II, 663.

¹³⁵ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2007: 43. Although in Yogācāra it is the *nimitta* (in this context the internal image) that produces perception and not a specific external object (and its *svabhāva*) that produce a corresponding perception. See Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. II, 663, n. 304. However, such causation need not imply a temporal sequence as certain Yogācāras including Asaṅga accept simultaneous causation, see Bhikku Dammajoti 2009: 159-160.

¹³⁶ One of the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu, gzugs med khams*).

¹³⁷ Asvabhāva, *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana*, D 4051, 225a.5-7: *yi dgas dang/ dung 'gro dang mi zhes bya ba la sogs pa ni chu klung gang la yi dgas rnam kyi rang gi las kyi rnam par smin pa'i dbang gis rnag la sogs pas gang bar mthong ba de nyid la dud 'gro nya la sogs pas btung ba dang gnas yin pa'i blos gnas par byed do/ /mi rnam ni dngar ba dang dad ba dang bsil ba'i chur rtog cing khru byed do/ /'thung ngo/ /'jug go/ /nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched la snyoms par 'jug pa'i lha rnam kyi ni nam mkhar mthong ste/ gzugs kyi 'du shes rnam par bshig pa'i phyir ro/ /dngos po gcig la phan tshun mi mthun pa'i rnam par shes pa du ma 'byung ba de ni mi rung ba*, (also translated in Brunnhölzl 2018 vol. 2, 663).

To summarise Asvabhāva's comments on the second occurrence of the Example in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*'s eighth chapter (XIII.20): external objects cannot produce cognition because a specific entity (and its *svabhāva*) produces only a specific corresponding perception and not contradictory and discordant perceptions. That is, there is an exact one to one match between object-*svabhāva* and its representation in cognition, as such it is not sensible to argue there is one unified external entity behind the water-*svabhāva* and the blood-*svabhāva* that produces different cognitions of these different objects.

Jinaputra's commentary (the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*)¹³⁸ on Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, an important treatise on Mahāyāna Abhidharma, also uses the Example to negate external objects or referents.¹³⁹ However, Jinaputra adds little to the *drastically divergent cognitions argument* and this passage shall therefore not be discussed in more detail.¹⁴⁰

ii. The Infeasibility of Contradictory Functions Argument

Asvabhāva in his *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana* further argues that external objects do not exist as it is unfeasible for a single entity to perform such distinct functions as being revolting pus, and sweet water, and having the character of mere space. I shall call this the *infeasibility of contradictory functions argument*. Although this is presented as a distinct argument here, it may be seen as a natural continuation of the *drastically divergent*

¹³⁸ However, there is some debate over the authorship of this text. In the Tibetan Tengyur (*bsTan 'gyur*) it is ascribed to one Jinaputra (rGyal ba'i sras); in contrast, Pradan (1950: 19) considers it to be by Sthiramati since almost identical passages from it are also found in the *Trīṃśikāvijñaptibhāṣya* that is also attributed to Sthiramati. Nance (2012: 240 n.7) disagrees with this; whereas, for Sakuma (2020: 48) it is best to consider the text as a compilation made by Sthiramati.

¹³⁹ Both Asaṅga and Jinaputra seem to consider *artha* and *ālambana* as coreferential in this context at least. This can be seen in the former's *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the latter's *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* where both author's quote the same 6 verses from the *Abhidharmamahāyānasūtra* mentioned above in fn.131.

¹⁴⁰ Jinaputra, *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*, D 4053: 30b.

cognitions argument as for Ābhīdharmikas an object's *svabhāva* and its *kāritra* or function are very closely related and, in some cases, perhaps even being the same.¹⁴¹

How could that very same river come to be filled with pus, urine, and excrement, be guarded by people holding staffs and swords, and also be fragrant and cool water, a dwelling place, a drink, and so forth; how could it also be of the nature of space? External objects do not exist. Yet, through imagination they can appear.¹⁴²

That is, external objects do not exist because it is unfeasible for a single entity to perform functions or possess qualities that are mutually exclusive.

iii. The *Seeing the Familiar Argument*

The next argument may be seen as an extension of *the drastically divergent cognitions argument*, in that it recognises the drastically different cognitions of a single referent that may occur, but builds upon the argument by illustrating how this happens. I shall refer to it as the *seeing the familiar argument*. Jñānagarbha's¹⁴³ (c. 8th century) *Āryasaṃdhinirmocanasūtre Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, which elaborates upon the 'Questions of Maitreya Chapter' of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, uses the Example to establish mind-only in the following way:

Although various cognitions are imagined to be [external] through the influence of one's inclinations (*mos pa*) towards certain familiar (*mtshungs*) objects, the nature of mind is definitely that of a reflection (*gzugs brnyan*) that appears [as though it were external].¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ See Westerhoff 2018: 70-71.

¹⁴² Asvabhāva, *Mahāyānasamgrahopaniśandhana*, D 4051, 225a.7-225b.1: *chu klung de nyid rnag dang gcin dang phyi sa sa gang ba dang/ dbyug pa dang ral gri thogs pa'i mis bsrungs pa yin pa dri zhim pa dang bsil ba'i chu dang/ gnas dang/ btung ba la sogs pa'i bya ba'i 'os dang nam mkha'i bdag nyid du ji ltar 'gyur te/ phyi rol gyi don med do/ /brtags pas der snang bar ni rung*, (also translated in Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. II, 663).

¹⁴³ For Tāranātha, this master was born in Oḍiśā and worked in eastern India, belonging to the lineage of Bhavya and Śāntarakṣita (Chattopadhyaya 1970: 252-3 and 260). He is generally classified as a Svātantrika-Mādhyamika in Tibetan literature, although there appears to be disagreements whether or not he is a Yogācāra-Svātantrika, or a Sautrāntika-Svātantrika (see Powers 1992: 51-63). There is no currently known Sanskrit edition of his commentary to the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, or the sūtra itself.

¹⁴⁴ Jñānagarbha, *Āryasaṃdhinirmocanasūtre Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, D 4033, 322a.7-322b.1: *don mtshungs pa la mos pa'i dbang gis rnam par rig pa tha dad par dmigs pa kyang sems nyid gzugs brnyan*

That is, the nature of mind manifests as the array of images that are mistakenly taken to be real external objects. This occurs through the mind taking the various cognitions (*rnam par rig pa*) flowing through consciousness as this and that type of external object in accordance with what we expect and are deeply habituated to seeing, ordering the world according to what makes sense to it, just as in a dream one may see an image that resembles a familiar person and take such an image to be the actual person.¹⁴⁵ However, this interpretation doesn't imply that every object we newly perceive is something we are expecting or even something we have experienced before in living memory. Rather, the rationale supports the feasibility of mind-only through providing a coherent underlying mechanism for the apparent experience of external objects. The perception of external entities is aligned with our psychological constitution and the types of innate mental tendencies (*vāsanā*) we are inclined to encounter, and that ripen as the particular objects that are familiar and concordant (*mtshungs*) with our realm. This argument bears similarities to what modern cognitive scientists call the “cognitive penetrability of perception”:

The hypothesis that perception is cognitively penetrable holds that cognitive states such as beliefs, desires, and possibly other states can causally influence perceptual processing in such a way that they end up determining subjects' perceptual contents or experiences.¹⁴⁶

This contentious empirical position maintains that perceptual content is at least partially influenced by preexisting or simultaneously existing psychological factors, such as one's beliefs and the expectations that flow from them. In empirical experiments conducted by Bruner and Postman in the nineteen fifties, participants anticipating specific categories of objects (playing cards) were shown them for very brief periods. When they were presented

du snang bar nges pa yin. The following explanation is based on Powers' explanation to his own translation (Powers 1992: 77, fn.77).

¹⁴⁵ Powers 1992: 77, fn. 113.

¹⁴⁶ Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos 2015: 1. See this volume for a collection of essays by contemporary cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind, both challenging and supporting this theory.

with cards featuring unexpected colour schemes, such as a six of spades printed in red rather than the standard black, the subjects frequently reported seeing either the conventionally expected colours or some intermediate blend between the expected colour and the actual one. Bruner and Postman interpreted these misreports as evidence that pre-existing expectations shape our processing of stimuli.¹⁴⁷ We shall return to this subject in the conclusion to this chapter.

To bolster Jñānagarbha's non-empirical and idealistic account he then uses the Example thus:

For example, regarding a single phenomenon like a river and so on: animals see it as a dwelling place; hungry ghosts see it as pus and so forth; humans see it as water. Similarly, gods see the earth as being of the nature of *vaidūrya*¹⁴⁸ (*bai DU r+ya*). Just as form and its reflection are not different [in essence] yet appear different, so too [are these perceptions], because they necessarily appear simultaneously.¹⁴⁹

Hence, the *seeing the familiar argument* may be rephrased as: external objects do not produce cognition. Their appearances are just projections of the mind, since such objects appear through the influence of cognitive tendencies and expectations. Just as a single referent, appears to beings of the six realms in correspondence with their psychological makeup, and their previous mental and physical actions.

¹⁴⁷ Mole 2015: 2020. Bruner's and Postman's conclusion was 'The perceptual effect of a stimulus is necessarily dependent upon the set or expectancy of the organism. (Bruner and Postman 1949: 209)', cited in Mole 2015: 2020.

¹⁴⁸ A precious stone that may be lapis lazuli, beryl, cat's eye, chrysoberyl, aquamarine or even sapphire. See Dan Martin's entry in the Rangjung Yeshe Tibetan-English Dictionary 3.0 (2003), and <https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vaidurya>

¹⁴⁹ Jñānagarbha, *Āryasamdhinirmocanasūtre Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, D 4033, 322b.1-2: *dper na chu klung la sogs pa'i dngos po gcig la/ dud 'gro rnam kyis ni gnas kyi rnam par mthong/ yi dgas rnam kyis ni rnag la sogs pa'i rnam par mthong/ mi rnam kyis ni chu'i rnam par mthong ba lta bu dang/ lha rnam kyis sa gzhi bai DU R+Ya'i rang bzhin du mthong ba lta bu'o/ de bzhin du zhes bya ba la sogs pas ni ji ltar gzugs dang gzugs brnyan gnyis tha dad pa med kyang tha dad par snang ba bzhin du/ nges par cig car snang ba'i phyi/* (also translated in Powers 1992: 77).

Vasubandhu's *Vimśikākārikā*¹⁵⁰ and *Vṛtti* also seems to use the *seeing the familiar argument*, and a variant of the Example to illustrate it. The general discussion is as follows: to resolve the understandable objection that if there are no external objects that impinge upon and effect the consciousnesses that are representing these objects, such as colour and the like, why do such objects appear at specific times and places and not at others, or by extension all of the time? For the objector it seems plausible for such objects to occur all the time with no specific determinacy as to when they arise because they occur with no corresponding external cause, and thus haphazardly. This shall be referred to as the *spatial-temporal objection*. Moreover, the objector argues, why is it the case that such uniform perceptions occur for a group observing a single object and not just for a single observer, if there is truly no external object causing their perceptions? For the objector, if external objects do not exist, collective experiences should not be possible. Just like the appearance of falling hair for one with an eye disorder is unique to the afflicted person and cannot be experienced by a group.¹⁵¹ This shall be referred to as the *intersubjective-agreement objection*.

To answer the *spatial-temporal objection*, Vasubandhu says:

The determinacy or specificity (*niyama*) of place, etc., is proven, just as it is in a dream.¹⁵²

That is, just as in dreams specific experiences of seemingly external objects occur only in certain periods of a dream and not in others, and in certain locations of the dream

¹⁵⁰ The *Vimśikā* was translated into Tibetan by Jinamitra, Śīlendrabodhi, and Yéshé Dé, during the early dissemination of the teachings in Tibet. It was translated into Chinese twice and exists in numerous translations in western languages. In English see Anacker (1984), Kochumuttom (1989), Sharma (1993), and Silk (2016), in French La Vallée Poussin (1912) and Lévi (1925), and in German Kitayama (1934).

¹⁵¹ Silk 2016: 33. This objector also questions how karma may function in such a situation. However, the Example is not used to answer this doubt. Vasubandhu prefers instead the example of a dream to illustrate how karma can function even in the absence of external objects, as in the case of a dream experience inducing ejaculation in the dreamer, see Silk 2016: 7 & 43.

¹⁵² Vasubandhu, *Vimśatikākārikā* 3: *deśādiniyamaḥ siddhaḥ svapnavat*. (Sanskrit and an alternative translation in Silk 2016: 6).

environment and not in others, it is the same during waking life.¹⁵³ The dream, here, is thus a counterexample proving there is spatial-temporal determinacy even in illusory cognitions that are not stimulated by an external world.

In response to the *intersubjective-agreement objection*, Vasubandhu says:

Moreover, this is not restricted to an individual continuum [of only a single perceiver], for it is just like how [a group] of hungry ghosts can [share] the perception of a river as pus and the like.¹⁵⁴

That is, a group of beings may have a more or less uniform perception of an object even without their perceptions corresponding to a real external object, because this occurs due to the ripening of shared karma, as in the uniform perception of a river of pus by a group of hungry ghosts.¹⁵⁵ There is no mention of the gods or humans usually found in the Example, but their inclusion would have little effect on the overall argument, as the main point being driven home is that beings may have unrestricted (*aniyata*) or shared perceptions of their environments due to the ripening of common karma. Although it may be the case that a group of hungry ghosts all see the river as full of pus this is due to the ripening of their shared karma, there are other groups of hungry ghosts who see the river as full of other substances such as vomit, or guarded by beings wilding weapons.¹⁵⁶

These two responses to the *spatial-temporal objection* and the *intersubjective-agreement objection* may well bolster the “mind-only” doctrine through dealing with these two practical issues with the theory; however, do Vasubandhu’s responses really use the *seeing the familiar argument* to do this? His use of this argument for the latter objection is clear, as he

¹⁵³ See Siderits’s translation and commentary to the *Viṃśatikārikā* (2007: 153-155).

¹⁵⁴ Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikārikā* 3: *pretavatpunaḥ santānāniyamaḥ sarvvaiḥ pūyanadyādidarśane*// (Sanskrit and an alternative translation in Silk 2016: 6).

¹⁵⁵ Siderits: 2007: 153.

¹⁵⁶ This is Vinītadeva’s reading. See Vinītadeva, *Prakarāṇa viṃśatikāṭīkā*, D 4065: 177ab.4-177a.5.

mentions the ripening of shared karma in his response to the *intersubjective-agreement objection*. As Siderits's comments on this section of the *Vimśikā* show:

Karmic causal laws specify the conditions under which a seed will ripen and bear fruit. The fruit of a karmic seed is an impression – a mental image that presents itself as an external object. Since the same karmic causal laws govern all mental streams, similar karma will lead to similar sensory experiences.¹⁵⁷

However, in response to the *spatial-temporal objection* it is less apparent if *the seeing the familiar argument* is being used. For Vasubandhu there is spatial-temporal determinacy of cognised objects, despite external objects not existing, since this occurs in ordinary life just as it occurs in dreams, where the absence of real external objects is not in question. The underlying assumption of this argument is that it is the ripening of karma that causes us to perceive the objects that we do, and as such it is the same mechanism that determines their unique spatial and temporal locations. As Siderits continues:

The uniformity of the karmic causal laws will likewise account for spatio-temporal determinacy: the seed that causes the seeing of a rose image will only ripen after certain other experiences, such as the ones we interpret as 'walking into the garden' experiences.¹⁵⁸

Likewise, the seeing of a friend at a certain place and moment in a dream is also due to the ripening of unique karmic seeds charged with the potential to produce perceptions of uniquely specific objects with temporal and spatial determinacy. To summarise Vasubandhu's reply to these two objections with the *seeing the familiar argument*: external objects do not produce cognitions and yet there are cognitions of objects with spatial-temporal determinacy, and the perception of objects via intersubjective cognitive agreement, because this occurs due to the ripening of individuals' unique karma, as in dreams, and collective karma, as in the group of hungry ghosts seeing a river of pus, respectively.

¹⁵⁷ Siderits: 2007: 156.

¹⁵⁸ Siderits 2007: 156.

Vinītadeva's *Prakaraṇaviṃśatikā*¹⁵⁹ commentary on this section of *Viṃśikā* adds little beyond to clarify Vasubandhu's *seeing the familiar argument* and use of the Example. Likewise, Kambala's *Ālokamālaprakaraṇanāma*,¹⁶⁰ and Asvabhāva's *Ālokamālāṭīkā-hṛdānandajanānīnāma*¹⁶¹ and Xuanzang's *Vijñāpimātratāsiddhiśāstra* (*Ch. Cheng weishi lun*),¹⁶² all use the Example in a similar way to the *seeing the familiar argument*, but in less articulate fashion than Asvabhāva and Vasubandhu. They merely add that it is the karma of sentient beings that causes them to perceive such distinct objects. To summarise their arguments: external objects do not exist or produce cognition, since a single river is perceived in vastly distinct ways due to karma.

In summary, all the Yogācāra authors who penned the texts discussed in this section perceive the Example as demonstrating that no external world presents itself and produces our perceptions – an idealistic reading. Whether it involves an ontological commitment to rejecting the external world or merely a disavowal of the idea that such a world is discernible and capable of influencing our cognitions, what is evident for our discussion is that they all regard the Example as signifying more than just a moralistic teaching. It does not merely suggest that our karma can manifest in cognitive tendencies and a range of pleasant or unpleasant experiences. Rather, it underscores a fundamental point about our perception: the external world, whether or not it exists, simply cannot logically be the source of the vastly different experiences we have of what is presumed to be the same object. For example, if one were to enter a room with ten television screens disguised as mirrors, all facing and surrounding a banana, yet a different fruit appeared in each “mirror”, one would logically

¹⁵⁹ Translated into Tibetan by Jinamitra, Śīlendrabodhi, Dānaśīla, and Yéshé Dé. The first half of the text is translated into English and is the subject of Hillis's MA dissertation (1993). For the section of the commentary concerning the Example see Vinītadeva, *Prakaraṇa viṃśatikāṭīkā*, D 4065: 176b.4-177a.7. I have been unable to find a Sanskrit edition of this text.

¹⁶⁰ Lindtner 2003: 47.

¹⁶¹ Asvabhāva, *Ālokamālāṭīkāhṛdānandajanānī*, D 3896: 82b7-83a1.

¹⁶² Cook 1999: 234-235.

deduce that the banana itself was not responsible for the images appearing in the supposed mirrors. There must be another cause at play, and the nature of the apparent mirror would have to be re-evaluated, just so, with the television-like nature of sentient perception.

None of these authors, however, see the Example as potentially leading to rampant relativism (along the lines that any assertion or perception is equally accurate), and as thus undermining their position. One may ask them if there is no external world capable of producing cognition, by means of what can we judge if the perceptions of the hungry ghost who sees pus and the human who sees water are more or less veridical? If we dissolve any common world, do we not also dissolve any common standard of warrant by means of which we can judge the accuracy of our own perceptions, a means by which we can judge if our perception of a lake as a lake is accurate, and yet that of a mirage as a lake is not. These questions are intriguingly left unanswered. And yet, our authors all implicitly subscribe to one such common standard, a means by which, and in light of, all the beings in the Example are considered deluded. It is the standard of *yukti* and *āgama*, two authorities that serve as reference points allowing these authors to establish their positions on perception and what exists and does not. It is based on a tacit appeal to these common standards that they have attempted to show the irrationality of a single object being represented in directly contradictory ways in perception. Is this contradictory? Can one reject a common world and not reject a common system of logic and authority?¹⁶³ For these authors, it would appear that one can. The Madhyamaka critics of Yogācāra do not explicitly mention this issue, perhaps because they see the Yogācāras as only refuting physical stimuli and not an

¹⁶³ Gendün Chöpel (1903–1951), the Tibetan polymath and iconoclast, in his own brief discussion of the Example challenges the value of applying Dharmakīrtian forms of reasoning to the realms beyond our own. See chapter 6, fn. 667, and Lopez 2006: 111, and 212.

immaterial shared world. Instead, the Mādhyamikas find fault with other assumptions within the Yogācāra interpretation of the Example.

2.4.1 Emptiness: the Example for Undermining *Svabhāva*

Let us now turn then to Madhyamaka critiques of the Yogācāra take on the Example. Our first Mādhyamika, Candrakīrti (c. 7th cent.) presents his Yogācāra opponents as subscribing to the view that all of the beings' cognitions in the Example possess *svabhāva*, are intrinsically existent. Whether or not the Yogācāra authors of the texts discussed in the previous section, held such a view is very difficult to say; and yet, based on Candrakīrti's comments, we can presume it was a common enough opinion among those ascribing to Yogācāra during his time. A second critique is drawn out by Candrakīrti's commentator Jayānanda. This is apparently a consequence of the Yogācāra interpretation of the Example that holds two contradictory notions: (i) that all of the cognitions in the Example possess *svabhāva*, and (ii) that the beings' cognitions are deceived, in that they perceive a nonexistent external world. These two propositions are contradictory, for, if one of the cognitions is intrinsically perceiving an object, anyone else who looks at that object or the location should also see that object in the same way, their cognitions would thus not be deceived. Let us unpack these two points one by one.

2.4.2 Candrakīrti's and Jayānanda's Interpretation of the Example: The Hungry Ghost's Consciousness is not Intrinsically Existent, nor is it Veridical

i. The *Madhyamakāvātāra*

Candrakīrti discusses the Yogācāra interpretation of the Example in his philosophical masterpiece the *Madhyamakāvātāra* and its *bhāṣya*.¹⁶⁴ The Example appears in the context of Candrakīrti's refutation of the Yogācāra position on external objects and *cittamātra*.

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus

Is like [a visual consciousness] whose organ is afflicted with a

disorder. [VI.71ab]¹⁶⁵

In line with the explanation given above “Whatever hairs are seen through the power of a visual disorder” [6.54b] one should know also other types [of cognitions] to be similar to that [mistaken visual consciousness]. One could elaborate [upon this].¹⁶⁶

The allusion to a visual consciousness afflicted with a disorder of the eye (*tamira, rab rib*)¹⁶⁷ and its perception of floaters or “falling hair”, is an example the Yogācāras use to illustrate that it is quite possible to have a consciousness representing an object that is not a different entity from it, or external. This example is called the Falling Hair Example throughout this thesis. Candrakīrti refuted the Yogācāra interpretation of this example through showing that if an intrinsically existent disease-afflicted visual consciousness were to exist and perceive falling hair, then being an intrinsic and independent entity, not depending on its visual faculty being impaired by disease, anyone who looks at the same place should also see falling hairs there. Why? Because the perception and its object have *svabhāva*, they are

¹⁶⁴ The *Madhyamakāvātāra* was translated into Tibetan twice, an earlier version by Naktso Lotsaba Tsültrim Gyelwa (1011-1064) the famous student of Atiśa who invited him to Tibet, and a later more influential and revised version by Tilakakalaśa and Patsap Lotsaba Nyima Drak (b.1055). A Sanskrit manuscript of the root verses and their *Bhāṣya* was discovered in Tibet, and a diplomatic edition of the first five chapters of this Sanskrit manuscript has recently been published, see Lasic et al. 2022. The remaining chapters are still forthcoming.

¹⁶⁵ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātāra* D 3861, 207b.3: *rab rib dang ldan dbang po can mtshungs pa/ chu 'bab klung la yi dgas rnaṅ blo yang*. Sanskrit in Li 2015, 13: *toyaṃ vahantyām api pūyabuddhiḥ pretasya nadyām timirākṣatulyā | saṃkṣepatas tv artham amuṃ paraihi jñeyaṃ yathā nāsty api dhīs tatheti ||*

¹⁶⁶ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, D 3862, 271b: *rab rib mthu las skra rnamṅ gang mthong ba/ zhes gang bshad pa de dang mtshungs pa de lta bu'i rigs can gzhan yang rig par bya ste spros chog go*

¹⁶⁷ For more details on *tamira*, useful secondary sources, the various diseases that it may refer to, and how one can understand it in light of modern medicine, see Yakherds 2021: 48, fn. 28.

intrinsically existent and independent. Candrakīrti would thus consider the visual cognition in the Falling Hair Example, and the preta's visual consciousness in the Example, as similar examples of cognitions with objects.

If, for someone with an eye disorder there arises a cognition whose content is that of falling hair, without falling hair [really] being there; then there would also exist an awareness of falling hair like that in someone without an eye disorder who directs their eyes to wherever the one with an eye disorder has seen falling hair, since they are alike in not having an object. Therefore, it is not suitable to say, “there arises a cognition without an object.”¹⁶⁸

As Forman puts it: for Candrakīrti, every epistemic event always has an existent percept, and not merely intentional content.¹⁶⁹ What kind of existent object Candrakīrti is referring to here is not explicitly stated. However, it cannot be functional falling hair, nor can it simply be the nature of or an appearance to consciousness, as the entire discussion aims to undermine the Yogācāra account of these examples as negating external objects. We may thus presume that Candrakīrti is referring to the nominal reference of hallucinatory experiences, which are based on existent, non-conscious external factors—such as material defects and secretions in the eye organ, sufficient light in the environment, or however such factors may have been conceived in his time.

¹⁶⁸ Candrakīrti, 2015: VI.55-56, and *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, D 3862, 266a: *gal te rab rib can la skra shad dag med par skra shad kyi rnam pa can gyi shes pa skye na yul gang du rab rib can gyis skra shad dag mthong ba der mig gtad pa'i rab rib med pa la yang de dang 'dra bar skra shad kyi blo yod par 'gyur te/ yul med par mtshungs pa'i phyir ro/ /de'i phyir yul med par rnam par shes pa skye'o zhes bya ba de ni mi rigs so*

¹⁶⁹ Forman 2020: 917. In this context, ‘percept’ refers to an *ālambana*. However, in Western philosophy and psychology, ‘percept’ typically denotes the mental representation or image that constitutes the content of a cognitive episode, as opposed to a physical stimulus (see, Colman, A. (2015). percept. In *A Dictionary of Psychology*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 2 Jun. 2025, from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199657681.001.0001/acref-9780199657681-e-6164>). This conceptual difference suggests that ‘percept’ may not be the most suitable translation for *ālambana*, which refers to the observed object that serves as the objective support for the production of a cognition. This support can encompass both internal *ākāras* and external matter. Consequently, ‘objective support’ may be a more appropriate translation, as it accounts for both internal and external referents.

In response to the Yogācāra explanation of the Example, then, Candrakīrti simply refers his opponent to his previous response to their position on the Falling Hair Example. To reconstruct his argument: if a hungry ghost's intrinsically existent awareness of a river as pus is feasible, all of the other beings who look at that river should have uniform perceptions of pus since one can have such a cognition without relying on karma, a hungry ghost's sense power, or anything at all. Since they do not all have uniform perceptions, as the Example itself seeks to prove, consciousness cannot exist intrinsically.

As such, for Candrakīrti the perceivers in the Example have species specific existent referents. Yet, none of them can see each other's objects, just like in the Falling Hair Example. The pus, water, and nectar are the exclusive referents of their own species' perceivers. Although Candrakīrti stresses the existence of these different objects, one may wonder if the cognitions in the Example are as deceived as the visual consciousness in the Falling Hair Example, or is there an explicit difference between these two examples and the cognitions they illustrate. In chapter 4 and 5 we will see how Tsongkhapa and his followers favour the latter reading, and their Sakyapa opponents the former.

ii. Jayānanda's *Madhyamakāvatāraṭīkā*

Jayānanda's (12th cent.)¹⁷⁰ commentary to this discussion in his *Madhyamakāvatāraṭīkā* elaborates by explicitly introducing the important notion of mistaken cognitions (*'khrul pa'i shes pa*) into the argument. By emphasising the deluded nature of the beings' cognitions in

¹⁷⁰ Jayānanda (*rGyal ba mtha' med*) was a Kashmiri paṇḍit who served as a *Guoshi*, a national preceptor, among other important roles, at the Tangut court. He travelled to Tibet in the twelfth century, at which time it seems he encountered and debated with Chapa Chökyi Senggé (1106–69), the famous scholar of the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and opponent of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka system, in Sangpu Neutok (*gSang phu ne'u thog*) monastery. Publicly failing the debate, he was apparently unable to uphold Candrakīrti's system. (Van de Kuijp 1993: 188, 193.). His commentary to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* is the only known Indian commentary. It is used extensively by Tsongkhapa in his own commentary to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (see Jinpa 2021), and also seems to have had a big influence on Gorampa, see Thakchoe 2007: 50, 53-54, 59, 64. It was translated into Tibetan by Jayānanda himself and by Kūnga Drak in Tangut (Van de Kuijp 1993: 190). No Sanskrit edition has been, thus far, found.

the Example, he undermines an implicit ascription of accuracy to the beings' cognitions, by Yogācāra.

In terms of the meaning of this [*Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.71ab], since all deceptive cognitions (*'khrul pa'i shes pa*) do not possess [real] objects, all three components [the object, sense power, and consciousness] are also not produced [in reality]. Through the power of being ascertained by a deceptive cognition, all three also [seem] to be real (*bden pa*). But, through depending on nondeceptive cognitions all three are [understood] to not be real, so it is said. As for 'one could elaborate [upon this]', one could elaborate by refuting the premise that there exists cognition without an object.¹⁷¹

Jayānanda clarifies that the ontological status of the sense powers, their objects, and the consciousnesses of the beings in the Example are all unreal or not intrinsically existent, despite their appearance to the contrary. Furthermore, like the cognitions of those seeing falling hair, these are perceptions of non-existent things—the falling hair is not real, nor is the pus and blood. It is unlikely that Jayānanda interprets Candrakīrti as claiming they have no object whatsoever, as this would directly contradict Candrakīrti's earlier statements regarding the Falling Hair Example that all cognitions have objects, as discussed above. Rather, Jayānanda's argument appears to be this: just as the Yogācāras accept that both the perceiver of falling hairs and the perceiver of pus are deceived, he concurs that these beings' cognitions are indeed mistaken since the hair, pus, etc., are not real. However, since the Yogācāras maintain the *svabhāva* of the object, sense power, and consciousness, this logically entails that the hair and pus should be perceivable by anyone looking where these seemingly exist. In that case, these perceptions would necessarily be correct and nondeceptive, for there would be collective agreement and warrant of them—yet this

¹⁷¹ *Madhyamakāvātārāṭīkā*, D3870, 190a-b: 'di'i don ni 'khrul pa'i shes pa thams cad la yul med pas gsum char yang ma skyes pa yin la/ 'khrul pa'i shes pas nges pa'i dbang du byas nas ni gsum char yang bden pa yin la/ 'khrul pa med pa'i shes pa la ltos nas ni gsum char yang bden pa ma yin no zhes pa'o/ /spros pas chog go zhes bya ba ni yul med pa'i shes pa yod pa nyid du bsgrub pa dang de 'gegs par byed pa'i spros pas chog go zhes bya ba'o/

contradicts the Yogācāras' own position on the Example that argues the beings' perceivers do not cohere with each other. By affirming the deceptive nature of these cognitions, Jayānanda thus exposes an internal contradiction in claiming they are both deluded and possess *svabhāva*. Consequently, these two examples fail to substantiate the Yogācāras' central thesis that external objects do not exist.

2.4.3 The *Laṅkāvatāra* and Jñānavajra's Interpretation: The River Is Not Real But It Is Not Non-Existent

The next most relevant text for our discussion and that appears to use the Example in support of the doctrine of emptiness is the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (c. 4th cent),¹⁷² a sūtra usually associated with Cittamātra views, and its interpretation by authors of the Madhyamaka school. This important and highly influential Mahāyānasūtra is noteworthy for its explicit condemnation of meat eating and is considered by many to be a principal source for the Chan and Zen traditions. The discourse itself is framed as a discussion between the Buddha and his bodhisattva disciple Mahāmati. It elaborates upon three of the main Yogācāra doctrines, the *ālayavijñāna*, *tathāgatagarbha*, and *cittamātra*. This sūtra does not appear in any of the works of the prominent Yogācāras Asaṅga or Vasubandhu (4th/5th cent). This is, however, perhaps not all that surprising given the close historical proximity of these masters and the sūtra, and the likely time it would take for newly circulated texts to be widely disseminated. Candrakīrti, does not see it as endorsing the mind-only doctrine, and quotes

¹⁷² The text is extant in a Sanskrit edition first published by the renowned Tibetologist Sarat Chandra Das, together with Vidyabhusana (1900). A Sanskrit manuscript from Nepal was also published by L. Chandra (1977). There are also editions by Nanjio (1923) and Vaidya (1963). Moreover, Tokiwa (2003) has translated Guṇabhadra's Chinese translation back into Sanskrit. In Chinese there are three different translations: by Guṇabhadra translated in 443, Bodhiruci in 513, and Śikṣānanda in 700. There is a Tibetan translation by Gö Chödrup, made c. 840 CE that is a translation of Guṇabhadra's Chinese translation (See Pine 2012: Preface). It has been translated into English in its entirety by Suzuki (1932) based on the Sanskrit edition prepared by Nanjio and the Chinese versions, and by Tokiwa (2003).

the sūtra extensively in his *Madhyamakāvātara*, re-interpreting core “Yogācāra” passages with a Madhyamaka spin.¹⁷³

The Example appears in the sūtra’s first chapter, and its commentary the *Tathāgatahrdayālamkāra* by Jñānavajra (c. 10th or 11th cent)¹⁷⁴. To sufficiently frame the discussion, we shall examine excerpts from the beginning of the discussion in which the Example is contained. We have opted to primarily use the Tibetan translations of both of these texts and have inserted the most relevant sections of Jñānavajra’s commentary below the passage of the sūtra that it comments upon. This approach hopes to clarify with greater precision how the two enigmatic texts relate to each other. In the sections we shall examine, both texts clarify how the appearances for each of the beings in the Example are *bhrānti, nor pa*, that is “mistaken”. Such objects are not existent ultimately, but they are also not utterly non-existent. The discussion is found within a discussion between the Buddha and Mahāmāti concerning words (*śabda, sgra*). After the Buddha’s pronouncement that words are not representational of objects, for there are words with no corresponding object, such as a tortoise’s hair, and knowledge of objects with no need for words,¹⁷⁵ Mahāmāti then asks why the Buddha has described words as permanent.

¹⁷³ See the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* passages quoted by Candrakīrti in his *Bhāṣya* on *Madhyamakāvātāra*, VI: 3, 42, 68, 76, 85, 93.

¹⁷⁴ Kim holds that this text is written from the point of view of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka system, according to the Tibetan way of designating this system (Kim 2002: 72). It is no longer extant in Sanskrit, the Tibetan translation exists but no translator is mentioned in the colophon. This text has received little attention from modern scholarship, the exception being the doctoral dissertation of Kim (2002) that analyses the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* through two of its Indian commentaries, that by Jñānaśrībhadrā (c.10th cent) and this one by Jñānavajra (c. 10th or 11th cent). Although the *Tathāgatahrdayālamkāra* is ascribed to a Jñānavajra (Ye she rdo rje) in the Tibetan Tengyur, unfortunately there seem to be three authors with this name from whom several tantric lineages pass through that came to spread in Tibet. Tāranātha says they came from Nepal, Oddiyana, and China, the latter being the author of this text. Tāranātha considers the third Jñānavajra to have been Chinese (Chattopadhyaya 1970: 432), presumably due to the colophon of the *Tathāgatahrdayālamkāra*, which refers to him as the rGya mkhan po. However, Kim contests this attestation considering him to have been Indian (Kim 2002: 69-71.)

¹⁷⁵ See Suzuki 1932: 91-92.

Then again, the Bodhisattva the great being Mahāmati spoke thus to the Lord, ‘Lord, why has the Lord taught that words (*śabda, sgra,*) are permanent (*nitya/śāsvata, rtag pa*)?’ The Lord replied, ‘Mahāmati, why is the mistaken (*bhrānti, nor pa*) referred to as mistaken since it is perceived unmistakably by āryas? It is like this Mahāmati, in the world unknowledgable ones erroneously grasp at mirages, fire-brand circles, [the appearance in one’s vision of] agitated hairs, cities of Gandharvas, illusions, dreams, reflections, and the hallucinations of beings. But educated ones are not like that, even though it is not that [such phenomena] do not appear to them.’¹⁷⁶

In answer [to that question the Buddha explains], the mistaken minds of childish beings, that are mistaken about their apprehended object (*gzung yul*), are by nature awarenesses (*blo*) with mistaken appearances. Although the reality of those [objects] appear to āryas, for them such appearances are by nature just obscured or conventional awarenesses (*kun rdzob tu blo nyid*), and awarenesses that are empty of existing ultimately (*don dam pa’i dngos pos stong*).¹⁷⁷

.... As for the meaning of those examples, the unknowledgable may completely grasp at real water and the like in mirages etc, due to which those [appearances] are said to be mistaken (*nor ba*) and erroneous (*phyin ci log*). Accordingly, the reality of that appearance is completely empty of existent water etc.¹⁷⁸

Here Jñānavajra clarifies the meaning of ‘mistaken’ in the sūtra: it refers to the appearances to unknowledgable people who mistakenly understand their apprehended object, the cognitive content of their cognitions, as real. Several examples are posited such as the water

¹⁷⁶*Lankāvatāra*, D 107, 97b: *de nas yang byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po blo gros chen pos bcom ldan 'das la 'di skad ces gsol to/ bcom ldan 'das bcom ldan 'das kyis gang la rtag pa'i sgrar yang gsungs/ bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa/ blo gros chen po gang gi phyir nor pa 'di ni 'phags pa rnam la'ang phyin ci log ma yin par snang bas na nor pa la bya'o/ 'di lta ste/ blo gros chen po 'jig rten na mi mkhas pa dag gis smig rgyu dang / mgal me'i 'khor lo dang / skra shad 'dzings pa dang / dri za'i grong khyer dang / sgyu ma dang rmi lam dang / gzugs brnyan dang / mig yor skyes bu phyin ci log tu 'dzin gyi mkhas pa rnam kyis ni ma yin te/ mi snang ba'ang ma yin no. The Sanskrit is as follows: *atha khalu mahāmatirbodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ punarapi bhagavantametadvocat - nityaśabdaḥ punarbhagavan kvabhihitah? bhagavānāha - bhrāntau mahāmate / yasmādiyam bhrāntirāryāṇāmapi khyāyate viparyāsataḥ / tadyathā mahāmate mṛgatṛṣṇālātacakrakeśoṇḍukagandharvanagaramāyāsvapnapratibimbākṣapuruṣā loke 'vidvadbhirviparyasyante, na tu vidvadbhiḥ / na ca punarna khyāyante / (Vaidya, 1963: 44).**

¹⁷⁷ Jñānavajra, D 4019, 156b.7-157a.1: *lan gyi don ni byis pa'i skye bo'i sems phyin ci log gi gzung yul ni de ltar snang ba phyin ci log gi blo nyid kyi bdag nyid yin la/ de'i de kho na nyid kyang 'phags pa rnam la snang ba ste/ de rnam la snang ba yang kun rdzob tu blo nyid kyi bdag nyid yin zhing/ blo yang don dam pa'i dngos pos stong.*

¹⁷⁸ Jñānavajra, D 4019, 157a.4-157a.5: *de la dpe'i don ni/ mi mkhas pa dag gis smig rgyu la sogs pa la chu la sogs pa'i dngos por yang dag pa par 'dzin pas nor pa phyin ci log ces kyang bya la/ yang de ltar snang ba de nyid chu la sogs pa yang dag pa'i dngos pos stong.*

in a mirage; these appearances are misleading for non-ārya beings. Āryas on the other hand realise such illusory objects like mirages as mere appearances for conventional or obscured cognitions, and understand that these appearances are ultimately empty, just as the mirage is empty of water.

Mahāmati, as for such mistaken [appearances], since they appear (*khyāyāt, snang ba*) in so many ways, mistaken [appearances] are also not referred to as transitory (*aśāśvata, mi rtag pa*). If you wonder why that is the case, it is because they are without existence or non-existence (*bhāvābhāva, dngos po dang dngos po med pa*).¹⁷⁹

Concerning such [mistaken appearances], they are mistaken because a single object may appear (*snang ba*) in many contradictory ways that are discordant with [the perception of] āryas. Their nature is permanent because they are free of being existent or non-existent (*dngos po dang dngos po med pa*); such mistaken and erroneous thoughts do not establish the nature (*dngos po*) of the ultimate.¹⁸⁰

Here the sūtra and Jñānavajra's commentary clarify another characteristic of mistaken appearances: they do not cohere with the reality of āryas. They are also described as permanent on account of them being free from either existing or non-existing. While it is difficult to understand the exact point here, in line with the sūtra's comments below, this seems to indicate that mistaken appearances are unchanging and permanent for they are always the field of experience of deluded cognitions. This fact does not change. The sūtra continues:

As such, Mahāmati, if you wonder why mistaken [appearances] are neither existent nor non-existent? It is like this, since [some] hungry ghosts see and [others] do not see, for instance, the waves of the ocean or the Ganges River, due to which the object-domains (*gocara, spyod yul*) of all childish being's

¹⁷⁹ *Laṅkāvatāra*, D 107, 97b: /blo gros chen po nor pa de ni rnam pa du mar snang bas nor pa la mi rtag par yang mi byed do/ /de ci'i phyir zhe na'di lta ste/ dngos po dang / dngos po med pa rnam par spangs pa'i phyir ro/. The Sanskrit is as follows: *sā punarbhṛāntirmahāmate anekaparakārā khyāyāt / na bhrānteraśāśvatatām kurute / tatkasya hetoḥ? yaduta bhāvābhāvavivarjitatvāt /* (Vaidya, 1963: 44).

¹⁸⁰ *Jñānavajra*, D 4019, 157a.6-157a.7: *de la nor pa ni 'phags pa rnam dang mi mthun par don gcig la 'gal ba'i rnam pa du mar snang bas so/ de'i de bzhin nyid rtag pa ni/ dngos po dang dngos po med pa rnam par spangs pa'i phyir zhes pa ste/ nor pa phyin ci log gi blo de nyid don dam pa'i dngos por ma grub.*

[cognitions] are multivarious (*vicitra, sna tshogs*). Therefore, because of that Mahāmati, the [objects of] mistaken [cognitions] are not existent (*bhāva, dngos po*). Similarly, since for others that water does appear it is also not non-existent (*abhāva, dngos po med pa*).¹⁸¹

Like the waves of the ocean or the Ganges River are seen as pus and blood and are not seen as water by hungry ghosts but are seen by humans and the like as water since they are not seen as pus and blood. Such appearances are free from being truly existent (*bden pa'i dngos po*) because it is not possible for there to be many contradictory [accurate perceptions] of a single object. Also, since the objects of their respective consciousnesses appear and function they are not non-existent (*dngos po med pa*).¹⁸²

This passage is extremely important as it highlights Jñānavajra's concerns regarding relativism and epistemic scepticism. This is because it provides possible solutions to these philosophical issues. As he says, the mistaken appearances of water for the humans and pus and blood for the hungry ghost are not real, for they cannot both be ultimately correct about their objects, since a single object cannot be validly perceived to possess two contradictory natures, by one as pus and by the other as water. This helps to avoid rampant relativism. These cognitions are still said to perceive entities that appear and perform the functions of water or pus, as such they are not entirely non-existent. This second step shuns scepticism and shows the relative accuracy of the ghost's and human's perceptions.

Therefore, in terms of mistaken [appearances], āryas are free from [both] the erroneous and non-erroneous. Even so Mahāmati, because the characteristic does not diverge from the characterised (*nimittalakṣaṇābheda tvā, mtshan ma'i mtshan nyid tha dad pa ma yin pas*), mistaken [appearances] are

¹⁸¹ *Laṅkāvatāra*, D 107, 97b: /ji ltar na yang blo gros chen po nor ba'i dngos po dang / dngos po med pa rnam par spangs she na/ 'di lta ste/ rnam kyis mthong ba dang mi mthong ba'i phyir rgya mtsho'i rlabs dang / gang gA'i chu lta bur byis pa thams cad spyod yul sna tshogs kyi phyir ro//de bas na de'i phyir blo gros chen po nor pa ni dngos po ma yin no/ 'di ltar chu de gzhan dag la snang bas na de'i phyir dngos po med pa'ang ma yin no/. Sanskrit: *katham punarmahāmate bhāvābhāvavivarjitā bhrāntiḥ? yaduta sarvabālavicitragocaratvātsamudrataramgagaṅgodakavatpretānām darśanādarśanataḥ / ata etasmātkāraṇāmahāmate bhrāntibhāvo na bhavati /* (Vaidya, 1963: 44).

¹⁸² Jñānavajra D 4019, 157a.2-157a.3: ji ltar rgya mtsho'i rlabs dang gang gA'i chu la yi dgas rnam kyis rnag khrag tu mthong zhing chur mi mthong ba dang/ mi la sogs pa rnam kyis chur mthong zhing rnag khrag tu mi mthong ba'i phyir/ de ltar snang ba ni bden pa'i dngos po spangs pa ste/ don gcig la 'gal ba du ma mi srid pa'i phyir ro/ /yang rang rang gi shes pa'i don snang zhing don byed pas/ dngos po med pa rnam par spangs pa'o.

permanent. Mahāmati, although they are imputations since they are conceptualised in many aspects, with multivarious (*vicitrā, sna tshogs*) characteristics, they do not undergo change (*bhedamupayāti, tha dad du mi 'gyur*). Therefore, because of that, Mahāmati, mistaken [appearances] are permanent.¹⁸³

Now, this is the case because the fields of experience (*spyod yul*) of all childish ones are multivarious (*sna tshogs*); this concerns how awareness and an object of awareness appear and are experienced. Some grasp [their object] as the nature of an agglomeration of subtle external particles, some grasp it as a single substance (*rdzas*), a coarse possessor of parts; some grasp it as the ultimate, which is the nature (*dngos po*) of knowing. But others realise (*rtogs pa*) them as mere non-existent (*dngos po med pa*) appearances because it is not possible for contradictory (*'gal ba*) [entities] to come together (*'du ba*) [in a single object].¹⁸⁴

These passages seem to reveal Jñānavajra's Madhyamaka inclinations. Through listing the various ways in which thought apprehends objects, he also provides a doxographic summary of Buddhist philosophical views on reality. From the view that ultimate reality constitutes a collection of minute external particles usually associated with the Vaibhāṣikas, to the view that objects each possess a single substance, that is a coarse whole, expounded by the Sautrāntikas (discussed above),¹⁸⁵ to that of the Yogācāras that the ultimate is the nature of cognition, and finally to the correct realisation (*rtogs pa*) that the objects of awareness are mere appearances, not existing (ultimately). His use of *rtogs pa* here is significant. It highlights his own view, which is not that of the Yogācāras who consider ultimate reality to

¹⁸³ *Laṅkāvatāra*, D 107, 97b-98a: *de ltar nor pa ni 'phags pa rnam la phyin ci log dang / phyin ci log ma yin pa rnam par spangs pa'o//de ltar yang blo gros chen po de'i phyir 'di lta ste/ mtshan ma'i mtshan nyid tha dad pa ma yin pas nor pa ni rtag pa ste/ blo gros chen po nor pa ni mtshan ma sna tshogs rnam pa mang por rnam par rtog pas rnam par brtags kyang tha dad du mi 'gyur te/ des na de'i phyir blo gros chen po nor pa ni rtag pa'o/*. Sanskrit: *evaṃ bhrāntirāryānāṃ viparyāsāvīparyāsavarjitā / ataśca mahāmate asmātkāraṇācchāśvatā bhrāntiryaduta nimittalakṣaṇābhedatvāt / na hi mahāmate bhrāntirvividhavicitrānimittavikalpena vikalpyamānā bhedamupayāti / ata etasmātkāraṇāmahāmate bhrāntiḥ śāśvatā //* (Vaidya, 1963: 44).

¹⁸⁴ Jñānavajra D 4019, vol. 122, folio/line 157b.4-157b.5: *de deng de bzhin du byis pa thams cad spyod yul sna tshogs kyi phyir ro zhes pa ste/ blo dang blo'i yul ji ltar snang zhing myong ba 'di nyid la kha cig gis ni phyi rol rdul phra rab 'dus pa'i bdag nyid du 'dzin la kha cig gis ni rags pa yan lag can gyi rdzas gcig tu 'dzin cing/ 'ga' zhig gis shes pa'i dngos po'i don dam par 'dzin la/ gzhan dag gis dngos po med pa'i snang ba tsam du rtogs pas 'gal ba 'du ba mi srid pa'i phyir/*

¹⁸⁵ See chapter 2: 46.

be the nature of knowing (*shes pa'i dngos po'i don dam pa*). Since all deluded cognitions and the various cognitions that engage with these different Buddhist philosophical views of reality operate through the “mistaken”, these mistaken appearances remain constant as the field of experience (*spyod yul*) for such cognitions. In this sense, mistaken appearances are considered permanent because they persist unchanged as the experiential domain of these cognitive states.

Jñānavajra continues:

As for the mistaken [appearances for hungry ghosts and humans], a non-entity (*dngos po ma yin pa*) is experienced and appears to be an object for each of their respective awarenesses. Moreover, since such [appearing objects] do exist conventionally they are not said to be non-existent (*dngos po med pa*).¹⁸⁶

Finally, to wrap up the discussion and what seems to be the sūtra’s and Jñānavajra’s main point and use of the Example: the objects that appear to the beings in the Example are mistaken since they contradict those of āryas, and do not exist ultimately since contradictory entities cannot cohabit a single entity. Clean water cannot be pus. However, they do engage non-entities (*dngos po ma yin pa*), or un-real things, that appear and function conventionally. As such their cognitions do have some level of accuracy. The *Laṅkāvatāra* and Jñānavajra’s use of the Example, therefore, illustrate that each of the beings are wrong about the ultimate nature of their object, and yet they are each correct relatively speaking concerning their own appearance and the function of their un-real objects.

This marginal ascription of species-specific cognitive accuracy in relation to species-specific objects may be Jñānavajra’s attempt to avoid rampant relativism. His recognition that their objects perform the functions that they appear to, similarly shuns scepticism, as

¹⁸⁶ Jñānavajra D 4019, 157b.5-157b.6: *nor pa ni dngos po ma yin la rang rang gi blo'i don de ltar snang zhing myong la/ de yang kun rdzob tu grub pas dngos po med pa yang ma yin zhes pa'o/*

such conventional awarenesses are relatively accurate regarding the functional illusions that appear. While this is not a particularly well-developed argument to avoid total scepticism and rampant relativism, it is a basic recognition of common standards of conventional epistemic warrant. This species-specific cognitive accuracy is a theme later Tibetan Sakyapa authors such as Gorampa (1429-1489) and Shakya Chokden (1428-1507) will develop further, as we will see in Chapter 5.

Similarly, Jñānavajra's view that each of the beings in the Example are relatively accurate regarding the illusory yet functional objects that appear to them, is very similar to Ju Mipham's (1846–1912) account of the Example, which argues all of the beings each warrant their relative appearance that is nondual with emptiness. For him, such a union of appearance and emptiness is the common object around which all the perceptions can gather and yet do not contradict each other. We shall cover this fully in Chapter 6.

In chapter 2.4 we have seen how Mādhyamikas have seen the Example as underlining their core Madhyamaka premise that phenomena are empty, empty of intrinsic natures or empty of being real. Candrakīrti and his commentator Jayānanda have used it to reveal the contradictions in a Yogācāra interpretation of the Example: it is contradictory to accept that the beings' cognitions possess *svabhāva*; while at the same time saying they are deceived. For if these perceivers are intrinsic, they exist in virtue of themselves, do not require causes for their existence, and anyone who looks in the same direction would also see the pus, water, or nectar. As a consequence, they would not be deceived, they would be correct, for there has been collective warrant of their objects. The *Laṅkāvatāra* and Jñānavajra have seen the Example as illustrating the species-specific accuracy of the beings' cognitions, that are relative and yet still accurate in relation to their unreal but “functioning” objects. Jñānavajra is the only author examined thus far who has attempted to ward off epistemic scepticism and relativism in his commentary to the Example.

The discussion until now has broadly speaking followed a chronological and systematic structure. We have grouped our textual witnesses in historical order and around the three primary doctrines that the Example was used to illustrate, namely, the moral and psychological components of the doctrine of karma, Yogācāra idealism, and Madhyamaka emptiness.

In the final section of this chapter (2.5) the approach will differ. We have chosen to present together two textual witnesses of the Example not for their shared or related chronological place in history, but for the related polemical purposes that they use it in the service of. In the two texts we shall cover, the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* from circa 2nd century India, and the *Benkenmitsu nikyō ron* from 9th century Japan, the Example is used to argue for the authenticity and ascendancy of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna doctrines, respectively. Although they are separated by seven centuries and originate in different cultural spaces, both texts employ the Example as a rhetorical tool to establish sectarian legitimacy and doctrinal superiority. It is hoped that this approach shall further augment the discussion by highlighting the doctrinal creative possibilities Buddhist philosophers saw within the Example, particularly how this single philosophical device could be repurposed across time and geography to address evolving sectarian concerns.

2.5.1 Sectarian Legitimacy and Doctrinal Superiority: the Example in Buddhist

Historiography and Hermeneutics

After the historical Buddha passed into *parinirvāṇa* and Mahāyāna and tantric scriptures continued to emerge, their progenitors were faced with the challenge of establishing the authenticity of these texts and doctrines. Of the many tools utilised for the legitimisation of these newly revealed scriptures, an appeal to the historical Buddha as their original source is the primary. The claim that these teachings were *buddhavacana*, the authentic spatio-temporally uttered speech of the Buddha, included an affirmation of an uninterrupted

lineage of teachers who transmitted this *buddhavacana* up until the present. Grey describes this form of historical referencing thus:

The statement of genealogy, regardless of whether “true” or “fabricated,” should more properly be seen as a creative affirmation, a placement of one’s self vis-à-vis tradition.¹⁸⁷

An alternative approach would consider as *buddhavacana* those teachings that demonstrate coherence with ultimate reality, sufficient similarity to, and non-contradiction of what a given Buddhist community accepts as the spatio-temporally uttered teachings of the Buddha. The critical question, however, concerns how we are to interpret this criterion of coherence.¹⁸⁸ While the former hermeneutic often presumes a somewhat realist regard for the temporal sequence of time and of the actors within it, such a view is not invariably present within the Buddhist traditions. The authors of Mahāyāna and tantric scriptures and their commentators relied on the pan-Buddhist acceptance of perceptual relativism to support their claim of authenticity. By arguing that a single teacher, their discourse, and the audience in attendance were understood and experienced in multiple ways, they attempted to simultaneously authenticate their scriptures and argue for their supremacy.¹⁸⁹ The *locus classicus* for this form of Mahāyāna perceptual relativism is undoubtedly the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (‘Lotus Sūtra’) where the original teachings that the Buddha gave to the śrāvakas are described as merely provisional, and are ultimately aimed at leading these disciples to the Mahāyāna.¹⁹⁰ Grey argues that this method of appealing to perceptual relativism is a form of *dehistoricisation* that allowed Mahāyānists to downplay the assumed

¹⁸⁷ Grey 2023: 49.

¹⁸⁸ As Kapstein notes it is unlikely any Buddhist tradition held fast to only the first of these two approaches (2000: 124). Kapstein also discusses the concepts of canon and apocrypha, and the challenges of applying them as unidirectional predicates. That is, in academic Buddhist Studies, the assertion that ‘The Pali Tipiṭaka is canonical’ is inherently problematic, as such claims inevitably imply that ‘The Pali Tipiṭaka is canonical for Theravāda Buddhists’ (Kapstein 2000: 121-122).

¹⁸⁹ See McMahan 1998: 266-26.

¹⁹⁰ Grey 2023: 54.

temporal sequence of time and the events that occurred in the distant past, and instantiate the Buddha into the transcendental, accessible to all with sufficient clarity of mind.¹⁹¹ However, one might question whether Grey's account attributes to ancient Buddhists a conception of time that they would have genuinely accepted. Would early Mahāyānists have actually accepted a realist account of history?¹⁹² McMahan describes this hermeneutic as a method by which Mahāyānists were able to transfer the basis of legitimacy from the speech of a distant historical figure, Śākyamuni, to 'the vision of the transcendent buddha.'¹⁹³ While the Buddha always provides the ultimate stamp of authority, access to him or other enlightened beings is a matter of perspective. Those with sufficient wisdom may access such a plane of ultimate knowledge and "carry back" the dharma. In this regard Grey notes the important *Pratyutpannabuddha-saṃmukhāvasthitasamādhī-sūtra* ('Concentration for Face-to-Face Encounters with the Buddhas of the Present'), which prescribes a mode of visualising the Buddha Amitāyus through which he will eventually appear to one and will reveal a new teaching.¹⁹⁴

To substantiate their claim and appeal to perceptual relativism, an example was required. One that was well-known to Buddhists, or one that would easily be accepted. The Example provided an acceptable illustration of their take on perceptual relativism and one that Buddhists of all persuasions, from those following the Pāli suttas to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya and the Mahāyāna, were likely to accept, as the above discussion has shown. In this section, with recourse to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, and the Japanese master Kūkai's (774-835)

¹⁹¹ Grey 2023: 55.

¹⁹² For a discussion of this issue, see Westerhoff 2018: 24-27.

¹⁹³ McMahan 1998: 272.

¹⁹⁴ Grey 2023: 55-57. Instead of assuming deliberate deception on the part of the writers of the newly revealed Mahāyāna and tantric scriptures, Grey contends that the abundance of visualization techniques of Buddhas and the like, as found for example in the *Pratyutpannabuddha-saṃmukhāvasthitasamādhī-sūtra* and Buddhist Tantras, suggests that these practices may actually result in what were considered 'subjectively "genuine" visionary experiences on the part of the discoverers'. It is thus plausible that these meditators interpreted their experiences as authentic revelations (Grey 2023: 57).

Benkenmitsu nikyō ron, we shall illustrate how the lens of the Example was focussed on Buddhist historical events and the scriptures that represented them, to affect a radical re-interpretation of the Buddha and his dharma.

i. **The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (c. 2nd-3rd centuries CE)¹⁹⁵**

The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is found within the monumental *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (c. 1st – 2nd centuries CE),¹⁹⁶ and constitutes its final chapter.¹⁹⁷ This popular sūtra provides an account of a young Sudhana’s quest for Enlightenment, via a multitude of teachers, the principal being Mañjuśrī whom he meets in south India. The array of teachers that this young man meets includes non-Buddhists, children, various women, and a courtesan.

The Example appears in the first chapter of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* that sets the scene for the whole sūtra. The context consists of Buddha Śākyamuni staying in Śrāvastī with a vast retinue of śrāvakas, and an even larger one of bodhisattvas. They are desirous of a teaching and so the Buddha enters a samādhi and causes various pure realms to appear in each of the directions together with various buddhas and even more bodhisattvas performing various deeds. It is then explained that due to the śrāvakas’ lack of merit, various forms of wisdom, and compassion, and due to ignorance, they are unable to perceive the miracles or the

¹⁹⁵ For the dating, see McMahan 1998: 250.

¹⁹⁶ Cleary 1993: 1.

¹⁹⁷ There is a Sanskrit manuscript from Nepal of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* extant, that appears to date to 1166 CE. The sūtra was translated several times into Chinese, for the first time sometime between 388 and 408 CE by Shengjian, by Prajñā a monk from Kashmir in 798, the entire *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* was translated into Chinese in 420 by Buddhahadra (359–429 CE) and his aids, and also by Śikṣānanda (652–710 CE) of Khotan. Its Tibetan translation was translated during the reigns of either Séna Lek (r. ca. 800/804-815) or Relpa Chen (r. 815-836), by Jinamitra, Surendrabodhi, and Yéshé Dé. Cleary (1993) has translated Śikṣānanda’s version of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* into English. Roberts (2021) has also translated it from the Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan; while Douglas Osto (2010, 2020) has translated various sections of this sūtra into English from the Sanskrit. There also exists a German translation by Dōi Torakazu (1978), and a French by Carré (2019), both from the Chinese.

buddhas and bodhisattvas right in front of them. The Example is then used to illustrate how the perception of these transcendental objects is obscured for the śrāvakas.

It is like this, for example: On both banks of the great river Gaṅgā, hundreds of thousands of hungry ghosts are gathered. They are terribly afflicted by hunger and thirst, naked and without clothes, their bodies are scorched and skin discolored, parched by wind and sun, tormented by flocks of crows, and assailed by wolves and jackals. Yet, they cannot see the great river Gaṅgā. This is because they are obscured by obscuring karma. Some of them, moreover, see it as dry and waterless; others see it as completely filled with ashes. Similarly, those sthavira (*gnas brtan*) and śrāvakas, though dwelling right there in Jetavana, do not perceive or comprehend the Tathāgata's manifestations. This is because their eyes are completely covered by the cataract of ignorance, which is an opponent to omniscience, and because they are not sustained by the power of the roots of virtue of the Omniscience Ground.¹⁹⁸

The sūtra then goes on to list other analogies and examples to illustrate the same point. For instance, a person may fall asleep in an area full of people and dream that that place is filled with various marvels, while people who are not asleep in the same place will not observe such things. Similarly, one who is skilled in the lore of herbal remedies may go to the Himalayas and find many healing herbs; however, animals, hunters and the like who dwell in the same place are utterly oblivious to the properties, locations, functions, and the like of such medicinal herbs. In the same way the śrāvakas are oblivious to the qualities and environments of the buddhas and bodhisattvas present in front of them.

¹⁹⁸ D 44-45, 292.b: *de'ang 'di lta ste dper na /gang gA'i chu klung chen po'i ngogs pha rol tshur rol du yi dgas bkres pa dang /skom pas rab tu mnar ba gcer ba gos myed pa/ lus kyi mdog dang kha dog tshig cing 'jum pa rlung dang nyi mas bskams pa/ bya rog mang pos gtse ba/spyang ki dang /was tho btsams pa/brgya stong mang po kun nas 'dus kyang /gang gA'i chu klung chen po myi mthong ste/ sgrib pa'i las kyis bsgribs pa'i phyir la las ni bskams te chu med pa mthong ngo /la las ni thal bas yongs su gang bar mthong ngo/ /de bzhin du nyan thos chen po gnas brtan de dag dze ta'i tshal de nyid na 'khod kyang thams cad mkhyen pa nyid dang myi mthun pa'i phyogs ma rig pa'i ling tog gis myig kun nas khebs pa dang /thams cad mkhyen pa nyid kyi sa'i dge ba'i rtsa ba'i mthus yongs su ma bzung ba'i phyir/ de bzhin gshegs pa'i rnam par 'phrul pa de dag ma mthong ma shes so/. The Sanskrit equivalent is found (Vaidya 1960b: 14): *tadyathāpi nāma gaṅgāyā mahānadyā ubhayatastīre bahūni pretaśatasahasrāṇi samāgatāni kṣutpipāsāprapīḍitāni nagnāni nirvasanāni vidagdhaḡātracchavivarṇāni vātātapapariśuṣkāṇi kākasaṅghopadrutāni vṛkaśṛḡalairvitṛśyamānāni tāṃ gaṅgāṃ mahānadīṃ na paśyanti / kecīpunah śuṣkāṃ paśyanti nirudakāṃ bhasmaparipūrṇāṃ, āvaraṇīyakarmāvṛtatvāt / evameva te sthavirā mahāśrāvakāstatraiva jetavane sthitāḥ tāni tathāgatavikurvitāni na paśyanti, nāvataranti, sarvajñatāvīpakṣikāvidyāpaṭalanetraparyavanaddhatvāt, sarvajñatābhūmikuśalamūlāparigrhītatvāt //**

This section of the sūtra authenticates itself through presenting Śākyamuni as its source, while at the same time providing a rationale why the sūtra may not have appeared within “mainstream” Buddhist discourse. For, if the ‘Supreme Pair’, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana,¹⁹⁹ were not able to perceive all of these miraculous qualities of the Buddha and his bodhisattva retinue due to their lack of compassion, aspiration for enlightenment, and other Mahāyāna virtues, then there is no need to mention the other śrāvakas. As mentioned above this may be characterised as a *dehistoricisation* of what mainstream Buddhists considered to have occurred during the lifetime of Śākyamuni. However, it may also be read on its own terms as a re-articulation of the historical events, one that incorporates the Mahāyāna understanding of the Buddha as a transcendent entity that can be epistemically accessed through meditative states. That is to say, by shifting the assumed metaphysical reference point of the scene from the somewhat “realist” śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha perspective, and into the trans-worldly perspective of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, the sūtra relativizes the perspective accounted for in the “non-Mahāyāna” discourses. It also highlights the limited interpretative framework implicit in the śrāvaka perspective of the Buddha, his activities, and qualities.

Within this approach, one that we may call Mahāyāna historiography, there are also several important epistemological claims. Firstly, that the śrāvaka perspective may be partially correct (in thinking that there is a Buddha in front of them teaching the dharma); however, the perspective of the great bodhisattvas is more accurate because only the latter’s perspective sees the Buddha as he really is. Secondly, that this cognitive ability is acquired through the practice of the various Mahāyāna virtues and the Mahāyāna path, practices that were not undertaken by the śrāvakas present. This sūtra’s account of (at least) two levels of

¹⁹⁹ Roberts 2021: <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-037-007.html#UT22084-037-007-292>, chapter 1.40.

increasing cognitive accuracy in relation to conventional truths, may be seen as a seed for a doctrine that would later be developed further in Tibet within the Nyingma tradition, in particular by Rongzompa in the 11th Century and Ju Mipham in the 19th century. For Mipham, this doctrine accepts two types of relative epistemic instruments, that based upon the confined perspective (*tshur mthong*), and that based upon pure vision (*dag gzigs*).²⁰⁰ The first would accurately warrant commonsense objects such as tables, the latter uncommon objects only available to advanced yogins, such as the qualities of the Buddha's miraculous manifestations, recounted here in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. We shall discuss these in chapter 3 and chapter 6. Before we do that, let us turn to the Japanese author Kūkai and his use of the Example for hermeneutical purposes.

ii. Kūkai's *Benkenmitsu nikyō ron* (c. 813-815 CE)

Kūkai (774-835) founded the Japanese Shingon school and was thus one of the most influential figures in Japanese Buddhist history. Having travelled to T'ang China in 804 he met Hui-kuo (746-805), a master of Vajrayāna Buddhism from whom he received tantric teachings, and soon thereafter returned to Japan and propagated them. Kūkai's *Benkenmitsu nikyō ron* ('On the Differences between the Exoteric and Esoteric Teachings'),²⁰¹ composed between 813 and 815, is one of six texts that his tradition considers to be his most important works. According to Giebel, it may be considered a manifesto of sorts, establishing the supremacy and uniqueness of Shingon Buddhism when compared to all of the traditions existent at that time in China and Japan. The work is polemical in nature, seeking to prove the legitimacy of Vajrayāna Buddhism by showing that many of its fundamental premises can be found within exoteric, that is to say, sūtra works. To prove this point there are ample quotes from Mahāyāna sūtras, śāstras, and tantras. In distinguishing and delineating the

²⁰⁰ See Chapter 3 on Rongzompa, and Chapter 6 on Ju Mipham.

²⁰¹ Translated in Giebel 2004.

“Exoteric” and “Esoteric” Buddhist systems, Kūkai covers such subjects as the differences in methods, the time it takes to achieve enlightenment, and the different benefits one may achieve from practising these two approaches. He also distinguishes these two collections of teachings by the teacher who originally taught them: Śākyamuni Buddha taught Exoteric Buddhism, while Esoteric Buddhism was taught by the Dharma body (*dharmakāya*).²⁰²

The Example appears in the context of a discussion of this controversial subject.

Question: That the response [Jp. *ōjin*]²⁰³ and transformation bodies [Jp. *keshin* / *hengeshin*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*] expound the Dharma is acknowledged by all schools. As for the Dharma body, however, it is formless and imageless, the path of speech is cut off and the workings of the mind are extinguished, and it neither expounds nor reveals [the Dharma]. The sūtras all explain this principle, and it is likewise discussed in treatises. Why do you now say that the Dharma body expounds the Dharma? Where is your evidence for this?

Answer: This proposition is frequently found in the sūtras and treatises, but these passages remain hidden because of biased views, and their meaning is revealed only in accordance with the religious capacity [of the reader]. It is, for example, like the differing perceptions of heavenly beings and [hungry] ghosts (*pretas*) [who, looking at the same water, see either a bejewelled pond or pus and blood] or like light and darkness for men and [nocturnal] birds [who on a pitch-dark night see either only the colour of darkness or bright light].²⁰⁴

Unlike any other instance of the Example surveyed so far, in this text it is used to illustrate how a scriptural passage itself can be seen in a variety of ways depending on the acumen of the reader. In line with the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* we may interpret Kūkai to mean it is the person’s wisdom and level of spiritual development on the Buddhist path that determines how accurately or inaccurately they ascertain the real meaning of a discourse. Kūkai is

²⁰² This paragraph paraphrases Giebel’s introduction to his translation (Giebel 2004: 1-5). I am following his terminology here: Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism refer to a common division of Buddhist teachings into sūtras and tantras, respectively, which is also found in Tibet with the division of *mdo* (*sūtra*) and *gsang sngags* (*secret mantra*) teachings.

²⁰³ This can refer to either the *nirmāṇakāya* or *saṃbhogakāya* of a Buddha.

²⁰⁴ Giebel 2004: 19-20.

concerned with showing that the meanings of the Buddhist tantras are contained within the exoteric sūtras and the treatises that comment upon them. They are thus valid *buddhavacana*.

Kūkai's intriguing hermeneutic, used here at the beginning of the 9th century as Buddhist tantras were just entering and being propagated in Japan, is not historiography. He does not use the principle of perceptual relativism like the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* to re-articulate historical events. Rather he claims it was Śākyamuni Buddha in his *nirmāṇakāya* or *saṃbhogakāya* form who taught the sūtras, but the *dharmakāya* that revealed the tantras, each administering the appropriate medicine required for the ailments of their patient-like disciples.²⁰⁵ However, like the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* Kūkai implicitly recognises degrees of cognitive accuracy, specifically in the readers of these scriptures. Certain people may read a scripture and only grasp the most basic principles, others will realise the underlying “esoteric” significance.

In terms of the rampant relativism and scepticism that the Example may lead to, the author(s) of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and Kūkai do not appear to be overly worried by them. Such questions are not addressed explicitly. They do, however, provide an epistemic anchor that grounds their explanations: The Buddha's and high bodhisattvas' perceptions are the most veridical, these are our measuring pole for determining the relative accuracy of an interpretation or a perceiver of an event. All perceptions, therefore, are not equally accurate, and genuine knowledge is, it seems, possible. For if not, what would be the value of the Buddhist path?

2.6. Observations

Before we continue to the next leg of this conceptual journey, let us briefly take stoke and examine where we are and what we may have learned. We have started with the *Petavatthu*

²⁰⁵ Giebel 2004: 20.

that Dharmapāla tells us reports an event just after the historical Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* and the first council. It recounts the plight of Uttara, a disciple of the Buddha and his mother, who is born into the hungry ghost realm through her scolding of her son for his generosity to the Sangha. We have progressed through the early Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya account of the Example in its *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (1st-3rd cent. CE), the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (2nd-4th cent. CE), the Chinese *Dazhidu lun* (5th cent. CE), and the **Nyāyānusāraśāstra* (5th cent. CE). Our account of these sources has highlighted that despite differing styles of composition of these texts, the former three being more narrative, the latter more systematic, all see the Example as highlighting the moral and psychological effects of karma. Within the **Nyāyānusāraśāstra* we saw the hints of a shift towards an illusionistic interpretation of the Example. We thus focussed on several of the concerns Sautrāntikas began to have about Sarvāstivāda realist ontology and epistemology, which it was argued would eventually lead to the full Yogācāra doctrine of mind-only, and a consequent use of the Example. We surveyed how the Example was used by eminent scholars such as Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Candrakīrti to both argue for and against an idealistic rejection of the idea that external objects can produce cognition. In *Jñānavajra* we saw our first explicit reading of the Example that attempted to avoid rampant relativism and scepticism. In our final section we touched on the historiographic and hermeneutical purposes that the Example was used to substantiate in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (c. 2nd-3rd centuries CE), and by Kūkai (9th cent.) in Japan, justifying Mahāyāna thought and esoteric Buddhism respectively.

All these sources on the Example contradict the “consistency hypothesis”—the necessary consistency of a one-to-one correspondence between real external objects and their perceptions—and have in their own way supported the “cognitive penetrability of perception”. As we saw above, this empirical position maintains that perceptual content is at least partially influenced by preexisting or simultaneously existing psychological factors,

such as beliefs, expectations, attention, specialised knowledge and the like. In many ways all the sources surveyed have shown how psychological dispositions resulting from previous actions imbue their subjects with certain cognitive tendencies and capacities that deeply influence what they “know”. They all thus share several of the core features highlighted of the cognitive penetrability of perception.

Some philosophers of science, such as Duhem (1914), Hanson (1958), Kuhn (1962), and Feyerabend (1962), inclined to this theory have used it to support the claim that all scientific observation is theory-laden, that is to say they are all framework-relative, not theory-neutral descriptions of mind independent data.²⁰⁶ One of the extreme outcomes of this account is conventionalism, not so far from what we are calling rampant relativism in this thesis. To avoid this, other philosophers of science, such as Brewer and Lambert (1993; 2001), and Kitcher (2001), would balance the theory with bottom-up factors that empirically ground cognition, thereby eschewing overly constructivist accounts of cognitive penetration.²⁰⁷ Such an anchor in a shared empirical world with bottom-up data is hard to see in our sources above. It is indeed intriguing that in all of them only Jñānavajra makes any attempt at warding off epistemic relativism.

Throughout this narrative we have seen the very principle of perceptual relativism that the Example is used to demonstrate, itself subject to diverse interpretations—reflexively embodying the very idea it illustrates. This is somewhat like a second-order manifestation of the principle: the Example shows how things are perceived differently by different beings, a phenomenon that is itself perceived differently. On this account one may feel the tenacious shadow of rampant relativism is not far away. This may be one reason why the Tibetans felt the relativist and sceptical ramifications of the Example had to be resolved. As we will see,

²⁰⁶ For references and further discussion, see Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos 2015: 4-5, 17-20, and Mole 2015.

²⁰⁷ For references, see Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos 2015: 4-5.

although none suggest a shared world of “bottom-up” empirical data, a common theme does emerge: All the cognitions share a “common object” that grounds them within an epistemically verifiable framework.

In the following section, then, we will observe how the Tibetans engage with the subject and present various strategies to tackle the challenges of relativism and scepticism.

Chapter 3: The Example in Tibet

3.1. Introduction

Having presented a collection of passages containing the Example in non-Tibetan literature, and having discussed the three most prominent ways in which it was used, the following chapters will survey and map the appearances of the Example and the philosophical dialogue surrounding it in native Tibetan sources. Its prominence in Tibet seems to have been far more pronounced than in India. Indeed, the Example almost inevitably appears when a Tibetan author wishes to discuss the questions of intersubjectivity and relativism. It is worth noting that all of the various Tibetan writings introduced in this section relate their commentarial import back to the Indian literary sources of which they are the beneficiaries. These Tibetan sources draw upon many of the Indian texts discussed in the previous chapter and thus the Tibetan religio-philosophical discourse on the Example may be conceptualised as one distinct and coherent stream of thought: a current of analysis that revolves around specific textual traditions with overarching consistency in their methodological approach, soteriological concerns, and metaphysical enquiry. This is not to dismiss the very uniqueness of the Tibetan interpretations, which arose due to the problems and debates that were left unresolved in the Indian sources or that were pertinent to the Tibetan polemical world. As Wangchuk remarks in more general terms:

On the whole, Tibetan Buddhist scholars have honestly striven to adhere to the doctrines of Indian Buddhism. But we do encounter from time to time philosophical theories and interpretations that are of purely Tibetan provenance. Most of them seem to be the product of an attempt to resolve conflicts and inconsistencies found in the heterogeneous Indian Buddhist scriptures and systems.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Wangchuk 2009: 215.

Seyfort Ruegg has proposed a distinction between the historically *Indian* elements of Buddhist philosophy contained in the Kagyur (*bKa' 'gyur*) and Tengyur (*bsTan 'gyur*) and the *Indic*, which constituted Tibetan elaborations and yet were ‘*typologically Indian*’ even if such lines of interpretation were not found in historically Indian literature.²⁰⁹ This distinction may fruitfully be applied to the works discussed in this part of the thesis, which fall into the latter category, while drawing on the former.

In the following chapters, then, we continue the conceptual journey from the previous section along this very same tributary of philosophical thought as it enters Tibet. The approach here, however, shall differ from the previous chapter. Rather than grouping the various instances of the Example around the doctrines that it was used to illustrate, the discussion shall survey what appear to be philosophically interesting and significantly influential instances of discourse on the Example (in terms of their effect on this stream). The authors surveyed represent preeminent Tibetan luminaries whose works exemplify the intellectual currents of their respective eras. These thinkers emerge from three distinct periods in Tibet’s rich philosophical history, each characterized by unique doctrinal concerns. Although all comment on the Example in relation to Yogācāra and or Madhyamaka, since the latter was by far the most successful philosophical tradition in Tibet an overview of its history in Tibet is needed.

Much has been written on the various stages of development of Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa thought in Tibet. Several systems of periodisation have been proposed that prove helpful in framing the following section. Seyfort Ruegg, for example, offers a nuanced model that identifies four major periods in the evolution of Tibetan Madhyamaka.²¹⁰ The first began in the late eighth century CE, a period that was a watershed of sorts, and included the now

²⁰⁹ Seyfort Ruegg 2004: 328.

²¹⁰ Seyfort Ruegg 2000.

famous “Great Debate of Samye” where Indian and Chinese masters from various traditions gathered at the request of the Tibetan emperor Trisong Détsen (r. c. 755-797) to debate doctrinal and philosophical issues.²¹¹ According to the native historical account in the *dBa’ bzhed*, following this pivotal meeting, Trisong Détsen issued a decree establishing Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka as the official philosophical tradition for Tibet.²¹² This initial period has come to be known as the “Early Propagation” (*snga dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet, and spans the late eighth and early ninth centuries. This phase saw the transmission of Indian Madhyamaka traditions—primarily Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and so called Svātantrika texts, with even some Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka materials²¹³—through influential figures such as Śāntarakṣita, his disciple Kamalaśīla, and other scholars like Jñānagarbha, and Jinamitra. This period also witnessed some of the first Tibetan interpretive efforts, notably by the translator-scholar Yéshé Dé (, *fl. c.* 800).²¹⁴ The study of Madhyamaka as a doctrinal discipline was thus already instantiated in Central Tibet by the 9th century.²¹⁵

²¹¹ See Gomez (1983), Cabezon (2007), and van Schaik (2015).

²¹² Translated in Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 88. The relevant section is also translated in Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 2.

²¹³ The terms Svātantrika (*rang rgyud pa*) and Prāsaṅgika (*thal ‘gyur pa*) denote two sub-schools or distinct lines of Indian interpretation on Nāgārjuna: those stemming from Bhavya (c. 6th Century) and from Buddhapālita (c. 5th -6th Century) and Candrakīrti, respectively. Although, the terms are not attested in any known Sanskrit source and are generally regarded as Sanskrit neologisms, created by Tibetans, they undoubtedly represent two distinct lines of Indian commentary. While the division of Madhyamaka into Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and Sautrāntika Madhyamaka already existed during the Early Propagation period, these two would eventually come to be regarded as internal division of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka system. Due to the efforts of the Tibetan scholar-translator Patsap Lotsaba Nyima Drak (1055-1145?) to translate key Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka texts and champion the supremacy of the system, it would come to be regarded by Tibetan historians as the most popular system of Madhyamaka in Tibet from the 12th century. The Tibetan doxographic division of *dbu ma rang rgyud pa* and *dbu ma thal ‘gyur pa*, thus, first appears during this period (Lang 1990: 132). While the reasons for dividing Madhyamaka into the two systems has occupied some of Tibet’s greatest thinkers for the last millennium, all agree there is a difference between them. See Dreyfus and McClintock (2003) for a collection of essays on the subject, and Seyfort Ruegg (2000: 41-72).

²¹⁴ Seyfort Ruegg, 2000: 3-4. Many of the most important Madhyamaka works by Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Bhavya, Buddhapālita, and Candrakīrti are listed in the early Tibetan catalogue the *IDan dkhar ma* (see Lang 1990: 128).

²¹⁵ Lang 1990: 128.

The second major period began in the late tenth or early eleventh century and continued through the fourteenth century. During this era, the “Later Propagation” (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet, Indian Madhyamaka traditions continued to be transmitted—particularly Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika texts—through scholars including Atiśa, Sūkṣmajana, Kanakavarman, Jayānanda and others.²¹⁶ This period was a reformation of sorts. Enormous quantities of Indian Buddhist tantras were (re-)translated due to a general distrust in those translated during the Early Propagation period. (This shall be discussed further in the following section of this chapter 3). However, it also saw pronounced philosophical engagement with *śāstra* doctrines, particularly those associated with the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, and further sophistication in Tibetan interpretations of Madhyamaka. During this period Rongzompa (1042 – 1136) flourished. He shall be covered in the next section for his interpretation of the Example illustrates an interesting facet of the dynamic era of the *phyi dar*.

Seyfort Ruegg terms the third period as the “classical-systematic period” primarily spanning the 14th to 16th centuries. He characterises this classical-systematic period as representing the pinnacle of Tibetan philosophical exegesis and systematic hermeneutics. During this enormously creative era, the major Tibetan Buddhist orders crystallised their distinctive doctrinal positions into formal philosophical schools (*chos lugs*).²¹⁷ Within this framework, Seyfort Ruegg identifies the five major Tibetan traditions and the individuals who were key to their formation: the Nyingma tradition, notable for Longchenpa’s (1308-1363) philosophical and doctrinal contributions; the Sakya lineage, represented by Madhyamaka masters who traced their intellectual heritage to Sakya Paṇḍita, including Réndawa (1349-

²¹⁶ Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 4.

²¹⁷ Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 4-5.

1412), Taktsang (1405-1477), Gorampa (1429-1489) and Shakya Chokden (1428-1507);²¹⁸ the Gelug tradition established by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) and developed by his principal disciples Gyeltsap Darma Rinchen (1364-1432), Khédруп Gélek Pelzang (1385-1438), and the First Dalai Lama Gendün Drup (1391-1474); and the Kagyu school, whose Madhyamaka interpretation was advanced by figures such as the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorjé (1507-1554) and the Drukpa master Péma Karpo (1527-1592). Seyfort Ruegg also acknowledges the contributions of smaller but philosophically significant traditions, particularly the Jonang school represented by Dölpopa (1292-1361).²¹⁹ It is this classical-systematic period that shall form the largest part of the second section of this study. For within it we find the most nuanced, interesting, and formative discussions of perceptual relativism and the Example. While it would be a *desideratum* to cover all the authors here mentioned, we shall have to limit ourselves to those authors who provide a particularly influential and philosophically rich discussion of the Example.

The fourth and final period according to Seyfort Ruegg, the “post-classical scholastic period” of Tibetan Madhyamaka emerged mainly from the sixteenth century onward. This era featured philosophical elaboration and systematic consolidation of the ideas heatedly discussed during the previous periods. While operating largely within established sectarian frameworks, this period still witnessed valuable developments in inter-tradition intellectual exchange. This tendency toward synthesis and systemisation reached its apex in the non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Key figures in this intellectual development included Jamgön Kongtrul (1813-1899), who created encyclopaedic works integrating and systematising multiple lineages, and Ju Mipham

²¹⁸ Seyfort Ruegg does not mention Takstang and Shakya Chokden. They are included here as they will be covered later and are equally worthy to be considered in this group of Sakya scholars.

²¹⁹ Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 5-6.

Gyatso (1846-1912),²²⁰ whose philosophical syncretism captures the spirit of the movement.

We shall cover his creative contribution to resolving the Example in chapter 6.²²¹

I shall map the Tibetan commentaries on the Example discussed in this thesis onto the final three of Seyfort Ruegg's categories: pre-classical, beginning in the 11th century and here represented by Rongzompa (chapter 3.2), the classical-systematic period beginning with Réndawa in the 14th cent. (chapters 4 and 5), and what may be seen as the apex of the post-classical period with Ju Mipham at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (chapter 6). Although the analysis shall follow a chronological order, I will at times attempt to place these authors' interpretations of the Example directly in conversation with each other since they often respond to, and sometimes seemingly pre-empt points made hundreds of years apart. We will begin our exploration of each Tibetan author and their discourse on the Example by briefly discussing their life. Where relevant, we will also consider their historical context. Additionally, we will highlight key aspects of their "thought", focusing particularly on those ideas connected to the Example—namely, Pramāṇa and Madhyamaka. As discussed in the introduction to this study, like Tillemans we shall borrow Imre Lakatos's conception of external history (the explicit notions that we have textual evidence for) and internal history (deductions based on a thinker's explicit statements). Including this

²²⁰ Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 6.

²²¹ A somewhat different periodisation scheme is suggested by Tauscher (1995: 10) based on Seyfort Ruegg's. This model divides Tibetan Madhyamaka into two major historical phases—the early and later propagation of Buddhism in Tibet—with the latter divided into three distinct periods. The first the "period of reception" (late 10th to 14th century), saw Tibetan scholars systematically gathering, organising, and interpreting Indian philosophical materials to develop comprehensive indigenous interpretations. This was followed by the "classical period" (14th to 16th century), representing the culmination of these interpretive processes and concluding with the formal establishment of the major Tibetan Buddhist schools, particularly marked by the institutional consolidation of the Gelug tradition. Finally, Tauscher identifies a "scholastic period" (from the 16th century onward), distinguished by intensive commentarial activity occurring within the established doctrinal frameworks of each school's respective curriculum (*yig cha*). Van der Kuijp 1989, suggests a similar four-phase periodisation of Tibetan *tshad ma* (*pramāṇa*) literature, and also uses the term "classical" to denote roughly the mid-13th to 16th centuries. This term is also used in a similar way to denote scholasticism during the same period by Dreyfus (2003: 17, 25), Duckworth (2011: 43) and Komarovski (2011: 17).

“internal” interpretation will on occasion be needed for it allows us to fill-in the conceptual gaps in our thinkers’ explanations and places their discourse on the Example within the larger context of their oeuvre.²²² However, our investigation will take care to make clear whenever such an “internal” interpretative approach is used, and the main source will be the explicit statements of the authors within their works, i.e. the “external” history of their ideas. This approach aims to provide sufficient context to enhance our understanding and appreciation of their explanation of the Example, while remaining firmly grounded in textual evidence.

3.2.1. Rongzompa: Life and Context²²³

Rongzompa (1042 – 1136) was born into a Nyingmapa (*rNying ma pa*) family and, as was the custom at the time, initially educated in this tradition by his father, Rongben Rinchen Tsültrim (n.d.). Demonstrating exceptional scholastic prowess in all the traditional Buddhist fields of knowledge, such as in philosophy, logic, grammar, and technology, he particularly excelled in Sanskrit, influenced by the numerous Kashmiri and Nepali paṇḍitas visiting Tibet during his youth.²²⁴ His intellectual career unfolded after the Period of Fragmentation (*sil bu'i skabs*) that had witnessed the collapse of the Tibetan empire and its state-sponsored translation and propagation of Buddhism. While the Period of Fragmentation saw political decentralization, it eventually would spark a period of spiritual renewal among Tibetans, the so-called Later Dissemination of the Teachings (*bstan pa phyi dar*). During this period courageous Tibetans undertook arduous journeys to India, seeking authentic Buddhist

²²² See the Introduction for more details.

²²³ There is considerable ambiguity regarding the dates of Rongzompa. Following Sur’s (2021) summary, two suggestions are most prevalent in the literature: an earlier one of 1012-1088, used by Tarthang Tulku (1991: 229), Hirshberg (2016: 10), and Jackson (2019: 310), and a later one of 1042-1136, used by the BDRC. The publisher's colophon of the 1999 edition of Rongzom's collected works states he was born in the iron-dragon year (1040). For more information see Sur, 2021: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>

²²⁴ Sur 2021: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>

teaching lineages and re-translating tantras that were perceived to have degenerated during the previous period. This era was characterized by a renewed engagement with Indian Buddhist teachings, coupled with considerable scepticism towards the Nyingma tradition's older tantras translated during the Early Dissemination (*snga dar*). Within this complex and rich intellectual landscape – marked by decentralized political and monastic institutions of power, a quest for authoritative teachings, and a critical reappraisal of existing literary traditions – Rongzompa flourished as a leader of Buddhist lay communities and emerged as a significant scholarly figure.

Within this culturally self-reflective atmosphere, there appears to have been a certain degree of suspicion regarding native Tibetans' capacity to understand, explicate, and transmit authentic Buddhist teachings. The atmosphere is well characterized by formal ordinances (*bka' shog*) by Lha Lama Yéshé Ö (947 – 1019/1024) and Photrang Shiwa Ö (c. 11th cent.). These publicly chastised certain prevalent practices, such as the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), and the lay communities and their lay priests for upholding inauthentic or, at the very least, incorrectly understood practices.²²⁵ Instead, they 'championed a conservative style of institutional monasticism'.²²⁶ Yéshé Ö and his nephew Jangchup Ö (984-1078) were responsible for inviting the Bengali master Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna to Tibet, and thereby initiating what would become known as the Kadampa (*bKa' gdams pa*) tradition. Rongzompa and his community would likely have been typical targets of this public defamation, as they were part of a lay community who practised the ancient tantras and teachings like the Great Perfection. It is thus perhaps not particularly surprising that Rongzompa, the outstanding scholar that he was, authored many polemical works to authenticate his tradition and its approach to Vajrayāna Buddhism. An intriguing account in

²²⁵ Cabezon 2007: 22. See Karmay (1998: 31-38) for a translation of the *bka' shog* and full list of the various practices Zhiwa Ö considered illegitimate.

²²⁶ Sur 2021: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>

the *Blue Annals* (*Deb sngon*) by Gö Lotsaba Zhönnu Pel (1392–1481)²²⁷ illustrates why this was against the norms and customs of the time. During that period, Tibetans considered themselves suitable for translating authentic Indian texts but not, it seems, for authoring their own.²²⁸ The account relates a conference of sorts organized by the scholars of the four horns (*ru bzhi*, i.e. the four regions) of central Tibet to discuss and validate the authenticity of the scriptures in distribution at that time. Rongzompa's texts were rejected and censured, apparently due to the mere fact that they were written by a Tibetan. However, upon discussing their content with Rongzompa, several members of this conference were so in awe of his scholarly abilities that they requested to be his students. These included a disciple of Marpa Chökyi Lodro (c. 1012 – 1097), Marpa Dowa (1042 – 1136); the translator Gö Khukpa Lhetse (early 11th cent. – late 11th cent.), and Gorub Lotsāwa Chökyi Sherab (11th cent.). These scholars, perhaps inspired by Rongzom's example, would later come to write their own authoritative texts.²²⁹ Rongzompa's desire to validate his tradition may have contributed to his prestigious scholarly output. His collected works were originally reported to have totalled 60 volumes, including 300 individual works, although most have been lost.²³⁰ The recent edition of his oeuvre contains 23 texts authored by him.²³¹

Rongzompa was active at a time when the epistemological school of Sangphu (*gSang phu*) Monastery, founded in 1071 or 1073, flourished. Teachers such as Ngok Loden Sherab (1059–1109), Chapa Chökyi Sengé (1109-1169), and their students significantly influenced the intellectual climate of central Tibet in the 11th and 12th centuries. Their dissemination of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's logico-epistemological system with its emphasis on justified knowledge and highly sophisticated account of epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*),

²²⁷ See the full biography translated in Roerich, 1976: 160-167.

²²⁸ Almogi 2002: 69.

²²⁹ Sur 2021: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>

²³⁰ Almogi 2002: 75.

²³¹ Sur 2021: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>

must have influenced Rongzompa.²³² The dialectical and logical rules of this system were becoming the norm in central Tibetan dialectics, and would provide Rongzompa with the basic logical arguments to build his own sophisticated system of epistemology – one that could both validate his tradition’s approach to Vajrayāna and ostensibly benefit its practitioners. Rongzom, in his defence of Nyingmapa tantras, would use Dharmakīrtian style arguments to prove the transcendental vision of Vajrayāna Buddhism, what he terms the purity (*rnam par dag pa*) and equality (*mnyam nyid*) of all phenomena. He thus integrated a thoroughly dialectical approach to what he considered the higher “view” (*lta ba, dṛṣṭi*) of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

In contrast, many of the masters from the New Traditions (*gSar ma*), the Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug, held that the ultimate reality taught in Buddhist tantras is shared with that taught in exoteric sūtras, the so-called *pāramitā* (*phar phyin gyi theg pa*) or Dialectical Vehicle (*mtshan nyid theg pa*).²³³ It is this reality that is to be accessed through the more expedient means, or methods (*upāya, thabs*), taught in the Vajra Vehicle (*rdo rje theg pa*). This could lead one to the conclusion that the logical and dialectical methods taught to access ultimate reality in the Perfection Vehicle are not a feature of Buddhist tantra. However, various scholars throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism have argued the opposite. Tsongkhapa goes to great lengths in his works on Vajrayāna to prove that the view of emptiness taught in the Madhyamaka treatises is exactly that which is taught in the Tantras, the difference between the two vehicles lies in the methods used to actualise this reality. For instance, in his *sNgag rim chen mo* Tsongkhapa asserts:

The division [of the Mahayana in the Secret Mantra and Perfection Vehicles] is not about whether or not it has the view cognising the suchness of phenomena. For there is no view superior to Nagarjuna's presentation in his Treatise on the Middle Way of

²³² Köppl 2008: 20.

²³³ This appears to be a Tibetan term of art, with no Sanskrit equivalent, which emphasises the “philosophical” or dialectical character of the system.

the thought of the definitive sutras, such as the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.... [T]he division of the Mahayana into two is not made on account of the wisdom cognising the profound emptiness but on account of method.²³⁴

Likewise, Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) also held that the *Freedom from Elaboration* (*sros bral*) view expressed in the Madhyamaka corpus is not superseded by the Vajrayāna. In typical egalitarian fashion Mipham appears to agree with Sakya Paṇḍita (although not always consistently).²³⁵ Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–1899), however, proposes a division of Madhyamaka into that of sūtra and that of secret mantra (*gsang sngags*) or Vajrayāna.²³⁶ Likewise, Rongzom and many of his fellow Nyingmapas held that the ultimate view of reality practiced in the Perfection Vehicle is inferior to that of the Vajra Vehicle. To fully appreciate Rongzompa’s arguments and his consequent use of the Example, we shall now summarize some of the salient features of Rongzom’s doxographic model of Buddhist vehicles and his critique of Madhyamaka, largely based on Köppl’s treatment of this topic.

3.2.2. Rongzompa’s Thought

i. Vajrayāna Doxography and the Problem with Madhyamaka

Following the *Man ngag lta ba’i phreng ba*²³⁷ traditionally ascribed to Padmasambhava, Rongzom generally recognises the nine vehicles commonly presented in the Nyingma tradition: the first three constitute the Perfection Vehicle and begin with the vehicles of the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas. The remaining six include the three “outer” tantra vehicles: ²³⁸ Kriyā (*kri ya, bya ba*), Caryā (*spyod pa*) or Upāya (*u pa ya*), and Yoga

²³⁴ Translation taken from Hopkins 1987: 110 & 115-116. Also, translated in Köppl 2008: 33.

²³⁵ For more details see Köppl 2008: 32-33.

²³⁶ Callahan 2007.

²³⁷ Padmasambhava 1999: 293-295.

²³⁸ In this passage Rongzompa transliterates the Sanskrit of these vehicles, but either him or the editor of the 1999 edition of his collected works appears to have missed the *ā* in their transliteration of *upāya*. I have provided the common Tibetan translations of these terms (when available) together with Rongzompa’s transliteration.

(*yo ga, rnal 'byor*); and the three “inner” vehicles, Mahāyoga (*ma hA yo ga, rnal 'byor chen po*), Anuyoga (*a nu yo ga, rjes su rnal 'byor*), and Atiyoga (*a ti yo ga, bshin tu rnal 'byor*),²³⁹ which is usually synonymous with the Great Perfection. While there are indeed many differences between these two groups, of particular concern here is Rongzom’s demarcation of them based on differing degrees of realisation of the inseparability of the two truths,²⁴⁰ a model of reality characteristic of Nāgārjuna and his heirs’ Madhyamaka treatises. The Outer Vehicles illustrate only a partial realisation of the union of the two truths, the Inner Tantras have a medium realisation, but only the Great Perfection fully realizes this union.²⁴¹ In this reading, Rongzom places the Great Perfection above the Inner Tantras.²⁴² This distinction highlights the hierarchical progression of Buddhist vehicles, with higher vehicles demonstrating more sophisticated realisations of the two truths. The higher vehicles thus have a higher *view* of reality than the exoteric Perfection Vehicle. For Rongzom, this also means they have a superior realisation of the two truths than is afforded by the teachings in Madhyamaka.

ii. On a Division of Relative Truth

In his *Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa* Rongzom criticises Madhyamaka for what he considers an objectification of the relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya, kun rdzob bden pa*),²⁴³ through its division of relative truth into the authentic (*yang dag pa'i bden pa*), and inauthentic (*yang dag ma yin pa*). This division divides the relative on the basis of whether or not the object can perform the telic function (*don byed par nus pa*) that it appears to

²³⁹ Rongzompa 1999b: vol.1, 499.

²⁴⁰ Rongzompa 1999b: vol.1, 502: *gsang sngags kyi nang gi bye brag 'di dag kyang/ bden pa gnyis dbyer yed par 'dod pa'i dang po kri ya nas brtsams nas/ rdzogs pa chen por mthar phyin to/*

²⁴¹ Köppl 2008: 28.

²⁴² Köppl 2008: 28. Presumably he means the Great Perfection is superior to only the first two Inner Tantras, as the last Inner Tantra Atiyoga is, as mentioned, usually synonymous with the Great Perfection.

²⁴³ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 421-424. English translation in Sur, 2017: 44-45.

possess. For instance, a mirage is an inauthentic relative truth because one cannot drink a mirage, while a lake is an authentic relative for one can drink its water. This division of relative truth is commonly considered that of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (*dbu ma rang brgyud pa*) system,²⁴⁴ a designation which—although of Tibetan origin—undoubtedly denotes a stream of Indian Buddhist thought, as we saw in the introduction to this chapter. Rongzompa does not use the terms Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika in his extant writings, nor does he explicitly reference Candrakīrti.²⁴⁵ However, this may be because the efforts of Patsap Nyima Drak, a contemporary of Rongzom, to propagate Candrakīrti’s works simply escaped Rongzom’s attention,²⁴⁶ or works where he explicitly addresses Candrakīrti are no longer available to us. Be that as it may, Rongzom critiques an unspecified Madhyamaka system’s division of the two truths that is based on different objects. According to this model, it is an object’s ability or inability to perform its appropriate function that is the basis for distinguishing if it is an authentic or inauthentic relative truth. Rongzom finds this division absurd for when a vase and its reflected image are broken down analytically into their parts, they have both lost the appearance of performing any function. Moreover, both

²⁴⁴ This is because the so-called Svātantrika Jñānagarbha in his *Satyadvayavibhāṅga* makes the same division of conventional truths. Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhāṅga*, D 3882, 6b.5: *kun rdzob ni rnam pa gnyis su bstan te/ snang du 'dra yang don byed dag /nus pa'i phyir dang mi nus phyir/ /yang dag yang dag ma yin pas/ /kun rdzob kyi ni dbye ba byas/ /zhes bya ba 'o.*

²⁴⁵ Instead, he favours the division into the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and the Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka, or alternatively to the Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavādins (*rab tu mi gnas pa*) and Māyopamādvayavādins (*sgyu ma rigs grub pa*); see Rongzompa 1999c: vol. 2, 20; Tauscher, 2003: 209, Almogi 2009: 225, and Köpp 2008: 41. Dreyfus (2023: 331) asserts that Rongzompa was a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, while Almogi (2009: 16, 225-232) and Wangchuk (2017: 91, fn 7) are convinced that he was actually a Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavādin.

²⁴⁶ Tauscher 2003: 209. Almogi (2009: 228-229) holds that there is no evidence that Rongzompa was aware of Candrakīrti’s works, despite noting important similarities in their views, particularly their agreement that gnosis (*jñāna*, *ye shes*) does not exist at the level of a Buddha. However, Köppl suggests that there is evidence in Rongzompa’s writings on Madhyamaka that he was indeed influenced by Candrakīrti’s thought. She notes the Candrakīrtian division of the two truths based on the subjects that perceive them and not on the objects, and several claims made by Ju Mipham that Rongzom was a follower of Candrakīrti, since both reject the *svabhāva* of each of the two truths, neither suggest a privileged ontology for the two types of conventional truths, and also agree in how they prove emptiness. (Köppl 2008: 44, 54). There is more evidence in support of this theory, I shall extrapolate on this below in relation to Rongzom’s use of the Example.

a face and a reflection are equal in possessing certain apparent functions.²⁴⁷ A reflection can reflect light, for example. Perhaps we can also say, it can even produce cognitions of itself just as effectively as a real face. To thus make any division of the relative based on an object's ontology, that is, a mirage being more "real" than a lake, makes no sense at all for Rongzom. As he says: 'All phenomena are taught to be equal in being like an illusion.'²⁴⁸ Even a rope and the rope that appears as a snake to someone in the dark are equally imputed, with no ultimate identity. The cognitions of them are also both mistaken (*'khrul pa'i shes pa*).²⁴⁹ To make such a division of "mere appearances" objectifies the relative.²⁵⁰ Moreover, if one argues conventional truths should be left without applying dialectical reasoning to them, he responds, surely is not dividing conventional truth into these two types a form of dialectical reasoning?²⁵¹

iii. Madhyamaka's Inability to Unify the Two Truths

This kind of Madhyamaka, for Rongzom, cannot unify the two truths. Due to its assertion that both truths are actually true—even if the authentic relative truth is only relatively so because of its capacity to perform functions—this prevents such a Mādhyamika from realising the unification of the two truths.²⁵² For, even if one refutes the *svabhāva* of both truths, one still holds distinct ontologies for the ultimate truth and the merely imputed and yet conventionally functional relative truth. Through holding to such a distinction, one will

²⁴⁷ Rongzompa 1999b, vol. 1, 422-423: *bya ba byed pa yang phal cher gnod kyis gzhag pa yin na/ 'di ltar nyi ma'i gzugs brnyan gyis ni mig la gnod par byed do/ zla ba'i gzugs brnyan gyis ni phan par byed do/ /gnyi' gas kyang grib ma sel bar byed do/*. Sur misreads this passage as an absurd consequence. Sur 2017: 45.

²⁴⁸ Rongzompa 1999b, vol. 1, 435: *chos thams cad sgyu ma lta bur 'go' mnyam par bstan pa*.

²⁴⁹ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 424-425.

²⁵⁰ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 423: *don dam par rdzas su yod par bsgrub pa'i rigs pa'i spungs mi bzod kyang/ / yang dag pa'i kun rdzob tsam du rdzas su yod par bsgrub pa la yang/ chos kyi rdzas kyis bya ba byed par mi sgrub par/ gang zag gi rdzas kyis bya ba byed par sgrub pa 'di la/ yang dag pa'i kun rdzob ces kyang ji ltar tha snyad 'jug ste/ 'jig rten phal pa'i lta ba dang bye brag du gyur pa ci zhig yod*.

²⁵¹ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 423.

²⁵² Köppl 2008: 49-50.

not reach the union of the two truths. Such a view consequently leaves the Mādhyamika unable to realize the fundamental nature of reality as taught in the *Guhyagarbhatantra*: phenomena are, on the ultimate level, in a state of great equality (*mnyams pa chen po*), on the relative level, in a state of great purity (*dag ma chen po*), and these two are fundamentally united in a state of great union (*dbyer med pa chen po*).²⁵³

[In the Vajra Vehicle] the assertion that ultimately there is no origination or cessation is the same as that in Madhyamaka, as is [the assertion] that the aggregates, elements, and sense-spheres are just illusory. Although, they differ in that while [Madhyamaka considers] them to be illusory, it does not have the view that they are divine and utterly pure (*yongs su dag pa 'i lha*), nor that the two truths are indivisible.²⁵⁴

For Rongzom relative entities are, if analysed properly, not merely illusory as the Mādhyamika would have it, but are qualitatively pure. The mistaken (*'khrul ba*) appearance of them as the nature of impure aggregates, elements, and the like is a result of the karma and delusions of sentient beings, primordially, appearances have always been pure and perfected, the sphere of the enlightened body, speech, and mind.²⁵⁵ Their actual nature (*dngos po 'i gnas lugs*) as perceived by Buddhas and accomplished ones (*siddha, dngos grub can*) is complete purity, manifesting as divinities and maṇḍalas. It is the Madhyamaka view that has irretrievably separated the two truths, keeping them bound in the quagmire of a view that requires impure appearances to be epistemically warranted. Their inability to prove the unified and thus equal nature of the two truths has blocked them from realising the purity of relative truth. As Köppl succinctly summarises: “If phenomena were not universally pure,

²⁵³ Wangchuk 2009: 225, Köppl 2008: 48-49.

²⁵⁴ Rongzompa 1999c, vol. 2, 20-21: *don dam par skye 'gag med par 'dod pa ni dbu ma dang mthun no/ kun rdzob tu phung po khams dang skye mched sgyu ma tsam du lta ba 'ang mthun no/ bye brag tu na sgyu ma 'i mtshan nyid de dag kyang yongs su dag pa 'i lha 'i mtshan nyid du lta ba dang/ bden pa gnyis kyang dbyer med par lta bas bye brag tu byas pa//* (Also translated in Köppl 2008: 39).

²⁵⁵ Rongzompa 2008: 113-114: *yas nas mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa 'o/ /de bas sa mtshan ma sna tshogs su snang ba 'i chos rnams sku gsung thugs rdo rje 'i dkyil 'khor nyid yin.*

they could not be equal, and unless everything is absolutely equal, one cannot establish the truth of purity.”²⁵⁶

3.2.3. Rongzompa’s Application of the Example

i. The Theory

Rongzompa further develops this line of argument in several texts with the help of the Example. Not only are appearances ontologically pure due to their ultimate empty equality, but they are also relatively pure because they are perceived as such by those whose perception has been sufficiently purified. In his *sNang ba lhar bsgrub pa*²⁵⁷ he utilises the four reasonings (*yukti, rigs pa*) developed by Asaṅga in his *Bodhisattvabhūmi*²⁵⁸ and *Śrāvakabhūmi*,²⁵⁹ and which also appear in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.²⁶⁰ For our purposes, Rongzom’s use of the reasoning of valid proof (*upapattisādhanayukti, ’thad pa sgrub pa ’i rigs pa*), within which he uses the Example, is the most pertinent. His arguments for the pure and divine nature of appearances through this line of reasoning has various stages.

Initially, he provides a very essential argument in relation to a scripture accepted by both parties in the debate that asserts the real nature (*chos nyid*) of phenomena is enlightened. Wangchuk summarises the essential argument thus: ‘One of Rongzompa’s main arguments is that a *dharma* (“phenomenon”) can hardly be impure if its *dharmatā* (“true reality”) is

²⁵⁶ Köppl 2008: 50-51.

²⁵⁷ English translation and critical Tibetan edition in Köppl 2008.

²⁵⁸ Ogiwara 1930: vol. 2, 293. 17–18.

²⁵⁹ Śrāvakabhūmi Study Group 1998: 236.10–240.15.

²⁶⁰ Lamotte 1935: 155–158. These four *yukti* are (i) the reasoning of efficacy (*kāryakaranayukti, bya ba ’byed pa ’i rigs pa*), (ii) the reasoning of dependency (*apekṣāyukti, ltos pa ’i rigs pa*), (iii) the reasoning of valid proof (*upapattisādhanayukti, ’thad pa sgrub pa ’i rigs pa*), and (iv) the reasoning of intrinsic nature (*dharmatāyukti, chos nyid kyi rigs pa*). They have been carefully unpacked by Köppl (2008: 61-88). Also, see Yoshimizu (1996: 160) for discussion of their occurrence in Asaṅga’s texts and the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.

pure, for there is an essential connection between *dharma* and *dharmatā*. Both *dharma* and *dharmatā* are thus pure, and hence also divine.²⁶¹

Rongzom elaborates on this general assertion by focussing his discussion on “mere appearances”, everything that appears. He argues they are the nature of enlightened or vajra (*rdo rje*) body, speech, and mind. His thesis is first presented in a “subitist” fashion (*cig car*) for those of sharp faculties who will quickly realize it and is followed by a more “gradual” (*rim gyis*) rationale for those who are less sharp.²⁶²

For the subitist:

Hungry ghosts perceive rivers to be filled with pus. Some among them will also have heard that human beings perceive water. Among them, some may, thus, believe that pus is the genuine entity and that water is an imputed form. Others may believe that pus is an impure appearance and that, therefore, water, as perceived by humans, is what genuinely [exists]. The [latter group] will argue, saying, “Friends, this river, filled with pus, as perceived in common by us hungry ghosts, is, in fact, a river of water as perceived by humans. For, if somebody who has free access to that water dedicates the water to us and gives it to us, we hungry ghosts will also perceive, and experience, it as water. It is just like that water we have obtained from time to time in the past.”²⁶³

Due to their prior experience of human-water becoming hungry-ghost-water the latter group of hungry ghosts are aware their perception of pus is limited, and can change if the human-water is blessed and dedicated to them. Implicitly, the hungry ghosts are aware, it seems, that humans are in a superior epistemic position compared to themselves in accessing the real nature of the apparent pus. Rongzompa then maps this onto his central thesis.

In the same way, some individuals will have heard that the appearances of bodies and enjoyments, as commonly perceived by humans, can be perceived by people of

²⁶¹ Wangchuk 2009: 225.

²⁶² This division of practitioners into the subitist (*cig ca ba*) and gradualist (*rim gyis pa*) is a leitmotif in traditional and contemporary discussions of the Nyingma and Sarma traditions. For a discussion of the origin of the controversy during the Tibetan imperial period, see Gomez (1983), Cabezon (2007: 18-21), and van Schaik (2015).

²⁶³ Translation quoted from Köppl 2008: 100-101. Tibetan in Rongzompa 2008, 119.

complete purity as a divine maṇḍala. Moreover, they also know that, according to Secret Mantra, [everything] is taught to be the divine maṇḍala. Some will argue that the appearances of ordinary bodies and enjoyments are genuine entities, while the seeing of divinities is an imputation and so on. Others will believe ordinary bodies and enjoyments to be impure appearances and that divinity as seen by pure individuals and as renowned in the Secret Mantra is therefore the genuine characteristic of entities.²⁶⁴

Rongzom argues that this latter group, through their exposure to Secret Mantra teachings and accounts of realised practitioners, recognise that their own perception is limited. They understand that through receiving tantric empowerment (*abhiṣeka*, *dbang*) from such realised beings and practicing these teachings, they too could come to experience appearances in their purified form—as the maṇḍala and deities. This seems sufficient evidence for a subitist to realise this thesis. The gradualist, however, must first validate their ordinary perception before accepting that it can be superseded by a more accurate cognition. For such individuals, one must initially establish that both appearances—of pus and water—are equally mental aspects (*rnam pa*) and share the common feature of appearing as fluid (*gsher ba*). Having established this foundation, Rongzom then proceeds to refute the aspect or feature of pus.

It is indeed true that these two are equal in being apparent features [*rnam pa*] of the mind, but, since the appearance of pus is impure, it is delusion. Water is a pure appearance and, therefore, not delusion. In this way whatever is delusion is impure and that which is impure is delusion. This [demonstrates] equal pervasion. Purity and non-delusion should be viewed in the same way [i.e., as equal].²⁶⁵

Here we see the crux of Rongzompa's argument: the objects of deluded perception are impure, the objects of pure perception are thus pure, due to which the real nature of the object is that perceived by the undeluded perception. (This argument requires the recognition that deluded perceptions are misguided ones). This argument has been termed by Wangchuk

²⁶⁴ Translation quoted from Köppl 2008: 101. Tibetan in Rongzompa 2008: 120.

²⁶⁵ Translation quoted from Köppl 2008: 103. Rongzompa 2008: 122.

“a relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception” which he defines thus: ‘The validity of perception is directly proportional to the purity of perception.’²⁶⁶ Rongzom describes the idea in his commentary to the *Guhyagarbha tantra*, *dKon cog 'grel* thus:

With regards to a river that is evident to [various] beings, although it is seen as a flowing [body] of liquid (*gsher bar 'bab par*), hungry ghosts see it as pus and the like, a flow of liquid that is extremely impure; humans see it as pure, clear, without impurities, unharmed to drink and consume, and as something that will nourish their senses. Those who dwell in pure realms see it as an extremely pure river of nectar, something that heals and is extremely nourishing for the senses. Yet, for as long as one has not completely abandoned one’s obscurations, one will not comprehend this; having exhausted them all, one will comprehend it and undertake the activity of a Buddha. If one wants to discuss this further, since all [of the beings] are similar in seeing liquid (*gsher ba*), there is not a basis for debate, which is or is not water (*chu*), since the impure water, pure water, and extremely pure water that are seen, are different. Therefore, since each of the individual beings warrant [their own appearance] with direct perception, there will be disagreement about the other characteristics [not seen by themselves].²⁶⁷

Therefore, Rongzom concludes:

When one examines impartially the [various perceptions of the liquid in the Example, it is clear that] the purer the perception (*mthong ba*), the more accurate (*bden par*) it is. For, in dependence on being the objects of powerful ones who have purified their obscurations, [those objects] are considered stable and undecieving.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Wangchuk, 2009: 232.

²⁶⁷ Rongzompa 1999a, vol. 1, 103-104: *de la re zhig thun mong du na 'gro ba rnams kyis mthun par mngon du byas pa'i chu klung zhig la/ gsher bar 'bab par mthong bar mthun yang/ yi dwags rnams kyis ni rnag la sogs pa yongs su ma dag pa'i chu klung zhig tu 'bab par mthong ngo/ mi rnams kyis ni dag cing dang la dri ma med cing lto ba dang mgrin pa la mi gnod la dbang po'i rgyun rgyas par byed pa zhig tu mthong ngo/ zhing dag pa na gnas pa'i 'gro ba rnams kyis shin tu rnam par dag pa'i bdud tshi'i chu bo dbang po'i rgyun shin tu yang rgyas par byed cing nad rnams kyang med par byed la/ sgrib pa ma zad kyi bar du 'ju bar yang mi 'gyur zhing / nam sgrib pa zad par byas nas sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa yongs su grub ste 'ju bar mthong ngo/ 'di rnams rtsod pa 'gyed pa na/ kun gyis gsher bar mthong ba mthun pa'i phyir ro/ /chu yin nam ma yin pa'i tsod pa'i gzhi med do/ ma dag pa'i chu dang dag pa'i chu dang shin tu rnam par dag pa'i chu rnams mthong ba tha dad pas/ de'i phyir so so rang rang gi mngon sum gyis grub pa tshad mar byas nas mtshan nyid gzhan du 'gal bar rgol bar byed do/*

²⁶⁸ Rongzompa 1999a, vol. 1, 104: *de rnams la gzu bo 'i blos gzhal bar byas na / ji ltar ji ltar mthong ba dag pa de ltar de ltar bden pa yin te / sgrib pa'i dri ma dag pa rnams kyi dbang po rnams kyi yul yin pa'i phyir dang / ltos te rnam par bzhas na brtan zhing mi bslu ba'i phyir ro //* (This passage is also translated in Wangchuk 2009: 233, fn.47).

The premise that the purer (less afflicted) the perception is, the more accurate it will be, finds supported in Abhidharma phenomenology, as one of the defining functions of the *kleśas* in these systems is to cause ‘one to be deluded (*sammohayati*) about the cognitive object (*ālambana*) of consciousness (*viññāna*).’²⁶⁹ Likewise, there are descriptions of different types and degrees of afflictions prevalent in various Buddhist realms. For instance, attachment to the *kāmadhātu* (and its objects) does not exist in the *rūpadhātu* or *ārūpyadhātu*.²⁷⁰ Additionally, eleven of the sixteen subsidiary afflictions (*upakleśa*) are found only in the *kāmadhātu*.²⁷¹ There are also descriptions of only subtler levels of attachment being present as one progresses upward from the *rūpadhātu* to the *ārūpyadhātu*.²⁷²

As such, for Rongzompa the cognitions of beings from a higher realm are epistemically superior to those below. Wangchuk is thus right to say Rongzom is concerned with and rejects ‘the arbitrariness of perceptual validity’.²⁷³ Rongzom does indeed seek a solution to epistemic relativism, since he explicitly states in the passage just cited that the objects of the various beings are warranted by direct perception. He develops this idea further in his *Theg pa chen po ’i tshul la ’jug pa*,²⁷⁴ where he attempts to ground his relative theory of the purity and validity of perception via a common object. In this text he gives various examples of perceptual relativism, which include mice that thrive in burning woods, gods that are nourished by fire, grass that appears as food for animals but not for humans, and the like. In all of these examples he holds there is a single basis (*gzhi*) for the various contradictory experiences. For example:

²⁶⁹ Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, V.1ff (Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: Vol. 2, 1656).

²⁷⁰ Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, V.2ff (Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: Vol. 2, 1661).

²⁷¹ Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*, V. 53 (Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: Vol. 2, 1735-1736).

²⁷² For example, see Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, V.2ff (Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: vol. 2, 1661).

²⁷³ Wangchuk 2009: 231.

²⁷⁴ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 415– 555.

Say there are two humans staying in a certain place, one is drunk and catatonic, without the ability to discriminate feelings or accessible objects (*nye bar spyod pa*).²⁷⁵ The other possesses mindfulness and introspection. Although they may both be touched with fire, it is as though the first does not experience the unpleasant touch of the fire, and yet is burned. The other does experience being burned, and yet, there is a common appearance that both partake in as the fruition of their karma. They are thus the same in having been burned. As such, there are differences with regards to appearances that are accessible and that are not.²⁷⁶

There is a shared basis for the various perceptions, “appearances” (*snang ba*), which due to different karmas are experienced in different ways. Yet, Rongzom argues that ‘all of the various conventional appearances, are to be taken as a shared basis [of perception] that appears in common [to all beings].’²⁷⁷ This notion of a single basis may be another facet of Rongzom’s attempt to avoid epistemic relativism, in that through anchoring the various perceptions, within his ladder of epistemic validity, to a shared object, he recognises that these can only be gradually more accurate in relation to something. As Nāgārjuna’s famous maxim goes: objects are established by their epistemic instruments and those in turn are established in dependence on their object.²⁷⁸ Both acquire their natures in dependence on each other. One can only hold a perception is more accurate through reference to what it perceives, and one can only hold an object possesses a certain nature through reference to its undistorted perception.

ii. Indian Sources for the Theory

²⁷⁵ I follow Sur’s translation here of *nye bar spyod pa* (Sur 2017: 50-51).

²⁷⁶ Rongzompa 1999b: vol.1, 428-429: *'di ltar 'gro ba mir gyur ba gnyis lhan cig na gnas pa las/ gcig ni ra ro'am brgyal bar gyurd te/ tshor ba dang nye bar spyod pa'i 'du shes dang mi ldan no/ gcig ni dran pa dang shes bzhin du ldan te gnas pa las/ gnyi' ga la mes mnyam du reg par gyur pa la/ gcig ni mes reg pa'i sdug bsngal nyams su ma myong bzhin du tshig go/ gcig ni myong bzhin du tshig ste/ gnyi' ga'ang las kyi bgo skal la spyod pa mthun par snang ba yin pas tshig ni mnyam du tshig go /'di lta bu ni nye bar spyod pa dang bcas pa dang nye bar spyod pa dang ldan pa ma yin par snang ba'i bye brag dag go.* Sur (2017: 51) misunderstands *tshig* here to mean “word”, I take it as the past of *'tshig*.

²⁷⁷ Rongzompa 1999b: vol. 1, 425: *kun rdzob kyi bye brag du snang ba thams cad ni 'di lta ste/ thun mong gi snang ba mthun pa zhig gzhir byas pa la/*

²⁷⁸ Westerhoff 2010: 80-82.

This relative theory of the purity and validity of perception is a novel and creative premise that accomplishes multiple aims. It supports Rongzompa's pan-illusionistic theory of the purity of phenomena with an epistemology that avoids rampant relativism and the arbitrariness of epistemic instruments. It also validates his tradition's principle tantra and its view of the equality and purity of phenomena. But is this theory his own invention? Wangchuk offers several possible antecedents for the theory, such as Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra* (6. 27):²⁷⁹

Just as the perception that perceives with an eye disease,
Does not invalidate the cognition of one without the disease,
Likewise, the awarenesses of those who have forsaken stainless wisdom,
Do not invalidate stainless awarenesses.²⁸⁰

The *Bhāṣya* continues: 'With regards to reality, only āryas are authoritative (*tshad ma*), non-ārya beings are not.'²⁸¹ Candrakīrti further substantiates this point in verse 6.30, arguing if ordinary worldlings were accurate regarding reality (*tattva, de nyid*) what use would there be for āryas, or their path?²⁸² Later in the text (6.214) he also argues the omniscient wisdom of a Buddha is the only cognition that can be considered direct perception (*pratyakṣa, mngon*

²⁷⁹ Wangchuk 2009: 232-233.

²⁸⁰ Candrakīrti *Madhyamakāvātāra*, 6.27:

na bādgate jñānam ataimirāṇām
yathopalabdhis timirekṣaṇāṇām |
tathāmalajñānatiraskṛtānām

dhiyāsti bādho na dhiyo 'malāyāḥ || (Sanskrit in Li Xuezhong, ed., 2015: 7)

D 3861, 205b.1-2: *mig ni rab rib can gyis dmigs pa yis/ /rab rib med shes la gnod min ji ltar/ /de bzhin dri med ye shes spangs pa'i blos/ /dri med blo la gnod pa yod ma yin.*

²⁸¹ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, D3862, 256a.6: *de kho na nyid bsam pa la 'phags pa rnams kho na tshad ma yin gyi 'phags pa ma yin pa dag ni ma yin no.*

²⁸² Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātāra*, 6.30, (Sanskrit in Candrakīrti 2015, Edited by Li Xuezhong), 8:

lokaḥ pramāṇam yadi tattvadarśī
syāl loka evety aparaiḥ kim āryaiḥ |
kim āryamārgeṇa bhaved ca kāryam
mūḍhaḥ pramāṇam na hi nāma yuktah ||

D 3861, 205b.3: *gal te 'jig rten tshad ma yin na ni/ /'jig rten de nyid mthong bas 'phags gzhan gyis/ /ci dgos 'phags pa'i lam gyis ci zhig bya/ /blun po tshad mar rigs pa'ang ma yin no/*

sum), other perceptions cannot for they are limited (*ekadeśatva, nyi tshe ba nyid*).²⁸³ He thus makes a clear distinction between the epistemic authority of āryas and worldlings regarding ultimate reality. A similar distinction can also be seen in Candrakīrti's writings in relation to conventional objects. As mentioned in the introduction, Salvini has highlighted two levels of conventional knowledge within Candrakīrti's thought: Those common conventions that are the domain of unspecialised knowledge, for example, that an eye sees matter; and conventions that require a more refined and specialised form of knowledge to access, for example, that the eye sees in dependence on a material object, a sense faculty, and a previous moment of visual consciousness (and other similar Abhidharma categories). This more specialised form of epistemic authority, afforded by Abhidharma's conventional categories, has still not reached the ultimate level of insight that sees the emptiness of *svabhāva*. It is simply a more refined form of knowledge in relation to a more specialised form of convention, one that while it does not represent ultimate reality, it does at least approach it.²⁸⁴ Wangchuk also notes a point made by Śāntideva (late 7th to mid-8th cent. CE) in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (IX. 3–4ab).²⁸⁵ In this text Śāntideva also distinguishes the knowledge or awareness (*dhī*) of yogins and worldlings, with the awareness of the former invalidating (*bādhyate*) that of the latter, and that of more advanced yogins invalidating the less advanced.²⁸⁶ Finally, as noted in the previous chapter, the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* may also have

²⁸³ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, VI.214:

*sarvākārajñātājñānaṃ matam pratyakṣalakṣaṇam |
anyat prādeśikatvena na pratyakṣam itīṣyate ||*

D 3861, 214b.4: *rnam kun mkhyen nyid ye shes ni/ /mngon sum mtshan nyid can du 'dod/ /gzhan ni nyi tshe ba nyid kyis/ /mngon sum zhes byar mi 'dod do/* (Sanskrit in Li 2015, 29)

²⁸⁴ Salvini 2023.

²⁸⁵ Wangchuk 2009: 233.

²⁸⁶ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, IX.3–4ab:

*tatra loko dvidhā dṛṣṭo yogī prākṛtakastathā |
tatra prākṛtako loko yogilokena bādhyate || 3 ||*

bādhyante dhīviśeṣeṇa yogino 'pyuttarottaraiḥ | (Vaidya 1960a: 177-178).

D 3871, 31a.2: */de la 'jig rten rnam gnyis mthong/ /rnal 'byor pa dang phal pa'o/ /de la 'jig rten phal pa ni/ /rnal 'byor 'jig rten gwis gnod cing/ /rnal 'byor pa yang blo khyad kyis/ /gong ma gong ma rnams kyis gnod/.*

been a source for Rongzompa's theory.²⁸⁷ This sūtra utilised the Example to substantiate a re-interpretation of mainstream Buddhists' characterisation of the Buddha and the events surrounding his life, which this thesis interpreted as a form of Mahāyāna historisation. The sūtra explicitly recognised the epistemic superiority of the bodhisattvas over the śrāvaka disciples, similar to Rongzompa's hierarchy of perceptive capacities.

Although none of these points map perfectly onto Rongzom's relative theory of the purity and validity of perception, for none explicitly relate to Vajrayāna practice or the epistemic warrant of pure conventions, Candrakīrti's views are perhaps the closest. He sees Abhidharma categories of conventional objects as approaching ultimate reality, while Rongzompa considers the Vajrayāna's descriptions of the conventional purity of reality as guiding one closer to their ultimate equality. As such, it is not such a stretch to concede these points may have inspired Rongzom, and, if they did, Köppl's theory discussed above that Rongzompa was indeed aware of Candrakīrti has more evidence in its favour.

3.2.4. Conclusions

In this section we have seen that Rongzompa is wary of setting forth an epistemological system that cannot certify a yogin's pure perception as cognitively more reliable than a hungry ghost's. We have seen that he was also concerned with proving the authenticity of the tantras of his tradition, such as the *Guhyagarbha* and its tenet that all beings and their environments are ultimately equal and primordially pure. Vajrayāna practice is not just a mental exercise of transforming impure entities into pure entities. It is that of purifying one's perception and appearances, such that the fundamental equal and pure nature of reality dawns. Rongzom has attempted to prove the equal nature of phenomena via a unifying

Wangchuk (2008: 233-234) suggests that Mañjuśrimitra's (8th cent.) *Bodhicittabhāvanā* and *Bodhicittabhāvanānirdeśa* could also have been sources for Rongzom's insightful theory.

²⁸⁷ Chapter 2: 81.

theory of the two truths and a critique of Madhyamaka's ontological division of them. All appearances are ultimately equal in being illusory. Yet, being equal they are also utterly pure, for this is how they are gradually perceived as the mind is purified. He thus suggests what Wangchuk calls "a relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception", a proposition that seeks to avoid epistemic arbitrariness, by grounding the accuracy of a perception in its capacity to access the pure nature of appearances. Additionally, through use of the Example and other similar *upamās* that contain a commonly observed object, he has anchored his trans-worldly epistemology in a shared reality, within which cognitions and their objects reciprocally warrant each other.

Of particular concern for our discussion is Rongzompa's premise that the realisation of a yogin or ārya cannot be invalidated by someone less spiritually advanced, be it in relation to either truth. For if it were, what indeed would be the value of the spiritual path. In particular, what would be the value of the Vajrayāna path if the pure visions and the like that arise as its result were only mind-made fantasies, with no connection to reality? Such is clearly Rongzompa's concern, and it is a concern that Ju Mipham, his fellow Nyingmapa, would share. Although surprisingly, from the 11th century until Mipham in the 19th, none of the authors surveyed express a similar preoccupation, as we shall now see. Let us, then, leap forward to 14th century Tibet and examine how Réndawa employed the Example to address his primary philosophical concerns.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ A more detailed examination of the Example's presence in early Tibetan Madhyamaka, particularly within or in relation to the Kadampa tradition and the monks of Sangphu monastery in Central Tibet between the 11th and 13th centuries, would certainly have been ideal at this stage of the thesis. While I have completed multiple word searches for the Example within the scholarship of early pre-classical Tibetan Mādhyamika figures such as Maja (d. 1185) and Chapa Chökyi Senggé, and Patsab Nyima Drak, I am yet to find anything of note. However, I am reticent to draw any conclusions yet, for more detailed research is required. This period is a crucial strand in any discussion of Tibetan Madhyamaka, especially considering the recent discoveries and publications of the extensive *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*, containing 120 volumes. Further exploration of this area of the subject will have to wait for future research.

Chapter 4: Gandenpa Beginnings

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter we enter the “classical-systematic period” of Tibetan Madhyamaka discourse. We have chosen to focus here on three of the most influential and intellectually powerful thinkers of the period. These represent the progenitors of the Gandenpa (*dGa’ ldan pa*) or what would later be known as the Gelugpa (*dGe lugs pa*) tradition.²⁸⁹ While our first author Réndawa was and has always been considered a Sakyapa, he was deeply important for and is mainly remembered for being the teacher of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa tradition. His writing and propagation of Madhyamaka in Tibet were deeply influential to Tsongkhapa and other figures of this period, and his writings are thus a useful illustration of the status of discourse on the Example right at the beginning of the classical period. Tsongkhapa, who follows (in section 4.3), is arguably the most influential Tibetan philosopher in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Much like Kant’s impact on continental philosophy—where nearly every subsequent thinker had to position themselves in relation to Kant’s ideas²⁹⁰—Tsongkhapa’s Madhyamaka discourse, particularly regarding the Example, shaped the tone and character of discussions on the subject for the following 600 years. However, this influence developed gradually, as his immediate successors faced significant criticism from some of the leading intellectual figures of their time. Khédрупjé, our next figure (in section 4.4), is now remembered as being the fiercest intellectual “defender of the faith”. His discourse on the Example is a masterful internal historical account of Tsongkhapa’s explanation, “clarifying” or reconstructing many of the enigmatic consequences of Tsongkhapa’s ideas. By concentrating on these three figures, we aim to

²⁸⁹ See Jinpa 2019: 349-356, for details on the formation of this tradition.

²⁹⁰ See Braver 2007.

illustrate the polemical climate of this classical-systematic period and underscore the high standards of discourse on the Example that their Sakyapa (*Sa skya pa*) opponents, as discussed in Chapter 5, would be compelled to meet.

These two groups—the early Gandenpas and their Sakyapa challengers—held subtle yet profoundly different interpretations of the Example. We may envision their positions as figures standing on a gangplank suspended between two extremes: on one side lies the secure deck of realist foundational epistemology, while on the other yawns the abyss of unconstrained relativistic epistemology. In this metaphor, Tsongkhapa and Khédrupjé occupy the most cautious positions, standing closest to the ship’s solid foundation. Further along the plank we find Gorampa, Réndawa, and Shakya Chokden, who venture into more precarious epistemic territory. At the furthest edge stands Taktsang, whose bold position utterly rejects the validity of epistemic instruments in Madhyamaka, positioning him at the most perilous point above the void of rampant relativism. We shall return to this metaphor at the conclusion of Chapter 5

4.2.1. Réndawa: Life and Works

Réndawa (1349-1412) was born into an aristocratic family in the vicinity of Sakya Monastery, central Tibet. He spent his childhood amidst the ascent of the Phamodrupa (*Phag mo gru pa*) leader Jangchup Gyeltsen (1302-1364), who was actively working to overthrow the established political dominance of the Sakyapa lineage, eventually succeeding in 1358/9. Réndawa’s early and middle life as recounted in his biographies follow the rather standardised model of an important Tibetan historical religious figure: showing spiritual inclinations from an early age, receiving novice and full ordination, undertaking extensive study of philosophical subjects and Buddhist tantras, undertaking retreat, and teaching and collecting disciples. It appears that Réndawa is primarily remembered for being the teacher

of Tsongkhapa, Khédrupjé, and Gyeltsapjé, the founding members of the Gelugpa tradition, than as an important Tibetan spiritual figure in his own right. He is also known, although to a lesser extent, for being the teacher of Lama Wumapa (mid 14th – mid 15th cent.), famed for acting as the medium between Tsongkhapa and Mañjuśrī, and Tangtong Gyelpo (1361-1485),²⁹¹ Tibet’s famous iron-bridge building Bodhisattva.

Within our periodisation of Tibetan Madhyamaka discussed at the beginning of this section, Réndawa lived at the crucial point between the pre-classical and classical periods.²⁹² As Roloff’s research and Sanggyé Tsémo’s (14th cent.) biography of Réndawa make clear, it was not only Tsongkhapa who was greatly concerned with the state of Buddhism during this dynamic time, particularly that related to the Madhyamaka and ethics, but also Réndawa.²⁹³ Like Tsongkhapa, Réndawa come to be a staunch critic of the Shentong (*gzhan stong*) system.²⁹⁴ However, unlike Tsongkhapa, he was an open critic of the *Kālacakratāntra*, writing an open letter publicly challenging its veracity, as we will see in due course. Being such an overt critic and polemicist, it is perhaps not a great surprise that he was also a rather controversial figure. He is reported to have suffered a revolt by some of his followers in Bulrong (*Bul rong*), leading him to resign from his teaching duties in Sakya monastery, and begin what would turn into a twelve-year meditation retreat.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Roloff 2009: 3.

²⁹² Roloff 2009: 16

²⁹³ Roloff 2009: 299.

²⁹⁴ The *gzhan stong* or “other emptiness” system of thought was inaugurated by Dölpopa (1292-1361), originally a Sakyapa but later an abbot of Jonang monastery (*Jo nang dgon*). Based on several of the texts traditionally ascribed to Maitreya and Asaṅga’s commentaries to them, the Shengtong system differs from the dominant Tibetan interpretation of Madhyamaka known as *rang stong* or “self emptiness” by arguing that ultimate reality is not best described as phenomena being empty of themselves; rather, ultimate reality, buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*, *de bzhin gshegs pa snying po*), *dharmatā* (*chos nyid*), and the like are actually empty of conventional objects, like a bowl that is empty of yoghurt. The discussion of this system is a leitmotif within Tibetan Madhyamaka discourse, as we shall see. For more details see Stearns (1999), and Hopkins (2008).

²⁹⁵ Roloff 2009: 32, and also n. 611.

Even during his lifetime, Réndawa was recognized as a major Tibetan authority on Madhyamaka.²⁹⁶ He was later widely acknowledged as a significant figure in the history of its propagation in Tibet.²⁹⁷ At his time, Madhyamaka studies appeared to be waning,²⁹⁸ and did not hold a central position in monastic education, as they were not included in the standard curriculum of the monastic colleges in central Tibet. These centres instead focussed on the four subjects of Prajñāpāramitā (based on the *Abhisamayālamkāra*), Abhidharma, Pramāṇa, and the Vinaya.²⁹⁹ A monk who had completed their training in these four fields of knowledge would become a *bka' bzhi pa*, one skilled in the four (fields of knowledge). Roloff contends that it was Réndawa who introduced Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka to the curriculum, thereby expanding it to include the five principal subjects that would constitute the traditional curriculum of Gelugpa monasteries.³⁰⁰ Réndawa's collected works (*gsung 'bum*), as it is currently known, contains in total nine major works on Madhyamaka: four independent works, and five specific commentaries on Indian Madhyamaka treatises.³⁰¹ The latter were some of the very earliest Tibetan commentaries on the Madhyamaka classics. The clearest exposition of his own unique perspective on Candrakīrti's system, one he wholeheartedly endorsed, is in his *bDen gnyis gnad kyi zla zer*.³⁰² Of particular interest are also the three *dBu ma 'i lta khrid* or *Practical Guide to the Madhyamaka View*, which appear

²⁹⁶ Jinpa 2019: 162.

²⁹⁷ See, Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima's (1737 – 1802) *Grub mtha' gsal gyi me long* (in Lhundup Sopa, et al. 2009: 178, and Jinpa 2019: 426, n. 302).

²⁹⁸ This is made clear by the account of Réndawa's contemporary Karma Könshön (n.d), see Jinpa 2019: 195. See also Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 60-61, and Phuntsho 2004: 244, n. 68, for more references on this point.

²⁹⁹ Jinpa 2019: 34, although this seems to have changed by the end of the 14th century (Jinpa, 2019: 402, n.83).

³⁰⁰ Roloff 2009: 5-6.

³⁰¹ These are commentaries on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Suhr̥llekha*, and *Vaidalyasūtra*, Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*, and Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*. The latter was completed by 1374/5 (Roloff 2009: 22). He also seems to have composed an independent commentary to Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* (Roloff 2009: 300), but this has yet to surface.

³⁰² Réndawa 2015: vol. 4, 142-194. My thanks to Drukgyel Tsering of Hong Kong University for sharing his preliminary translation of this text.

to be some of the earliest examples of this form of text within Tibetan literature.³⁰³ These are brief, medium, and large in length, and constitute essential and yet still philosophically precise and astute works on the practical application of Madhyamaka philosophy in meditation.³⁰⁴ According to Sanggyé Tsémo's biography, they incapsulate a lineage of instruction stemming from Khenchen Doklhöpa Künga Zangpo (n.d.).³⁰⁵

Despite being recognised by Tibetan historians as an important figure in revitalising Madhyamaka study in Tibet,³⁰⁶ and being generally extolled in the Gelugpa tradition for being Tsongkhapa's principal teacher and human instructor of Madhyamaka, his writings do not appear to have had a significant influence on later generations of Tibetans. This is most likely for two distinct reasons, one related to the Gelugpa tradition, the other to the Sakyapa. In terms of the former, after the passing of Réndawa and Tsongkhapa, and as the early Gandenpa sought to preserve their teacher Tsongkhapa's legacy from the avalanche of criticism descending upon it from significant Sakya scholars of their day (as we will see in due course), Tsongkhapa's followers were principally concerned with maintaining their teachers unique interpretation of Madhyamaka, and the other subjects on which Tsongkhapa diverged from the dominant interpretations of his day.³⁰⁷ Réndawa was, after all, a Sakyapa, and from a tradition that Tsongkhapa's lead disciples Khédрупjé and Gendün Drup were actively distancing themselves from.³⁰⁸ The second reason why Réndawa's corpus did not exercise a significant influence outside the Gelugpa tradition was that Réndawa was

³⁰³ However, Réndawa's contemporary, Rongtön Shéja Künrik (1367-1449), also has two *dBu ma lta khrid* texts in his collected works: Rongtön Shéja Künrik 2008, *dBu ma'i lta khrid zab don gnad kyi zla zer*, vol. 1, 402–413, and *dBu ma'i lta khrid kyi bsdus don*, 413–414.

³⁰⁴ See my paper, Fisher (2025a), for more details on this sparsely studied genre of Tibetan literature.

³⁰⁵ Roloff 2009: 19, and see the translation of the biography at 210.

³⁰⁶ For example, in Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima's *Grub mtha' gsal gyi me long* (See Lhundup Sopa, et al. 2009: 178).

³⁰⁷ Jinpa 2019: 426, n.302.

³⁰⁸ Cabezón 2007: 42. Roloff (2009), argues that the lack of Tibetan sources focussed on Réndawa's work is a result of an intentional Gelugpa ploy to avoid having their own teacher's legacy eclipsed. Wedemeyer (2010), finds this 'quite far-fetched'.

famously the teacher of Tsongkhapa, and despite being a Sakyapa, would always be associated with the Gandenpas. The later Sakya tradition, therefore, was likely reluctant to rely too closely on this figure's writings – a figure who played such an important role in the lives of the founders of the very tradition they saw as a great threat to Sakyapa spiritual and political power in Tibet.³⁰⁹ Shakya Chokden actively discouraged his tradition from following Réndawa's teachings,³¹⁰ and Gorampa also found recourse to criticise him.³¹¹ Both were disciples of another important figure of this time Rongtön Shéja Künrik (1367 – 1449), who had been one of the earliest opponents of Tsongkhapa.³¹² Such critiques illustrate an interesting division that had occurred within the Sakya tradition of the late 14th and early 15th centuries. As Jackson expresses:

In the general Mahāyāna scholasticism of Tibet in those days [i.e., the early fifteenth century], Rong-ston together with g.Yag-ston represented the main doctrinal alternative to the tradition of Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419) and his teacher Red-mda' - ba (1349-1412), though both pairs of savants were basically offshoots from a common trunk of the gSang-phu Sa-skya scholarly and intellectual tradition.³¹³

As such, although tradition generally recognises Réndawa as playing a significant role in the revitalisation of Prāsaṅgika studies,³¹⁴ and in particular for Tsongkhapa's "quest for the middle way",³¹⁵ (according to tradition it was Mañjuśrī himself after all who instructed Tsongkhapa to rely on Réndawa as being an unparalleled master of Madhyamaka at that time in Tibet),³¹⁶ his writings do not appear to have had a major impact on Gandenpa

³⁰⁹ Jinpa 2019: 426, n.302.

³¹⁰ Komarovski 2011: 98.

³¹¹ Roloff 2009: 1.

³¹² Jinpa 2019: 355-357. For more on his interpretation of the Example, a clear rejection of Tsongkhapa's interpretation, see fn. 420 below.

³¹³ Jackson 1989: 6.

³¹⁴ See specifically his place in the transmission of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Prasannapadā*, *Catuḥśataka*, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *Dharmadhātustava*, and the *Suhrillekha* in Khédrupjé's *gsang yig* (*record of teachings received*), discussed in Van der Kuijp 1985: 12-13.

³¹⁵ Jinpa 2002. Although, this influence seems to have been reciprocal, with Tsongkhapa also deeply influencing Réndawa's own view of Madhyamaka (Jinpa 2019: 192).

³¹⁶ Jinpa 2021: 110.

exegesis after the passing of Tsongkhapa, as we are unaware of a single Gelugpa sub-commentary on a Réndawa work, although there are various references to him and his interpretations of key doctrines, and critiques of them by Tsongkhapa and Khédrupjé.³¹⁷ Until recently, there also has been little sustained attention on Réndawa's corpus in contemporary scholarship.³¹⁸ Before 2015 we had a much smaller corpus of his writings available to us.³¹⁹ But in 2015 the *Gangs ljongs bod kyi dpe rnying dpe skrun khang* printed a 10-volume edition in Sichuan with a large number of additional and previously unknown texts.³²⁰ In light of this situation, it must be concluded that our current understanding of Réndawa's writings and influence on other areas of Tibetan literature is rather meagre, and much has yet to be studied.

4.2.2 Réndawa's Thought: Madhyamaka

Having a much larger corpus and several independent works on the subject to rely on, we are, however, now in a much better position to be able to assess his Madhyamaka view. While I cannot hope to provide an exhaustive summary of his positions on this system, what follows is a bird's eye view of relevant points he articulates on conventional reality and that directly or indirectly bear on our discussion of the Example. We shall cover (i) conventional

³¹⁷ For example, see Tsongkhapa's mention of Réndawa's position in his *dGongs pa rab gsal* (Jinpa 2021: 79, n. 140), and his praise of him in the colophon to his *Lam rim chen mo* (Cutler et al 2000: vol. 3, 372). For more references also see Roloff 2009: 1.

³¹⁸ Notable exceptions are the translations of Réndawa's commentaries on the *Suhrillekha* (Tharchin and Engle 2002), and *Madhyamakāvātāra*, *Catuḥśataka*, and *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Tillman and Tsering 1997, 2004, and 2007), and the monograph by Roloff (2009) that primarily focuses on Réndawa's extensive biography.

³¹⁹ For example, the edition published in 1999 by the *Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang* contains only four volumes. For more details on which works of Réndawa were published and available prior to 2015, see Roloff (2009: 1-3). Roloff came to the conclusion that a complete collection of Réndawa's works was never actually printed.

³²⁰ Drukgyel Tsering of Hong Kong University has investigated the origins of this newly published edition of Réndawa's collected works. Through conversations with the publishers, he has learned that we have a monk named Thupten Mönam to thank for gathering all these previously unpublished texts from various places such as the Tibet Museum, Sakya Monastery, and the Potala Palace. (Drukgyel Tsering, personal communication, 14/04/2024).

warrant, (ii) the *catuṣkoṭi* and the object of negation, and (iii) the status of propositional theses in Madhyamaka. This will help to clarify the conceptual framework within which Réndawa discusses the Example.

iv. Conventional Warrant

In accessing the philosophy of this important and little understood author, it is important to note the place Réndawa gives to epistemology in the Prāsaṅgika system. He was after all a recognised authority on the system of Dignāga-Dharmakīrti, writing a large commentary on the latter's *Pramāṇavārttika*,³²¹ and was one of the principle sources of its transmission to the early Gelugpa founders.³²² Although the suitability of epistemology and especially that of Dignāga-Dharmakīrti in Prāsaṅgika is a subject of debate, even within contemporary scholarship,³²³ it has long been understood that one of Tsongkhapa's principal innovations was to integrate Dignāga-Dharmakīrti's epistemology into Candrakīrti's system.³²⁴ Now we have access to a larger collection of Réndawa's texts, this theory will need to be re-examined. The question of precisely how innovative Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka was, has been considered and inadequately resolved since the time of Tucci.³²⁵ While such a complex question cannot be adequately addressed here, the following discussion will show that, like Tsongkhapa, Réndawa is concerned with the subject of epistemic warrant within Prāsaṅgika, on the level of *saṃvṛti*. In this vein, and especially significant for our purposes, is the weight Réndawa places on conventional things and the need for them to be warranted by epistemic

³²¹ Réndawa 2015: vol. 7.

³²² Roloff 2009: 31.

³²³ See the Yakherds 2021.

³²⁴ Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 90-91. The difficulties issuing from this approach shall be discussed in the following sections.

³²⁵ Tucci 1949: 118. Later, preliminary scholarship on the differences between their Madhyamaka systems can be found in Sato (1983), Tauscher (1995), Cabezón (2003), Roloff (2009), and Jinpa (2019), although, there is general consensus that much is still to be understood, and the subject requires a detailed study. For an interesting series of exchanges in letter between Réndawa and Tsongkhapa, which discuss their different opinions on the stages of realisation of the Madhyamaka view, see Jinpa 2019: 171-185.

authoritative cognitions, a point that is also a hallmark of Tsongkhapa's exegesis. Réndawa even foreshadows, it would seem, Tsongkhapa's insistence that conventional objects are established by conventional epistemic instruments. For instance, Réndawa's *dBu ma'i lta khrid rgyas pa* declares:

If one asks, how is the [self] a relative truth (*tha snyad kyi bden pa*) and conventionally existent (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*)? It is posited as a conventional truth by way of the warrant of the four types of conventional epistemic instruments: direct perception (*pratyakṣa, mngon sum*), inference (*anumāna, rjes dpag*), analogy (*upamāna, nye bar 'jal ba*), and scripture (*āgama, lung*).³²⁶

Réndawa's use of the expression *tha snyad kyi tshad ma bzhis grub pa'i sgo nas yin*, and similar expressions in his Madhyamaka writings, must have had some influence on Tsongkhapa and his famous point in his *Lam rim chen mo*, that 'objects that are considered to be relative, must be warranted by conventional epistemic instruments',³²⁷ an emphasis that would come to define Tsongkhapa. Interestingly, such an emphasis also appears frequently in Réndawa's Madhyamaka writings where he likewise stresses conventionally existent things must be warranted via epistemic instruments. For example, in contexts that concern conventional things, such as whether or not merely realising the impermanence of the personal self is sufficient to realise liberation, Réndawa argues it is not, and concludes by saying 'such is known by worldly epistemic warrant',³²⁸ and in relation to a mistaken

³²⁶ Réndawa 2015f, vol. 5, 465: *ji ltar na/ de tha snyad kyi bden pa dang / kun rdzob tu yod pa yin zhe na/ kun rdzob kyi bden pa rnam par 'jog pa ni/ mngon sum dang/ rjes dpag dang/ nye bar 'jal ba la/ lung ste/ tha snyad kyi tshad ma bzhis grub pa'i sgo nas yin la/*

The positing of these for *pramāṇa*, generally accepted by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, closely follows Candrakīrti's famous declaration in his *Prasannapadā* where he defines these four *pramāṇa* and then declares: 'Therefore, we hold that worldly objects are realised via the four types of epistemic instruments'. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* PP. I.25: PsP. I: *tadevaṃ pramāṇacatuṣṭayāl lokasyārthādhigamo vyavasthāpyate//* (MacDonald, 2015: vol. 1, 275-276). Tibetan in D 3860, 25b.5: *de'i phyir de ltar tshad ma bzhi las 'jig rten gyi don rtogs par rnam par 'jog pa yin no*. MacDonald, however, questions the interpretation of modern scholars such as Stcherbatsky, Siderits, and Arnold, who hold that the four *pramāṇas* defined by Candrakīrti here in *Prasannapadā* are identical to the four accepted by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas (MacDonald 2015: vol. 2, 289-290, fn. 541).

³²⁷ Tsongkhapa, *Lam rim chen mo*, 629: *tha snyad du 'jog pa'i don rnam tha snyad pa'i tshad mas grub dgos*

³²⁸ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 136: *'dir 'jig rten rang grags kyi tshad ma'o/*

interpretation of scripture that says the opposite he says ‘such [an interpretation] is harmed by epistemic instruments’.³²⁹ Likewise, in his *dBu ma lta khrid rgyas pa* in a discussion concerning the object observed and then mistakenly grasped at as a self by the acquired view of self (*kun brtags kyi bdag*) Réndawa refutes the positions that it is the collection of all five aggregates, or just the mind alone that is observed and then mistakenly believed to be a self. He does this through recourse to conventional epistemic warrant:

These [positions] are not suitable, since the aggregates are established by epistemic warrant to conventionally arise and disintegrate, and because the object of the view of self, is – according to this very view of a self - not disintegrating.³³⁰

Moreover, following Candrakīrti closely (*Madhyamakāvatāra* VI. 23), he also limits the sphere of expertise of conventional epistemic warrant to that of only conventions and not the ultimate.

The [Prāsaṅgika] masters posit the conventional without recourse to the tenets propounded by other [philosophical systems], but only through following the conventions of worldlings. As such, just as āryas are the only authority (*tshad ma*) for the ultimate truth, likewise, in positing conventional truth, [Prāsaṅgikas consider] only the world to be authoritative (*tshad ma*).³³¹

He also spells out two types of conventions, insisting these are not suitable to be subjected to philosophical analysis.

There are also two types of conventions (*tha snyad*): Conventions explicitly accepted in the world (*'jig rten na dngos su grags pa'i tha snyad*) – this includes conventions just like “going”, “sitting”, “eating”, etc. – and conventions that although they are not explicitly known, are suitable to be known. These are those conventions known from the scriptures (*gsung rab la grags pa'i tha snyad*), such as the path, objects of abandonment, antidote, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, etc. These are not to be negated merely as

³²⁹ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 161: *tshad mas gnod pa'i don*.

³³⁰ Réndawa 2015f, vol. 5, 460: *de ni mi rigs te phung po rnam ni tha snyad du yang skye ba dang 'jig par tshad mas grub pa'i phyir dang/ bdag lta'i yul ni/ de ltar bdag lta nyid kyis mi 'jig pa'i phyir ro/*

³³¹ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 187: *de bas na slob dpon de dag ni grub mtha' smra ba gzhan gyi rjes su mi 'brang bar/ 'jig rten pa rnam kho na'i tha snyad kyi rjes su 'brangs nas/ kun rdzob kyi bden pa rnam par 'jog par byed de/ ji ltar don dam pa'i bden pa la 'phags pa rnam kho na tshad ma yin pa ltar/ kun rdzob gyi bden pa rnam par 'jog pa byed pa la yang / 'jig rten kho na tshad ma yin pa'i phyir ro snyam du bsams pa yin no/*

conventions, since they cannot be negated [with philosophical reasoning], and there is no point in negating them, and if they are negated there will be problems. Conventions explicitly accepted in the world cannot be refuted with philosophical logic (*rigs pa*), since ordinary people engage with conventions without considering philosophical logic appropriate, and they do not accept philosophical logic.³³²

That said, in his commentary to Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*, he says Mādhyamikas do not even accept that there is epistemic warrant of dependent origination *in their own system*, for when they make such claims this is only from the perspective of the world, and for the sake of benefiting the world. He continues, one also cannot say that an ārya's nonconceptual realization in meditative equipoise is an epistemic warrant for any object whatsoever.³³³

He thus underlines two clear contexts of discourse: that in which philosophical analysis is appropriate and is to be employed in the rejection of a personal self, and that in which it is not, the context of transactional communication. The former, however, cannot be said to warrant anything, whereas, the latter certainly can. Rëndawa underscores the impracticality of applying philosophical reasoning to conventions, arguing this hinders basic communication, and also conventional understandings of what is helpful or harmful for oneself and others. For example, if someone says their material objects, such as a vase, have been stolen, it would be ridiculous to reply to them “a vase is not a material substance but merely congregated elements.”

³³² Rëndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 175: 'di la yang 'jig rten na dngos su grags pa'i tha snyad dang/ dngos su ma grags kyang grags su rung ba gnyis so/ /dang po ni/ songs shiga'adug cigazo zhig ces pa la sogs pa rnams yin la/ gnyis pa ni/ gsung rab la grags pa'i tha snyad pa dang/ lam dang/ spang bya dang/ gnyen po dang/ 'khor ba dang/ mya ngan las 'das pa la sogs pa rnams yin no/ /'di dag ni tha snyad tsam du dgag par bya ba ma yin te/ dgag mi nus pa'i phyir dang/ dgag mi dgos pa'i phyir dang/ bkag na nyes par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro/ /de la re zhig 'jig rten na dngos su grags pa'i tha snyad 'di dag ni/ rigs pas dgag par nus pa ma yin te/ 'jig rten pa rnams ni rigs pa'i 'thad pa ma bcug pa kho nar tha snyad la 'jug pa'i phyir dang/ rigs pas rnam par dpyad pa khas mi len pa'i phyir ro/. There is a similar explanation in his *bZhi brgya rnam bshad* (Rëndawa 2015d: vol. 4, 425-426).

³³³ Rëndawa 2015d, vol. 4, 353-354. English in Tillman and Tsering 2004: 157-158.

v. **The Object of Negation**

Thus far, we can see that Réndawa accepts conventional epistemic warrant from the perspective of the world. However, before we can discuss his interpretation of the Example and the status of the cognitions and the objects therein, we will need to first clarify his position on the status of conventions: do they exist, or is their existence also merely accepted from the point of view of the world (and thus not in reality or in the Madhyamaka system)? This question concerns what is ontologically negated by Madhyamaka argument.

Speaking in broad terms, Tibetan Rangtongpas generally fall into one of two camps in answering this question. The Ngarapas (*sNga rabs pa*) or “former lineage holders” such as Patsap Nyima Drak (1055-1145?), his students, and those cohering philosophically with them; and the Chirapas (*Phyi rabs pa*) or “later lineage holders”, that is, Tsongkhapa and his followers.³³⁴ Their differing assertions on the status of conventions in Madhyamaka relates directly to their understanding of what Nāgārjuna’s *catuṣkoṭi* or “tetralemma” argument refutes. This argumentative strategy is employed extensively, in several variants, by Nāgārjuna in his *Mūlamādhayamakārikā*,³³⁵ and is ostensibly accepted by all Mādhyamikas.³³⁶ The argument may be simply put in the following four propositions: things are neither existent, nor are they nonexistent, nor are they both existent and nonexistent, nor are they neither existent nor nonexistent. The Ngarapas take these four propositions literally without qualifying any of them. In contrast, the Chirapas interpret the

³³⁴ See Phuntsho 2004: 245, n 71 for a good overview of these two groups. The former seems to be essentially the same view as the “Shang Thangsakpa’s position”. Thanksakpa (n.d) was a student of Patsap Nyima Drak, the main Tibetan translator of Candrakīrti’s writings.

³³⁵ See its use in *Mūlamādhayamakārikā*: XXII:11 in relation to emptiness itself, XXII:12 the Buddha’s permanence and finitude, XXV Nirvāṇa, XXVII:13 persons in the past, XXVII:15-18 their permanence, and XXVII:25-28 the world’s finitude (Westerhoff 2006: 374). See Garfield 1995 for an English translation and commentary.

³³⁶ Although, the term *catuṣkoṭi* is not found in this work by Nāgārjuna nor in many of this school’s foundational texts (Seyfort Ruegg 1977: 3).

catuṣkoṭi with major qualifications. Tsongkhapa famously held, for example, that the second *koṭi* means things do not fail to exist conventionally – they do exist conventionally in the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika’s own system. The difference between these two groups of scholars thus importantly revolves around what is negated by Madhyamaka reasoning (*dgag bya*).³³⁷ (This subject shall be discussed in several of the following sections.)

Tsongkhapa has generally been considered the first in Tibet (and arguably also India) to emphasise the singular importance of correctly identifying the object of negation of Madhyamaka logic, prior to its negation.³³⁸ However, Réndawa once more foreshadows Tsongkhapa’s explanation. For instance, in his *dBu ma lta khrid bsduṣ pa* in a section on ‘identifying the entity of the object of negation’ (*dgag bya bdag gi ngo bo ngos gzung*), he says:

The self that is clung to by thoughts that cling to an “I” and “mine”, which exist naturally in all sentient beings, animals, and everyone else, is the referent object (*zhen yul*) of the innate misconception of self [the object of negation]. A permanent, unitary, and independent [self], does not exist even among conventions, as the non-Buddhists falsely claim. However, [the self] that is innately grasped to by one’s mind is also not non-existent within conventions, because there is nothing wrong with the “I” and “mine” as they are known and used in the various conventions of the world.³³⁹

³³⁷ For more discussion of this issue see the section on Gorampa in chapter 5.

³³⁸ Phuntsho 2004: 57. In a similar vein, Jinpa says: ‘There isn’t much in the Indian Madhyamaka literature to substantiate by means of direct citations Tsongkhapa’s point regarding the importance of prior identification of the object of negation. Tsongkhapa quotes *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* IX:139 to make a general point about the critical importance of cultivating a clear conceptual understanding of the object of negation. But to the best of my knowledge, no commentator in India seems to have associated this verse with identifying the object of negation. Nor did any Tibetan commentators on Madhyamaka before Tsongkhapa’ (Jinpa 2002: 52).

³³⁹ Réndawa 2015e, vol. 5, 350-351: *dud 'gro yan chad kyi sems can thams cad la rang 'khrungs su yod pa nga dang nga yir 'dzin pa'i bdag 'dzin 'jig lta lhan skyes kyi zhen yul 'di nyid yin la/ 'di mu stegs pa rnams kyi rtag cig rang dbang can du sgro btags pa ltar tha snyad du yang ma grub mod/ lhan skyes kyi blos zhen pa ltar tha snyad du yang med pa ma yin te/ nga dang nga'i zhes sogs kyi tha snyad sna tshogs 'jig rten la grags shing gnod pa med pa'i phyir ro/*

Moreover, within a discussion on how to correctly cultivate *special insight*, Réndawa explains how to identify the entity of the object of negation in the following way:

The view of the transitory [collection of aggregates] (*'jig lta, 'jig tshogs lta ba*) is of two types: that which is innate (*lhan skyes*), and that which is philosophically constructed (*kun brtags*). The former refers to the innate misconception of a self, as explained in the commentary: ‘When thinking “I wish I had happiness and did not suffer” this thought, is called the innately arising view of a self.’ This refers to the inherently confused clinging to oneself and one’s possessions that has been ingrained in all beings since beginningless time. The latter, philosophically constructed [view of the transitory collection], arises by conceptually elaborating on the same object [observed by] the innate view and through relying on scriptures, due to which one grasps at the aggregates as [a self that is] either singular or plural, identical or different [from the aggregates].

That self that is the object [projected onto the aggregates in these ways] is of two types: the innately arising self and the constructed self. Both are objects of logical negation, because one must negate the innate self through refuting the constructed self. If the innate self were truly established (*rdzas su grub pa*), then it would have to be established as either identical or different from the aggregates, etc, as [incorrectly] imputed by our own and other schools.³⁴⁰

The object to be logically rejected in establishing the nonexistence of one’s personal self, is both (i) the self that one naturally thinks of and is conceptually clung to as identical or somehow isolated from one’s aggregates, and (ii) the self that we may conceptually construct on the basis of intentionally examining it and developing ideas about it based on philosophy.

In his *bDen gnyis gnad kyi zla zer* Réndawa proposes a gradual process of logically undermining such hypothetical ideas. One does not begin by negating everything that

³⁴⁰ Réndawa 2015f, vol. 5, 459-460: *'jig lta ni gnyis te/ lhan skyes dang / kun brtags so/ /dang po ni rnam 'grel las/ bde bar gyur ram sdug bsngal bar/ /ma gyur gcig ces 'dod pa na/ /nga ba snyam pa'i blo gang de/ /sems can la lta lhan cig skyes/ /zhes gsungs pa ltar/ sems can thams cad thog ma med pa nas gos pa'i dbang gis nga dang nga yir 'dzin pa'i blo rang 'khrugs su 'byung ba gang yin pa'o/ /gnyis pa ni/ lhan skyes kyi yul de nyid rjes su dpag pa dang/ lung ltar snang la rton nas phung po dang/ gcig dang tha dad/ de nyid dang gzhan du med par 'dzin pa'o/ /de dag gi yul du gyur pa'i bdag de yang gnyis te/ lhan skyes kyi bdag dang kun brtags kyib dag go/ rigs pa'i dgag bya ni gnyi ka yin te/ kun brtags kyi bdag dgag pa'i sgo nas lhan skyes 'gog dgos pa'i phyir/ 'di ltar lhan skyes kyi bdag de rdza sa su grub na/ rang gzhan gyi sde pa rnam kyis brtags pa ltar/ phung po dang/ de nyid dang/ gzhan la sogs pa gang rung du grub dgos pa'i phyir ro/*

appears to oneself, but rather through first negating the conceptual superimpositions (*brtags pa, kun btags pa*) upon them. For it is through negating the accuracy of such conceptual projections, that one removes the grasping onto the appearances. It is the grasping at the objects, after all, that causes the problems, not the mere appearances of them.³⁴¹ He then says:

If appearances were negated, emptiness would be a total rejection of entities, and yogins who meditate on emptiness would fall into the abyss of nihilism, since they mentally reject [absolutely everything, and hold] nothing at all exists.³⁴²

Réndawa then further underlines the point that conventions such as *samsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, emotional afflictions, path, and the like that are known in scripture are not to be negated on the conventional level (*tha snyad tsam du dgag par bya ba ma yin*).³⁴³ Réndawa is definitely in the camp of the Ngarapa in accepting the rejection of all four *koṭi* without the need to qualify any of them. Yet, he still accepts effects arise in dependence on their causes from the point of view of the world, that is, from the point of view that merely accepts conventions without subjecting them to ultimate analysis.³⁴⁴

In sum, for Réndawa it is necessary to first delineate the target that is to be refuted with Madhyamaka logic; this includes the object of the innate conception of self that exists in all

³⁴¹ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 173: *da ni 'di dpyad par bya ste/ gal te dbu ma'i gzhung 'di dag gis ni rnam par dpyad nas dgag pa kho na lhur len pa 'dra na/ dgag bya ni snang ba'am brtags pa gang zhig 'gog byed ni lung rigs pa ji lta bu zhe na/ re zhig snang ba ni 'gog par rigs pa ma yin te/ dper na/dbang po rab rib sogs kyis bslad pa rnams ji srid dbang po skyon ldan dang ma bral ba de srid du/ skra shad dang/ zla gnyis la sogs pa'i snang ba mi ldog pa bzhin du/ ji srid nyon mongs pa can ma yin pa'i ma rig ma spangs pa de srid du/ tshogs drug gi snang ba sgyu ma lta bu 'di mi ldog pas/ de nyid rigs pas dgag mi nus pa'i phyir ro/dgag dgos pa yang ma yin te/ nyes pa rnams ni snang ba las 'byung ba ma yin gyi/de la mngon par zhen pas bskyed pa yin te/ dper na sgyu ma mkhan rang gis sprul pa'i na chung ma la mi chags pa bzhin du/ /snang ba yod kyang /zhen pa med na mi 'ching ba'i phyir dang byis pa rnams sgyu ma'i na chung ma la chags pa bskyed pa ltar mngon par zhen pa las/ kun nas nyon mongs pa rnams 'phel bar 'gyur ba'i phyir ro/*

³⁴² Réndawa 2015c: vol. 4, 174: *snang ba bkag na stong nyid dngos por med pa'i don can du 'gyur zhing /stong nyid bsgoms pa'i rnal 'byor pa yang cang med kyid dgag pa yid la byed pas chad pa'i mthar lhung ba'i phyir ro/*

³⁴³ Réndawa 2015c: vol. 4, 175.

³⁴⁴ Réndawa 2015g: vol. 5, 96-97. English in Tillman and Tsering 1997: 102-103, and 229.

beings, and the philosophically constructed self. This does therefore not mean one logically undermines the ontological status of all things that appear, but rather the objects which are conceptually clung to. These passages also show Réndawa's insistence that to utterly negate all conventions with logical analysis would be a big mistake.

vi. Propositional Theses in Madhyamaka

From what we have seen so far, Réndawa proposes a nominal acceptance of conventions for practical purposes, preserving them from philosophical analysis. However, on the tricky subject of the place of propositional theses (*pratijñā, dam bca'*; *sādhyā, sgrub bya*) in Madhyamaka, he seems closer to his fellow Sakyapas, Gorampa, Taktsang, and Shakya Chokden, than Tsongkhapa, as we will see.³⁴⁵ Réndawa believes Candrakīrti does not accept propositional theses in his system, either conventionally or ultimately, and that these are merely to be accepted from the perspective of the world, for the sake of eliminating the wrong views of others.³⁴⁶

There is not only disagreement [between Candrakīrti and other philosophical systems] on how to posit conventional truth, but there is also a difference in how philosophical assertions are [accepted] nominally (*tha snyad du*). Svātantrikas nominally accept [propositional theses] as conventional truths in their own system. Prāsaṅgikas have absolutely nothing to establish, either conventionally or ultimately, as their own tenet. However, solely for a specific purpose, they accept [propositional

³⁴⁵ Prior to the publication of the 2015 edition of his works, Réndawa's position on this was not clearly known, although Cabezon did infer from statements in the *De kho na nyid gsal ba'i sgron ma* (Réndawa 2015g) that Réndawa seemed to hold a position on this subject that is quite different from Tsongkhapa's, as noted by Roloff 2009: 20.

³⁴⁶ This is another important subject of debate within Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka. Réndawa's position on propositional theses in Madhyamaka follows quite literally Nāgārjuna's rejection of them. For example, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, 29: *yadi kācana pratijñā tatra syān na me tat eṣa me bhaved doṣaḥ/ nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ* (Yonezawa, ed, 2008: 268), ('If I were to have a thesis, I would have such a fault, but I have no thesis and thus do not have this fault'). In a closely related spirit, Nāgārjuna declares in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XIII. 8: *sūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭinām proktā niḥsaraṇam jinaiḥ | yeṣāṃ tu sūnyatādrṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire ||* ('The Victor taught emptiness [as a means] of being free from all views. But those who have a view of emptiness were called untreatable'). And, in a later verse of the same work (XXVII: 30): *sarvadṛṣṭiprahāṇāya yaḥ saddharmam adeśayat | anukampām upādāya taṃ namasyāmi gautamam ||* (Ye, ed, 2011: 214, 500). 'He imparted the true dharma in order to abandon all views, on the basis of his compassion I pay homage to Gautama.' For contemporary discussion of these points see Garfield (2002), Westerhoff (2010), Yakherds (2021), and Stepien (2024).

theses] as conventional truths that only exist from the point of view of the world but are not even nominally accepted in their own system.³⁴⁷

Réndawa then explains the standard Svātantrika position on propositional theses. This includes tenets such as, Mādhyamikas must not only refute others' theses but must also posit their own thesis conventionally. Merely pointing out illogical consequences cannot completely refute their opponent's thesis, and if theses are not put forward at all, a Mādhyamika's own assertions on emptiness, non-production etc. would not be established by epistemic instruments, for one cannot prove the Madhyamaka system's assertions merely through the assertions of other systems.³⁴⁸ He then explains Candrakīrti's position:

If Prāsaṅgikas did not posit their own system because they worry about the faults others would ascribe to their assertions, refuted the systems of others merely by [pointing out wrong] consequences due to the hostility they felt towards others' assertions, were crafty individuals employing flawed arguments, and really have no position at all that is to be established, then what is the point of all of the fatigue they experience in trying to prove such [theses]? In reality, they do not refute others, for if they observed a single quality that is to be refuted, it would be reasonable to refute it, but an entity that is the object of negation is not observed, even if one performs an extremely detailed deconstructive analysis (*sku'i rtse mo brgyar gshags pa'i cha tsam*). So, why do they propound such a refutation? Having set forth others' assertions in the Madhyamaka treatises, they engage in multiple types of analysis; this is not because they have aversion for or revel in refuting the ideas of others, but

³⁴⁷ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 187: *de ltar kun rdzob rnam par 'jog pa la mi mthun par ma zad tha snyad du khas len pa'i tshul yang mi 'dra ste/ rang rgyud pa rnam kun rdzob kyi bden pa tha snyad du rang lugs su khas len par byed la/ thal 'gyur ba rnam ni don dam dang tha snyad gang du yang rang lugs su rnam par bzhag par bya ba cung zad kyang med kyi/ 'on kyang dgos pa'i dbang kho nar/ kun rdzob bden pa yang 'jig rten gzhan ngo 'ba' zhig tu khas blangs ba ma gtogs/ tha snyad tsam du yang rang gi lugs yin par khas mi len te/*

³⁴⁸ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 187-188: */gzhan yang rtsod pa'i tshel rang rgyud pa'i slob dpon rnam ni rang gi lugs rnam par ma bzhag par/ gzhan kyi lugs kho na 'gog par byed pa ni sun ci phyin tu rgol ba yin pas/ mi rigs pa'i phyir dang/ rang gi 'dod pa stong nyid dang skye med la sogs pa tshad mas ma grub par yang /gzhan gyi dngos po rnam la skye ba dang rang bzhin yod par 'dod pa yang/ thal ba tsam gyis dgag par mi nus pa'i phyir/ tha snyad du skye med la sogs pa'i rang lugs kyi dam bca' bsgrub par byed pa'i gtan tshigs dang dpe la sogs pa tshad mas ma grub pa'i rang rgyud pa 'ga' zhig 'dod par bya ba yin te/ rang lugs kyi dam bca' gzhan gyis 'dod pa'i rtags kyis sgrub par mi nus pa'i phyir/ zhes 'dod do/*

it is to remove the grasping of those beings who are bound by their conceptual frameworks. It is thus only for the benefit of others.³⁴⁹

Réndawa thus holds the classical Ngarapa view on propositional theses: they are useful heuristics for Mādhyamikas to lead their opponents to the correct view, but they are utterly incapable of articulating the ultimate.

Réndawa then addresses the obvious query that if Mādhyamikas do not hold a position, then what about Nāgārjuna's rejection of the four alternative modes of production, from self, other, both and neither, in the *catuṣkoṭi*.³⁵⁰ He says it would be reasonable to accept the negation of these four alternatives if what was being negated existed, but since it does not, the rejection is only posited in relation to others' position. It is thus wrong to assert that the negation, the act of negating itself (*bkag pa 'i dgag pa*), exists.³⁵¹

From the above, we can see that Réndawa is willing to reject that things exist, and yet not willing to undermine conventions with philosophical analysis. He is content to say the world's non-analytical cognitions are suitable tools to establish conventional truths, and yet they are not suitable tools for reality. Conventions are thus not something that exist, or do

³⁴⁹ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 188: *thal 'gyur ba rnams ni/ gal te rang la dam bca' yod bzhin du gzhan gyis skyon brjod kyis dogs pa'i bsams pas rang lugs mi 'jog cing/ gzhan gyi 'dod pa la zhe sdang gyi bsam pas gzhan lugs thal ba tsam gyis 'gog par byed na/sun ci phyin tu rgol bar byed pa'i g.yo sgyu can du 'gyur na yang /dbu ma pa la rang la bzhag par bya ba'i phyogs cung zad kyang med na/ de'i sgrub byed tshol ba'i dub pa 'dis ci zhig bya/ yang dag par na gzhan bkag par yang ma yin te/ dgag par bya ba'i chos cung zad cig dmigs na/ de la dgag pa byed par yang rigs na/ dgag bya'i dngos po sku'i rtse mo brgyar gshags pa'i cha tsam yang ma dmigs na/ de la su zhig dgag pa smra bar byed/ gang yang bstan bcos su gzhan gyi 'dod pa bkod nas/ rigs pa'i rnam par dpyad pa du ma mdzad pa de ni/ gzhan lugs la zhe sdang ba'am rtsod pa la dga' ba'i phyir ma yin gyi/ rtog pa'i dra bas bcings pa'i skye bo 'di dag gi mngon zhen bzlog pa'i phyir/ gzhan ngo 'ba' zhig tu mdzad pa yin te.*

³⁵⁰ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, I. 1: *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ | utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kva cana ke cana ||* (Ye 2011: 12)

³⁵¹ Réndawa 2015c, vol. 4, 190: *de ni gang dag dngos po rnams bdag sogs las skye bar 'dod pa rnams dgag pa'i phyir du gzhan ngo 'ba' zhig tu khas blangs pa yin gyi rang gi lugs ni ma yin te/ dgag bya cung zad zhig yod na de bkag pa'i dgag pa khas len par rigs na yang /'dir dgag bya bdag las skye ba sogs ma grub pas na de bkag pa'i dgag pa khas len par rigs pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro/*

not, in any of the ways articulated by the *catuṣkoṭi*, in reality, intrinsically, or within a Mādhyamika's tenets. That said let us now turn to his interpretation of the Example.

4.2.3. Réndawa's Interpretations of the Example:

i. The Example in *Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.71ab

The principal textual source around which most Tibetan discussions of the Example revolve, is the mention of it in *Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.71ab. In that context Candrakīrti explained the Example through merely referring us back to his previous response in relation to the Falling Hair Example (*Madhyamakāvātāra* VI. 55-56) proposed by Yogācāra as an instance of cognition without an external object. At that point in his discussion with Yogācāra, he argued that even an eye consciousness seeing non-existent falling hairs has an external object, as all perceptions have (external) objects.³⁵² Candrakīrti would thus seem to consider the examples of a dream, falling hairs, and the preta seeing pus (in the Example), as similar examples of cognitions *with* objects conventionally. Réndawa follows Candrakīrti's comments closely, and holds that the Falling Hair Example and the Example as used by Yogācāra to illustrate the nonexistence of an external world and an intrinsically existent mind, do not prove these two points.³⁵³ The two examples instead illustrate two different points: the cognitions of those with the eye disorder and the beings in the Example are not intrinsically existent, and have objects (conventionally). For if they were intrinsically existent, those without an eye disorder would also see the falling hair – without depending

³⁵² Candrakīrti, 2015: VI.55-56, and *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, D 3862: 266a: *gal te rab rib can la skra shad dag med par skra shad kyi rnam pa can gyi shes pa skye na yul gang du rab rib can gyis skra shad dag mthong ba der mig gtad pa'i rab rib med pa la yang de dang 'dra bar skra shad kyi blo yod par 'gyur te/ yul med par mtshungs pa'i phyir ro/ /de'i phyir yul med par rnam par shes pa skye'o zhes bya ba de ni mi rigs so/*. ('If, for someone with an eye disorder there arises a cognition whose content is that of falling hair, without falling hair; then there would also exist an awareness of falling hair like that in someone without an eye disorder who directs their eyes to wherever the one with an eye disorder has seen falling hair, since they are alike in not having an object. Therefore, it is not suitable to say, "there arises a cognition without an object"').

³⁵³ Réndawa 2015g: vol. 5, 164. English in Tillman and Tsering 1997: 179.

on an eye disorder; and all the beings in the Example would presumably be able to see each other's objects – without depending on the other beings' personal karma and cognitive apparatus. (Although neither Candrakīrti nor Réndawa explicitly spell this last point out.)

Réndawa, by implication, then, considers the beings' perceptions in the Example to be grossly deceived experiences: If the person with an eye disorder cognises non-existent falling hair, then the ghost, human, and god also cognise non-existent blood, water, and nectar, as the two examples are the same. However, Candrakīrti argues that the content of the cognition seeing falling hair still has a conventional external object, it is just not falling hair. As discussed in chapter two, presumably he is referring to objects such as the light, secretion in the retina, and the like, that cause the appearance of falling hair. Neither Réndawa nor Candrakīrti explicitly tell us what the conventional object is that appears to the three beings in the Example. If it is asserted to be the flowing stream (*chu klung*), one may ask: what is the flowing stream made of, and why is perceiving it as water just as mistaken as seeing non-existent falling hairs? As we will see shortly, Tsongkhapa is not comfortable leaving these questions unanswered and draws a clear line between the cognitive accuracy of the cognitions in the Falling Hair Example and the Example.

ii. The Example when Meditating on Madhyamaka

Réndawa also uses the Example in his *dBu ma'i lta khrid rgyas pa*, a practical guide to meditating on Madhyamaka. The context is a discussion on how to gradually meditate on the selflessness of *dharmas*.³⁵⁴ This includes four stages: one begins by establishing appearing objects as mind (a rejection of intrinsically existent external objects), this is followed by establishing mind as an illusory appearance, this illusory mind is then shown to

³⁵⁴ For a discussion of Réndawa's manner of meditating on emptiness see Fisher 2025b, and for a more brief overview of the same subject see Komarovski 2011: 84-85.

be inexpressible, and finally one considers scriptures that substantiate the above. We shall only consider the first:

Establishing appearing objects as mind:

Regarding those *dharmas* which are included in the aggregates, constituents, and sources of perception, it is definite that they are either physical or non-physical. The physical dharmas are the five objects, form and so forth, and the [five] senses of the eye and so forth. If one divides those individually into minute atoms, the awareness that grasps the singular coarse [whole object] is nullified. And, if one also divides those subtle atoms into the aspects of the partite directions, there is nothing that can be definitively grasped, such than one can say, “This is its intrinsic nature”. This is because such physical [*dharmas*] are not established as a coarse singular entity, and the subtle atoms are not established as plural entities; and, because there does not exist an alternative which is proven to be another option for that physical [*dharma*]. It does not possess an intrinsic nature, just like an illusion.³⁵⁵

Thus far, we can see that this is an analysis of the ultimate nature of the aggregates, through which their intrinsic nature is refuted.

Likewise, the objects ‘matter’ and so on, apart from being objects of cognition, they [merely] appear as external objects that do not exist (*chad pa*). If one asks, then how is there consensus (*grags pa*) [regarding the common object]? For instance, on the occasion of waking up [from sleep] through the strength of strong clinging, in a dream there appear mountains, buildings, dwellings, etc. Likewise, from beginningless time, through the force of strong clinging to unreal forms and the like, for childish beings the nature of their minds appear as external objects, such as forms, that do not exist (*chad pa*). In reality (*yang dag par na*), it is said there are no forms etc. at all apart from being appearances in the mind. One must repeatedly analyse this.

Accordingly, it is said in the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*:

[External] objects do not exist, they are the nature of mind,

³⁵⁵ Réndawa, 2015f, vol. 5, 473-474: /*dang po ni/phung po khams dang skye mched kyis bsdus pa'i chos de dag kyang gzugs can dang /gzugs can ma yin pa gnyis su nges shing /gzugs can rnam ni/gzugs la sogs yul lnga dang /mig la sogs pa'i dbang po rnam yin la/ de dag kyang rdul phra rab so sor rnam par phye na/ rags pa gcig tu 'dzin pa'i blo 'dor zhing/ rdul phra rab rnam kyang /phyogs kyi cha shas kyis rnam par phye na/ rang bzhin 'di'o zhes nges par bzung du med do/ /de'i phyir bzugs can rnam rags pa gcig dang/ rdul phran du ma'i ngo bor ma grub pa'i phyir dang/ gzugs can la rnam pa gzhan du grub pa'i mtha' med pa'i phyir/ sgyu ma bzhin du rang bzhin med pa yin no/*

External objects are incorrectly perceived

Through the stirring of predispositions (*bag chags*) in the mind,

And arise as appearances of [external] objects.³⁵⁶

Moreover, the *Mahāyānasamgraha* says:

Since hell beings,³⁵⁷ hungry ghosts, animals, humans,

and gods have different minds [i.e. perceptions]

concerning a single entity each according to the class [of beings to which they belong],

it is maintained that [external] objects do not exist.³⁵⁸

For instance, although water is a single entity, it may appear in different ways – as burning iron, blood and pus, an abode, a place to wash, an object to drink, or as nectar – for the five classes of being due to their class. Even so, such dharmas that commonly appear (*snang grags*) do not exist apart from mind; one must repeatedly analyse this with wisdom. Such [analysis] is an antidote to conceptions of objects, establishes apparent objects as mind, and is called the level of yoga that observes the non-existence of objects.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ Rëndawa appears to be paraphrasing the sūtra here (highlighted below in fn. 359). The full sentence in Tibetan is as follows (*Āryalaṅkāvatāramahāyānasūtra*, D 107, 165a8-9): */rkyen las skyes pa'i rang bzhin la/ /rtog pa gang gis rtog byed pa/ /phyi rol don mthong log pa te//don med sems ni 'ba' zhig go/ /rigs pas rnam par gzhigs na ni/ /gzung ba dang ni 'dzin pa 'gag/ ji ltar byis pas brtags pa ltar/ /phyi rol gyi ni don med do/ /bag chags kyis ni dkrugs pa'i sems/ /don du snang ba shin tu 'byung //rtog pa'i rnam pa gnyis 'gags na/ /yang dag spyod yul ye shes te/*. The Sanskrit equivalent is (Vaidya 1963, 117):

*yena kalpena kalpenti svabhāvaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ /
bāhyārthadarśanaṃ mithyā nāstiyartham cittameva tu // Lank_10.153 //
yuktyā vipaśyamānānām grāhagrāhyaṃ nirudhyate /
bāhyo na vidyate hyartha yathā bālairvikalpyate // Lank_10.154 //
vāsanairlulitaṃ cittamarthābhāsaṃ pravartate /
kalpadvayanirodhena jñānaṃ tathatagocaram // Lank_10.155 //*

³⁵⁷ Note the unusual inclusion of *dmyal ba* in this line, all other editions of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* checked do not include this class of being. For more info on this verse, see chapter 2, fn. 131.

³⁵⁸ The Derge edition (Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 16a) reads: *yi dgas dud 'gro mi nrams dang/ lha nrams ji ltar rigs rigs su/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/*

³⁵⁹ Rëndawa, 2015f, vol. 5, 474-475: */de ltar na/ gzugs la sogs pa'i yul shes pa las phyi rol du chad pa ltar snang zhing /grags pa ji lta bu zhe na/ dper na sad pa'i gnas skabs su/ phyi rol du mngon par zhen pa'i dbang gis/ rmi lam du ri khang khyim la sogs pa med bzhin du snang ba ltar/ thog ma med pa nas gzugs la sogs par yang dag pa ma yin par mngon par zhen pa'i dbang gis/byis pa nrams la/ sems nyid gzugs la sogs pa phyi rol du chad pa ltar snang zhing /yang dag par na sems kyis snang ba las gzhan pa'i gzugs sogs ci yang med do/ /zhes yang dang yang du dpyad par bya'o/ /de skad du yang /lang kar gshegs pa las/ don yod ma yin sems nyid de/ /phyi rol don mthong log pa yin/ bag chags kyis ni dkrugs pa'i sems/ /don du snang ba rab tu byung/*

Since the context is explicitly a method to prove the emptiness of *dharmas* via a philosophical analysis of their ultimate nature, Réndawa is clearly not rejecting external objects as mere non-analysed conventions. It does, however, sound very similar to a Yogācāra rejection of external objects. He even posits Asaṅga's *pretatiryagmanuṣyāṇām-*verse to prove his point. Réndawa argues that in the context of an intersubjective gathering there is a common appearance, although this cannot be said to exist separated from the minds observing it. In spite of the above, we should not jump to any hasty conclusions that he is wearing a Yogācāra hat, so to speak. Considering the whole context and the discussion immediately following these passages, Réndawa is merely refuting the intrinsic existence of external objects as a preliminary step to illustrating that all *dharmas* are not intrinsically real, they are illusory, and not independent of mind.

iii. The Example when Practising the Three Sets of Precepts

Réndawa also uses the Example in a letter that responds to Géshé Senggé Gyeltsen (n.d), found within a collection of responses to various teachers.³⁶⁰ This particular response concerns the three sets of precepts (*sdom gsum*), those of the prātimokṣa, bodhisattva, and mantra systems, and how these are practiced together without contradiction. Réndawa explains that although the three sets of precepts are of a single entity within the mental continuum of the person who has obtained them, like fire and heat, if they give up one, it is not that they relinquish all of the precepts. He continues:

For if one does not fall from the higher root and branch [precepts], one will not be tainted through falling from the lower ones. When one practices the three sets of

/zhes gsungs so/ /gzhan yang theg bsdus su/dmyal ba yi dwags dud 'gro dang/ /lha rnams ji ltar rigs rigs su/ /dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ /don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/ /zhes gsungs pa ltar/chu lta bu'i dngos po gcig kyang/ 'gr o ba rigs lnga la/ lcags bsreg dang/ rnag khrag dang/ gnas dang/ khrus dang/ btung bya dang/ bdud rtsi la sogs pa snang tshul tha dad du snang ba'i rigs pas kyang /snang grags kyi chos rnams sems las gud na med par shes rab kyis yang dang yang du dpyad par bya'o/ /de dag ni gzung rtog gi gnyen por yul snang sems su sgrub pa gzung med la dmigs pa'i rnal 'byor gyi sa zhes bya'o/

³⁶⁰ Réndawa 2015b: vol. 3, 134-272.

precepts, having prioritised the protection of the higher ones, the lower precepts are to be considered in correspondence (*btang snyom su 'jog*) with one's location and time, as explained in many classes of sūtra and tantra.³⁶¹

Réndawa appears to be saying that one should prioritise the protection of the higher precepts, undoubtedly those of the bodhisattva and mantra systems, and most likely also the four root defeats (*catvāra pārājika, ltung ba bzhi*) of fully ordained ones, whereas the lower precepts, the thirteen remainders (*lhag ma bcu gsum*), and the like, are more relative. They should thus be maintained in correspondence with the customs of one's place and time. He then illustrates, the relativity of these lower precepts with the Example:

[This is similar to how] sentient beings have impure vision, and the Buddhas have a vision of wisdom, [although] this is a Cittamātra tenet, one that proves external objects do not exist. As the *Mahāyānasamgraha* says:

Since hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans,

and gods have different minds [i.e. perceptions]

concerning a single entity each according to the class [of beings to which they belong],

it is maintained that [external] objects do not exist.

In this citation a single entity [is shown to] appear in distinct ways to the different classes of sentient being. For each of them it is their own appearance that is true. It is as though a single position of 'true' or 'false' cannot be established.

[Likewise,] when one practices wind yoga, the experiential visions that arise are a function of the channels and winds. If these are not sustained by the *view*, leave aside becoming a cause for liberation it is difficult for them even to be a cause of higher

³⁶¹ Réndawa 2015b, vol. 3, 269: /*de bas na sdom pa gong ma'i rtsa ba dang /yan lag gi ltung ba ma byung na 'og ma'i ltung bas gos par mi 'gyur/ sdom gsum nyams su len pa na gong ma'i bsrung sdom gtso bor byas nas/ 'og ma'i sdom pa yul dus kyi dbang gis btang snyoms su 'jog dgos par mdo dang rgyud sde mang po gcig nas bshad do/*

re-birth. Whereas, if one practices while sustaining the *view*, the *view* will be enhanced a little.³⁶²

Réndawa thus provides a pithy explanation to underscore the relativity of specifically the lower precepts. He does not use the Example to illustrate the relativity of these precepts in relation to the higher precepts, but rather the relative nature of these more secondary rules. Just as different beings from the six realms and Buddhas have different visions of the same referent, and just as an experiential vision of one practicing completion stage (*sampannakrama*, *rdzogs rim*) wind yoga can increase wisdom or ignorance, similarly, the lower precepts can cause benefit (relatively speaking), and are to be maintained with insight that corresponds to one's time and locality. He, thus, utilises the Example to underscore the relativity at play within conventions.

iv. The Example in Critiquing the *Kālacakra Tantra*

The final instance of the Example in Réndawa's writings that we shall discuss appears in his polemical work, the *Nor bu'i phreng ba*, a text analysing the authenticity of the *Kālacakra tantra*.³⁶³ Despite being one of the most popular tantras in Tibet, it was not unilaterally accepted as a Buddhist tantra. Réndawa is undoubtedly its most famous critic, writing, as he did, the *Nor bu'i phreng ba* as an open letter within which he examines its authenticity. This text evoked several fierce reactions from masters of his day, leading Réndawa to write

³⁶² Réndawa 2015b, vol. 3, 269: *sems can la ma dag pa'i snang ba dang / /sangs rgyas la dag pa'i ye shes kyi snang ba sems tsam pa'i grub mtha' yin/ phyi rol gyi don med pa'i sgrub byed du 'gro/ theg bsdus su/ dmyal ba yi dwags mi rnams dang// lha rnams ji ltar rigs rigs su// dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir// don ma grub par 'dod pa yin// zhes gsungs pa ltar dngos po gcig la yang 'gro ba rigs mi mthun pa rnams la snang tshul tha dad du snang yang /gang la gang snang ba de nyid de dang de la bden'di bden la 'di mi bden zhes mtha' gcig tu bzhag par mi nus pa bzhin no/ /rlung sbyor byas dus kyi nyams snang sna tshogs 'char ba rtsa rlung gi byed pa yin/ lta bas ma zin na thar pa'i rgyur 'gro ba lta zhog mtho ris kyi rgyur yang 'gro ba dka'/ lta ba rnams dag gis zin cing nyams su len shes na lta ba'i bogs 'don cung zad yong/*

³⁶³ Réndawa 2015a: vol. 1, 113-129. For a discussion of the specifics of Réndawa's critique of the *Kālacakra tantra*, see Jinpa 2009.

a “self-addressed” (*rang lan*) response to his own letter.³⁶⁴ By the time he wrote the latter, his views do appear to have changed, as he was now willing to accept it as a Buddhist tantra,³⁶⁵ while maintaining there were internal contradictions in its commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā*, that were not to be accepted literally (*yathāruta, sgra ji bzhin pa*).³⁶⁶

In the section that concerns us, Réndawa discusses the differences between the explanation of the universe in non-Buddhist systems, such as those of the Jains (*gcer bu pa*) and the Buddhist system according to the Vaibhāṣikas. He argues that one cannot simply explain away these differences by saying they are just the result of the various thoughts and ideas of sentient beings (and thus neither explanation is more accurate than the other), for if one does, how is one to refute the explanation of the dimension of the god realms as described in the *Vedas* (*rig byed pa'i gzhung lugs*). He thus seems concerned with the sceptical ramifications of such an assertion. He continues:

If such [different descriptions of the universe] are not even established conventions, and the [differing] explanations in the *Abhidharma[kośa]* and *Kālacakra* tantra of [whether or not] the world is 400,000 yojana (*dpag tshad*) are not merely a matter of different appearances for sentient beings, then how can this be the case? For one would then also have to differentiate the appearances and not only the worlds of the people [discussed in] the *Abhidharma* and the *Kālacakra*. And yet, when the Teacher taught in the scriptures that a single entity appears differently for different beings, such as water appearing as pus and blood and the like, this was in relation to beings of different classes. How can a single external object appear to have contradictory sizes and shapes for beings of the same class?³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ Jinpa 2009: 319, 322.

³⁶⁵ Jinpa 2009: 319, 324.

³⁶⁶ Roloff 2009: 302.

³⁶⁷ Réndawa 2015a, vol. 1, 122-123 (highlighted sections below are in a smaller font in the original, and appear to be from a different text upon which Réndawa is elaborating. From word searches this text is neither the *Kālacakra* tantra nor the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary): *de ni tha snyad du yang ma grub na/ / dpag tshad 'bum phrag bzhi pa'i 'jig rten mngon pa dang dus 'khor nas bshad pa sems can so so'i snang ba yin na/ gang gis 'ang/ mngon pa dang dus 'khor gyi gang zag gang la 'jig rten gang snang ba'i/ /rnam par dbye ba 'di yang smra dgos so/ /rigs mi mthun pa'i 'gro la dngos gcig kyang/ /chu la rnag khrag tu mthong ba sogs tha dad snang bar ston pas lung las gsungs/ /rigs mthun 'gro la phyir rol dngos po gcig /tshad dang dbyibs sogs 'gal ba ji ltar snang/*

From this passage we can see that Réndawa is certainly not content to resolve the difference between the explanation of the universe in the *Kālacakra* tantra and that of the *Abhidharmakośa* system by simply saying these are just different ideas or appearances for different humans. For if that were the case, these systems should have divided up humans by way of the various appearances that they have, but they do not. When the Buddha uses the Example to illustrate the discordant appearances of beings, this illustrates the discordant appearances between beings of different realms, not of the same realm. We cannot therefore say for humans the world is X in size, and also not-X in size. Réndawa, thus, wards off rampant relativism.

He continues:

Displaying a universal monarch and his army in a space one cubit [twenty-four finger widths] in size, or placing the world inside a mustard seed, and the like, are not suitable examples of the world appearing differently for the same group of beings conventionally. For, such are accounts within the hagiographies of powerful masters. They do not exist from the perspective of relative truth (*tha snyad bden pa'i ngo na*). Therefore, do not cover the soles [of your faulty explanation] with a crown[-like] example (*zhwa dpe*)!³⁶⁸

Réndawa here rejects the numerous examples of yogic feats as valid examples illustrating the potential for a single object to appear in contradictory ways for beings of the same realm, through merely saying such are accounts from religious hagiographies, and cannot be said to exist as relative truths. An intriguing statement, indeed. For if such feats are not accepted among conventional truth, their ontological status will be no different from the water in a mirage. Réndawa has in effect placed the perception of the Buddha's and other masters'

³⁶⁸ Réndawa 2015a, vol. 1, 122-123: */phug khru gang bar 'khor lo sgyur ba sde dang bcas pa ston pa 'jig rten yungs 'brur 'dzud sogs tha snyad du 'gro ba ris mthun la 'jig rten mi 'dra bar snang ba'i dper mi rung/ de dag mthu ldan rnams kyi rnam thar yin/ /tha snyad bden pa'i ngo na de yod min/ de phyir zhwa dpe lham' la ma bkab cig/*

“miracles” into the category of utterly mistaken cognitions, as the objects observed do not exist even as conventional truths.

v. Conclusions

In sum, there are four quite distinct uses and interpretations of the Example here.³⁶⁹ The first in the *Madhyamakāvatāra* highlights the deceived nature of the cognitions in the Example and the nonexistence of the three objects; the second in the *dBu ma'i lta khrid rgyas pa* shows that external objects do not exist in reality and are not independent of mind; the third in his letter to Géshé Senggé Gyeltsen illustrates the relativity of the lower Buddhist precepts; and fourth, in his polemical work on the *Kālacakra* tantra the Example is used to show a standard of warrant applicable only within a single realm. Beings of the same realm can all warrant what appears in common to them, just not that of other realms. He thus avoids the arbitrariness of knowledge, where any cognition is equally accurate by stressing the cohesion among the perceptions of beings of the same realm regarding an external world.

In these four distinct interpretations, Réndawa has used the Example to both prove the ultimate non-existence of an external world, and also that its conventional nature is commonly agreed upon. He has used it to underscore the deceived nature of cognitions, and at the same time the contextual and relative value of conventional warrant and practices. However, it must be admitted, his explanations still leave many questions unanswered and do not constitute a well-developed theory that wards off relativism and scepticism. For instance, if the dimensions of the human world outlined in the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Kālacakra* are not merely a matter of differing human perceptions, does this imply that one

³⁶⁹ Réndawa, 2015h: vol. 9: 575-578, includes another instance of the Example. This is within Réndawa's *Legs par bzhad pa'i rgya mtsho*, a commentary to Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, a text Tsongkhapa requested Réndawa to write (Jinpa 2019: 46), and will not be discussed here, as Réndawa comments on it in conformity with Yogācāra position that external objects do not exist. It thus adds little to our discussion.

of these texts represents the universe more accurately? If so, does one of the perceptions within the Example better reflect the reality of the river? Are these various perceptions ranked by degrees of validity, or are they all equally flawed? Perhaps, this is why our next exegete felt the need to fill in the gaps in Réndawa's explanation and provide a more robust epistemology that more precisely avoids these two philosophical issues. Let us turn now, then, to Tsongkhapa.

4.3.1. Tsongkhapa: Life and Work

Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) hailed from the Amdo region of Eastern Tibet. Despite the tumultuous situation in central Tibet prior to his arrival in 1373, as Té Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen (1302-1364) wrestled power from the Sakya hierarchs to found his Phakmodrupa (*Phag mo gru pa*) dynasty, during Tsongkhapa's lifetime the area experienced a period of relative calm. This may have been one reason for his incredibly prolific and successful career.³⁷⁰ No doubt his close connection with Gongma Drakpa Gyeltsen (1374–1432), the longest reigning Phakmodrupa ruler who supported him throughout his life, was also instrumental.

Tsongkhapa would come to be regarded by his followers as a great reformer of Buddhism. His “reforms” or innovations may be characterised as embracing both historically *Indian* and typologically *Indic* elements of discourse,³⁷¹ and relate to a large number of points of Buddhist theory and practice. But they can all be gathered together via the didactic motif of issues that relate to the view (*dṛṣṭi, lta ba*), meditation (*bhāvanā, sgom pa*), and conduct (*caryā, spyod pa*) of Buddhist practice. Tsongkhapa's concerns with the way these were

³⁷⁰ Jinpa 2019: 14.

³⁷¹ See the introduction to chapter 3, and Seyfort Ruegg 2004: 329.

understood during his day have already been thoroughly examined in modern scholarship, so I shall merely gloss them here.³⁷² In terms of *view*, he was greatly concerned with how Tibetans were interpreting Madhyamaka. For him, they had fallen under the pernicious influence of teachings that either overextended their scope when refuting what did not exist, and thus were unable to uphold conventions like karma, or were overly limited in their scope, and thus could not uproot the subtlest form of ignorance that blocks liberation. For Tsongkhapa, such detrimental inadequacies in the Madhyamaka *view* inevitably informed inferior methods of *meditation*. For instance, through overextending what Madhyamaka reasonings reject, the *meditation* that cultivates such a *view* would abandon all mental activity and enquiry in order to cultivate a thought-free state that did not grasp anything, be they concepts that concurred with reality or inaccurate mental superimpositions. Such *meditation* would unavoidably influence these meditators' *conduct*. This would lead to what has been remembered by tradition as a lack of concern with the importance of the vinaya, and more generally the method (*upāya, thabs*) wing, as opposed to the aspect of wisdom of Mahāyāna Buddhist soteriology. Tsongkhapa's reforms or innovations, therefore, spanned many aspects of Buddhist practice, however, his followers would consider his principal contributions to Buddhist doctrine to be his writings on Madhyamaka,³⁷³ and on the illusory body (*māyākāya, sgyu lus*) of tantra's completion stage.³⁷⁴ Before discussing Tsongkhapa's unique interpretation of the Example, let us briefly survey certain features of his Madhyamaka that should allow for a more nuanced reading of his interpretation – one that underscores the importance of conventional epistemic instruments warranting the existence

³⁷² For a more detailed discussion, see Jinpa 2002: 21-34 and 175.

³⁷³ See Seyfort Ruegg (2004) for a useful overview of Tsongkhapa's principal innovations in Madhyamaka discourse.

³⁷⁴ See the Fifth Dalai Lama's exposition of why he considered Tsongkhapa unique among all other Tibetan spiritual figures in Jinpa 2021: 361-362.

of conventionally existent things, the famous *tha snyad tshad grub*, or “the establishing of conventions by (accurate) epistemic instruments”.

4.3.2. Tsongkhapa’s Thought

As mentioned, Tsongkhapa believed that his contemporaries and certain predecessors (which ones is a tricky subject as they are never named) had mistakenly read Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti through either under, or over-exaggerating what they negated. It will not be possible to examine both of these aspects thoroughly here, so for reason of direct relevance to our discussion we shall focus only on the latter.³⁷⁵ As had become the norm at his time, Tsongkhapa followed Buddhapālita’s and Candrakīrti’s interpretation of Nāgārjuna, and thus wished to not allow for any foundationalism or intrinsic existence even conventionally in his presentation. However, one of the natural by-products of conventionalism is epistemic relativism or scepticism, a major pitfall Tsongkhapa saw his contemporaries had unwittingly fallen in. Borrowing the two types of *pramāṇa*, perceptual and inferential, from the Pramāṇavādins’³⁷⁶ epistemology he would accept their premise that these epistemic instruments are the two means of accurate knowledge. At the same time, however, he would distinguish himself from them by following Candrakīrti’s acceptance of four *pramāṇas* - adding inferences via analogy (*upamāna*, *nye bar ’jal ba*) and testimony (*śābda* or *āgama*, *lung*).³⁷⁷ He would also reject the Pramāṇavādins’ view that these epistemic instruments are self-validating and accurate regarding the intrinsic nature of their objects.³⁷⁸ Like Réndawa as we have just seen, he argued that *pramāṇas*, nonetheless, are still viable within

³⁷⁵ For further details on the former, see Tsongkhapa’s presentation of ‘not negating enough’ with Madhyamaka reasonings, in Cutler, et al 2000-2004: vol. 3, 195-203.

³⁷⁶ Although this term is not found in the literature of this school, it is a useful neologism for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti’s school.

³⁷⁷ Jinpa 2021: 352, and Yakherds 2022: vol. 1, 24, and 73-75. See Candrakīrti’s mention of these *pramāṇa* in *Prasannapadā*, in McDonald 2015: vol. 1, 275-276

³⁷⁸ Cutler, et al 2000-2004: vol. 3, 165.

Madhyamaka discourse regarding the conventional. Yet, unlike Réndawa he also argued they are tenable for the ultimate. Indeed, it is conventional epistemic instruments that warrant conventions, and ultimate ones that warrant emptiness; neither validating nor rejecting each other's sphere of expertise. This is similar to how a telescope's accuracy regarding the moon does not bear on or invalidate a microscope's warrant of a micro-organism, and vice versa. He thus ascribes ontological truth to mere conventions (despite recognising they are deceiving or *slu ba*), and conventional accuracy to their certifying *pramāṇas* (despite accepting they are deceived). As Dreyfus succinctly puts it in his discussion of Gelug readings of Dharmakīrti:

Common conventions have a validity that is not the mere product of ignorance and cannot be contradicted by any philosophically informed interpretation of Dharmakīrti. This is the hallmark of a Geluk approach to Buddhist philosophy.³⁷⁹

Tsongkhapa thus hopes to avoid epistemic and ethical relativism. Tsongkhapa and his followers' strict adherence to their famous *tha snyad tshad grub*, would lead to a barrage of criticism from outside Tsongkhapa's tradition and was considered a realist or foundational interpretation of Madhyamaka.³⁸⁰ These critiques shall be examined in due course. For now, it is important to recognise that Tsongkhapa was deeply concerned with illustrating that Madhyamaka has an epistemology that allows for a confident recognition of the law of karma, and the whole *method* side of the Mahāyāna path.

The difficulty of maintaining this position, and around which the criticisms of his view revolve, is the interpretation of the term *saṃvṛti* in *saṃvṛti-satya*, or conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*). Of three central meanings of this term glossed by Candrakīrti in his

³⁷⁹ Dreyfus 1997: 116. Also, see 458.

³⁸⁰ See Yakherds 2022. I am following their terminology here: something being “foundational” may more literally be described as something possessing an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*), or something that is self-instituting (*tshugs thub*).

Prasannapadā,³⁸¹ we can heuristically group them into two central nuances: that of conventional and that of obscurational. As The Yakherds extensively clarify, the central debate between Tsongkhapa and his critics rests on emphasising either the former or latter meaning of *kun rdzob* in their interpretation of Candrakīrti.³⁸² For by emphasising the conventional nuance Tsongkhapa grounds the *method* side of Buddhist soteriology in Madhyamaka discourse, and through emphasising the obscurational side Taktsang Lotsawa (1405-1477) and similar interpreters would emphasise the deceiving nature of all conventional objects and subjects, and thereby leave no room for foundationalism. Both agree that conventional objects appear to possess an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*) when in fact they do not, and hence are deceiving; likewise, that the cognitions of conventions are tainted by this mistaken superimposition or grasping onto *svabhāva*. For Tsongkhapa, this does not mean, however, that conventional cognitions can never be epistemically warranting. They indeed can be, and must, if we are to avoid epistemic relativism, where any cognition may be accurate, or scepticism, where no cognition can be. To achieve this difficult manoeuvre, that allows conventions to be deceiving (*shu ba*) and yet existent, and the cognitions of them to be mistaken (*'khrul ba*) and yet conventionally accurate, Tsongkhapa will argue that for a cognition to be *pramāṇa* it need not be accurate regarding every aspect of its object:

For this master [Candrakīrti], if [entities] existed with their own intrinsic character or essence, then they would be true. Due to this, they would have to be posited as true by epistemic instruments, which would be accurate regarding such intrinsic

³⁸¹ Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā*, ed. La Vallée Poussin 1970: 492; and Yakherds 2022: vol.1, 22-23: (1) ‘“universal obscuration” (*samantād varāṇam*); that is misunderstanding (*ajñāna*) that obscures the reality of the objects; (2) mutually coming together (*paraspara-sambhavana*), which he explains refers to things that come to be “due to mutually supporting one another” (*anyone-samāśrayeṇa*); and (3) “agreed-upon worldly discourse” (*saṃketo loka-vyavahārah*) – in other words, the ways in which ordinary people communicate, which are based on accepted customs.’

³⁸² See Yakherds 2022: vol. 1, 8.

characteristics. However, since objects are false, the epistemic instruments that posit them cannot be accurate regarding intrinsic characteristics.

..... Therefore, when they are unharmed through being polluted on account of outer or inner causes of mistake, such as an eye disorder, sense cognitions and the like, are accurate regarding non-erroneous conventions. [However,] through the influence of polluting ignorance they have mistaken appearances, and so grasp (*'dzin pa*) their objects as though they had intrinsic natures, when they do not.³⁸³

In essence then, Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka project may be characterized as emphasising the relative *truth* of conventions to avoid a degeneration in Buddhist conduct, and the relative accuracy of conventional epistemic instruments to avoid epistemic relativism and scepticism.

In this regard he provides us with three famous criteria that must be fulfilled for an entity to be considered conventionally existent. Each criterion further refines those entities admitted: Something can be said to exist, if (i) it is known in the world, (ii) it is not invalidated by conventional epistemic instruments, (iii) it is not invalidated by ultimate epistemic instruments.³⁸⁴ These three criteria, therefore, may be seen as gradually weeding out subtler and subtler hypothetical things from the "in-group" of conventionally existent things.³⁸⁵ The first criterion (arguably) removes phenomena that no worldly institution could accept, as they are logical impossibilities such as square triangles, or the famous son of a barren woman. The second removes entities such as flat earths, or that a mirage is a lake. The third removes intrinsically existent things. These ingenious criteria may allow for the continuous

³⁸³ Tsongkhapa 1985: 616-618: *slob dpon 'di ni rang gi mtshan nyid dam ngo bos grub na bden par 'gyur bas yul bden par grub pa rnam par 'jog pa'i tshad ma la rang mtshan la tshad mar song ba dgos kyang yul ni brdzun pa yin pas de rnam par 'jog pa'i tshad ma la rang gi mtshan nyid la tshad mar song ba mi dgos.....des na rab rib la sogs pa'i phyi nang gi 'khrul rgyus bslad pa'i gnod pa med na ma rig pas bslad pa'i dbang gis dbang shes la sogs pa rnam rang bzhin med bzhin rang bzhin yod pa'i yul 'dzin par snang ba'i 'khrul bas ni tha snyad pa'i phyin ci ma log pa la mi gnod do/* (Also, translated in Cutler, et al 2000-2002: vol. 3, 166-7.)

³⁸⁴ Tsongkhapa 1985: 627, English in Cutler, et al 2000-2002: vol. 3, 178.

³⁸⁵ For more, and a slightly different reading, see Newland (1992: chapter V), and Cowherds (2011: 79).

updating of conventions, as required by society as it evolves.³⁸⁶ For example, if we were to accept a given convention, such as that the world is flat since it is known among a worldly institution as such, the convention that the world is spherical on the same reason, would have no more normative value. However, the second criterion allows for the first notion to be updated as evidence for the contrary grows and is contradicted by perceptual and inferential *pramāṇas*.

Now, while Tsongkhapa's three criteria appear to allow for worldly knowledge to be updated, one may ask does it also allow for specialised conventional knowledge? Can his theory incorporate non-ultimate but highly specialised and analytical knowledge of conventions such as those found in the sciences? This question relates closely to Rongzompa's "relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception", discussed in chapter 3. For if Tsongkhapa's three criteria allow for different degrees of accuracy of conventional epistemic instruments, say between a toddler's cognition of water and a chemist's cognition of it, then the problem of an ordinary human's cognition of water being superseded by an advanced yogin's perception of it as a goddess, poses no significant issue.

4.3.3. Tsongkhapa's Mereological Solution to the Example

i. Background and Context

However, before we can answer this, we must first unpack Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the Example as it is found within his commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra*. The general context of the discussion is found within Candrakīrti's broader examination of a related example that the Yogācāra's employ in their proofs for idealism. This related example concerns a yogi's meditation on foulness (*aśubha, mi sdug pa*).³⁸⁷ This popular

³⁸⁶ The Yakherds (2021: 74) appear to be using Tsongkhapa's criteria in this way.

³⁸⁷ Henceforth, the Meditation on Foulness Example.

meditation for reducing attachment is discussed in the Pāli sūttas,³⁸⁸ the southern³⁸⁹ and northern³⁹⁰ Abhidharma traditions, and in Mahāyāna śāstras.³⁹¹ The meditation in essence involves the imagination (*adhimukti, mos pa*) of a corpse in varying degrees of decomposition to subdue attachment to colour, shape, tangibles, and being honoured. Interestingly, Vasubandhu considers that meditation on just skeletons is sufficient to subdue all of these at once.³⁹² One begins by imagining that the skin gradually peels off one's body until all that is left is a skeleton. This is gradually extended to all other beings until the whole universe is filled with skeletons. Finally, one gradually reduces the scope of one's visualisation until only one's own skeleton remains.³⁹³

Candrakīrti's discussion of this meditation and its object revolves around an abhidharmic assertion on the nature of the imagined skeletons. For Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmikas, this meditation on *aśubhā* is technically *a mental application of resolve (adhimukti manaskāra)*, in contrast to the *mental application to the real (tattva manaskāra)*, and as such imagines a fictitious object. It is however not a topsy-turvy³⁹⁴ (*viparyāsa*) type of cognition as it does have salvific value and is done with full knowledge of the aims and relative skilfulness of the method.³⁹⁵ Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa argue that if the cognition that perceives these imagined skeletons is intrinsically real, as they believe their Yogācāra interlocutor asserts, then so should the skeletons if they are really the nature of mere cognition. If these are intrinsically real, and thus not dependent on meditative training or on their perceiver, then anyone who looks in the same direction should also see the skeletons.

³⁸⁸ For instance, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* within Majjhima Nikaya 10, see Bodhi 1995: 145-155.

³⁸⁹ Buddhagosa's *Visuddhimagga*, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 2011: 169-182.

³⁹⁰ Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and *Bhāṣya*, VI. See Gelong Lodrö Sangpo 2012: vol. 3, 1891-1902.

³⁹¹ Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.7-8, see Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 1, 181.

³⁹² *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, VI, see Gelong Lodrö Sangpo 2012: vol. 3, 1899.

³⁹³ Gelong Lodrö Sangpo 2012: vol. 3, 1900.

³⁹⁴ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2009: 283.

³⁹⁵ Bhikkhu Dhammajoti 2009: 285-281.

As we saw in the chapter 2 (2.4.2.i), and in the section on Réndawa above, when discussing the Example in VI.71ab of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti referred his reader back to his response in relation to the Falling Hair Example proposed by the Yogācāra as an instance of cognition without an external object. In that context, he argued that even an eye consciousness seeing non-existent falling hairs has an existent object.³⁹⁶ As noted in chapter two, Forman explains that for Candrakīrti, every epistemic event always has an existent percept, that is an objective support,³⁹⁷ and not merely intentional content.³⁹⁸ Candrakīrti would thus seem to consider the Falling Hair example and the Example as both exemplifying cognitions with existent external objects, with objects that are different entities than their perceivers. Furthermore, Candrakīrti regarded both examples as exposing the same flaw in the Yogācāra assertion that cognitions possess *svabhāva*. If this were the case, then anyone without an eye disease would perceive the falling hair, and anyone who is not a hungry ghost would perceive the blood. For such cognitions are independently produced, not dependent on an eye disease, or on a hungry ghost's karma.

Many of the debates that will follow revolve around how to categorise the cognitions in the various examples of illusion that Candrakīrti uses: does Candrakīrti group all of them under the rubric of non-*pramāṇa*; or is there a difference between the consciousnesses in a dream and one perceiving falling hairs on the one hand and those of the beings in the Example on

³⁹⁶ Candrakīrti, 2015: VI.55-56, and *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, D3862: 266a: *gal te rab rib can la skra shad dag med par skra shad kyi rnam pa can gyi shes pa skye na yul gang du rab rib can gyis skra shad dag mthong ba der mig gtad pa'i rab rib med pa la yang de dang 'dra bar skra shad kyi blo yod par 'gyur te/ yul med par mtshungs pa'i phyir ro/ /de'i phyir yul med par rnam par shes pa skye'o zhes bya ba de ni mi rigs so*. 'If, for someone with an eye disorder there arises a cognition whose content is that of falling hair, without falling hair [really] being there, then there would also exist an awareness of falling hair like that in someone without an eye disorder who directs their eyes to wherever the one with an eye disorder has seen falling hair, since they are alike in not having an object. Therefore, it is not suitable to say, "there arises a cognition without an object."'

³⁹⁷ See chapter 2, fn. 169.

³⁹⁸ Forman 2020: 917.

the other? Taktsang, Gorampa, and Shakya Chokden prefer the former reading, while Tsongkhapa favours the latter.

ii. Two Types of Example, Two Types of Falsity

Reading between the lines, Tsongkhapa's commentary on the Example in VI.71ab of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* distinguishes the various examples Candrakīrti is using into two groups: reflections, mirages, the imagined skeletons, and the Falling Hair example on the one hand, and blood, water, and nectar in the Example on the other.³⁹⁹ This is an important distinction, as it has significant ramifications for his presentation of conventional *pramāṇa* and his warding off of epistemic relativism and arbitrariness. The objects of the beings in the Example for Tsongkhapa are not in the same category of illusion as the falling hair. The Example is therefore not one of the examples of illusion *per se*. Rather, the pus, water, and nectar are only illusory in the same way that all other conventionalities are: they are illusory as they appear to and are believed to possess *svabhāva*. Strictly speaking, pus, water, and nectar in the Example are real conventional truths (*yang dag kyi kun rdzog bden pa*), conventional truths that are not realised as illusory by unimpaired worldly cognitions; that is, cognitions that are not distorted by internal or external causes of error and yet are not directly informed by an understanding of emptiness.⁴⁰⁰ Within the fictitious world of relative or conventional reality, these nominally existing objects perform the functions that they appear to perform in accordance with accepted custom in the institution of the world, and would not be considered falsities by the world. As such, the Example represents a more

³⁹⁹ This conclusion is based on reading the section as a whole, see Tsongkhapa 2008: 340-342.

⁴⁰⁰ For Tsongkhapa's tradition, the distinction of convention truths into real and unreal is held to be a distinction that is done from the perspective of the world, and not from the Mādhyamika's perspective, as from their perspective all conventions are unreal and illusory as they appear to possess intrinsic natures but do not. For more details see Jinpa 2021: 231-232. Candrakīrti discusses these in *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI.25-26, also see Cabezón 1992: 368-369.

complex scenario to explain than the coarser mirage and falling-hair style illusions, as it illustrates the problem of intersubjectivity across realms, and not mere illusionism.

Why does this complicate matters? It was said that if the consciousness that perceives floaters were intrinsically existent then so should these objects be, and thus they should be perceived by all who look in the same direction. However, the Example is a case where groups of beings of the same homogeneity do see the same objects in the same direction, but beings of other homogeneity see something entirely different in that location. Moreover, Tsongkhapa is very adamant that the hungry ghosts' eye consciousness that perceives a flowing stream as pus and blood is observing visible matter (*rūpāyatana*, *gzugs kyi skye mched*) capable of functioning as pus and blood, and is a conventional epistemic instrument. To resolve the issue thoroughly, the following question is raised:

While the perceptions of those beings [in the Example] are conventional epistemic instruments, if a single basis were established by epistemic instruments in such discordant [ways], being pus and blood and not being pus and blood would not be contradictory. In which case, how could there be any reliability as to what is established by epistemic instruments?⁴⁰¹

To unpack Tsongkhapa's argument we first need to bear in mind that, for him, the main conceptual dagger aimed at the heart of the Prāsaṅgika view is that it is nihilistic, not simply in terms of its ontological standpoint, but also by implication the feasibility of it upholding a coherent epistemology - the possibility of correct knowledge of objects, be they ultimate reality or nominal. Tsongkhapa's solution here is somewhat radical and yet is based on the common-sense notion that being an entity and not being an entity are mutually exclusive propositions and thus one thing cannot be its own entity and not be its own entity: a specific phenomenon cannot be pus and blood and not be pus and blood. This then leads to the notion

⁴⁰¹ Tsongkhapa 2008, 341: *'gro ba de dag gi mthong ba ni tha snyad pa'i tshad ma yin la/ gzhi gcig mi mthun pa de dag tu tshad mas grub na rnag khrag dang rnag khrag ma yin pa gnyis mi 'gal zhing/ tshad mas grub pa la yang yid brtan med par 'gyur ro zhe na/* (also translated in Jinpa 2021: 333).

that although there may well seem to be different perceptions of the same object, the flowing liquid, the perceived object is only the same in a characteristically Candrakīrtian way, that is as an unexamined worldly convention. It may only be accurately considered a single object when one does not enter into a more thorough examination of what exactly is the entity that is perceived. Tsongkhapa rightly points out that the “one thing” (*dnegos po gcig*) that is supposed to be perceived in drastically divergent ways is not spelled out by Asaṅga in his *Mahāyānasamgraha*,⁴⁰² However, Asvabhāva considers it to be the ‘flowing stream’ (*chu rlung*),⁴⁰³ and Tsongkhapa takes this interpretation as the basis of his discussion. So, without engaging in a detailed analysis, one can rightly say that the hungry ghost sees the same river as pus and blood while the humans see the very same river as water; whereas, upon a more careful analysis, one must say that the beings perceive different *parts* (*cha shas*) of the same whole.⁴⁰⁴

In relation to a certain basis, that is a flowing stream (*chu klung*) of water, a single *part* (*cha shas*) of that flowing water arises as pus and blood for a hungry ghost due to their previously created karma, another *part* of the flowing water arises as water for drinking and bathing for a human due to their own previously created karma and does not appear as pus and blood. Since each of these two [objects] are each parts of a single flowing stream, although there are two objects, one that is established by the hungry ghost’s eye consciousness and one that is established by the eye consciousness of the human, being individual entities, how could it be that the object

⁴⁰² Asaṅga *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 16a.1-2: *yi dgas dud 'gro mi rnams dang/ lha rnams ji ltar rigs rigs su/ dnegos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/*. The Sanskrit contained in the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* reads: *pretatiryagmanuṣyāṇāṃ devānāṃ ca yathārhatāḥ / tulyavastumanobhedād arthāniṣpattir iṣyate*. (Tatia ed. 1976: 42). ‘Since hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and gods have different minds [i.e. perceptions] concerning a single entity each according to the class [of beings to which they belong], it is maintained that [external] objects do not exist.’

⁴⁰³ Asvabhāva, *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana*, D 4051: 225a.5-7 (Brunnhölzl 2018: vol. 2, 663). Although in Tsongkhapa’s quote (Tsongkhapa 2008: 340) or paraphrase of this section of Asvabhāva’s text the edition reads *chu rlung*, the Derge edition of the passage has the more regular spelling *chu klung*.

⁴⁰⁴ Although the Tibetan term *cha shas* may literally mean part, this need not refer to a material section of an object as it can also denote properties or qualities like colour or shape. It can be a material part or an ontological constituent. This distinction is useful to bear in mind as Tsongkhapa’s mereological explanation and one of the arguments against it takes the *cha shas* of the flowing liquid to be material sections, and not properties or qualities.

established by one of them is also established to be something entirely different by the other?⁴⁰⁵

For Tsongkhapa, then, it is more precise to say that the beings perceive different parts of the same general object. This does not, however, mean he has moved beyond the level of (ultimately) unexamined worldly conventions, as even the world – be they cowherds or yakherds – accept degrees of precision in analysis and description.

iii. The Two Related Examples of Perceptual Relativism

To further illustrate his mereological argument Tsongkhapa gives two more examples. The first concerns touching a red-hot iron ball. If a tantric adept has performed certain mantras and blown on their hands they are, it is held, able to experience sense objects in an entirely different way than the common person. Examples abound in Buddhist literature of masters walking on water, not being burned by fire, not being subject to the ordinary laws governing the space element and thus being able to fly, and the like. The attainment (*siddhi*, *grub pa/dngos grub*) Tsongkhapa alludes to here has the effect that when the Tāntrika touches the red-hot iron ball it is experienced as cool; while if another who has not such a capacity with tantric practice also touches the ball they will be burnt. Now here, as with the water of the flowing stream, the general object may be described as singular, but upon more careful analysis, the objects they touch are actually different tangible objects (*reg bya*) and thus parts of the same iron ball.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Tsongkhapa 2008, 342: *gzhi gang du chu rlung 'bab pa'i gzhi der chu rlung de'i cha shas shig yi dwags rnams la sngon las kyi dbang gis rnag khrag tu skyes pa dang/ chu rlung gi cha shas gzhan zhig mi la sngon las kyi dbang gis rnag khrag tu mi snang ba'i btung ba dang/ khus kyi chur skye ba ni de gnyis ka chu klung gcig gi cha shas re yin pas/ yi dwags kyi mig shes tshad mas grub pa'i don dang/ mi'i mig shes tshad mas grub pa'i don gnyis kyang dngos po so so ba yin pas de gnyis gcig gis grub pa'i don de nyid/ cig shos kyis de'i bzlog phyogs su grub pa ga la yin/*

⁴⁰⁶ Tsongkhapa 2008, 342: *mi sreg pa dang sreg pa'i reg bya gnyis ka lcags gong gcig pu de'i reg byar ni bya dgos*. Gorampa (1979: 657-658) responds to this argument in his *lTa ba ngan sel* as follows: *dpe yang mi 'thad de/ lcags gong mes bsregs pa'i dmar 'bar ba la rig sngags dang ldan pa gcig gi lag pas reg pa'i tshe reg bya gcig pu des rang gi lag pa mi bsreg par byed nus pa yin gyi/ bsreg pa'i reg bya de las don gzhan du gyur pa'i*

Tsongkhapa then offers a second example, this time from Nāgārjuna's *Suḥr̥llekha* of the same sun being perceived as cold by hungry ghosts and warm by humans, or the rays of the same moon experienced as boiling by *pretas* but cool by humans.⁴⁰⁷ As with the two previous examples once more the solution to the objection of epistemic relativity or epistemic scepticism mentioned in the quote above is the same. The objects that are perceived by different beings are different parts (*cha shas*) or tangibles (*reg bya*) of the same object - sections of the river, red-hot ball, or rays of the sun.

iv. Do All These Perceptions Have Different Objects?

As such, the different parts of the objects in these examples are by no means identical sense objects, for if they were, the valid perception of the river as pus, the red-hot iron ball as cool, and the moon's rays as hot would discredit the equally accurate perceptions of these as possessing the opposite characteristics – *pramāṇas* would have no reliability whatsoever, and epistemic relativism would emerge. Therefore, for Tsongkhapa all the perceptions of the flowing stream, red-hot ball, and sun must be epistemic instruments.⁴⁰⁸ They are all nondeceptive (*mi slu ba*) regarding their objects, even if they are mistaken regarding the object's appearance as intrinsic, as seen above.

mi bsreg pa'i reg bya gcig gsar du skye ba ni ma yin te/ gal te yin na/ rig sngags kyis skyes bu gzhan 'chi bar byed pa na/skyes bu gcig pu de nyid kyi srog 'gag pa ma yin par/ srog 'gag pa'i skyes bu gcig gsar du skye bar thal ba'i phyir te/ rig sngags kyi byed pa'i rkyen 'dra ba'i phyir. 'That example is unsuitable. When one touches with the hand a red-hot blazing iron ball that has been blessed by mantras, although it is possible that one's hand is not burned by that single tangible object, it is not that there arises a new tangible object that does not burn and that is a different object from the burning tangible. If there were, it would absurdly follow that when a certain being is killed with a mantra, that very being [who is the intended target of the spell] is not killed, since there would arise a new being that is killed. This is because the situation of the mantra [and the iron ball] are similar.'

⁴⁰⁷ See Tharchin and Engle 2012: 106. (Nāgārjuna *Suḥr̥llekha* k. 95).

⁴⁰⁸ Forman (2020: 913) considers that 'Tsongkhapa's key hermeneutic addition [here] is his understanding that each external object is therefore universally epistemically warranted; their epistemic warrant is not relative to the individual'.

To frame Tsongkhapa's interpretation in a context that need not require the acceptance of Buddhist cosmology and ritual, let us turn to related examples in the natural sciences. Instead, one may propose the fairly well know example of certain animals perceiving the same "object", in the unexamined and general sense of that term, but upon further examination perceive different "parts" of that object. For instance, when a human sees a mouse and a hawk sees the same mouse, although they both see the same animal the human will not see the infrared light emanating from the mouse, this part of the animal is the exclusive domain of the hawk. Likewise, when a robin listens to the tune of another robin's chirps, the complexities of the tune encoded in it are too quick for human ears to pick up, but not for another robin.⁴⁰⁹ Since the extra encoded sense data that the listening robin additionally perceives are different parts of the same general sound, it is quite reasonable to say the robin and the human hear the same sound. All these animal and human cognitions can readily be considered accurate *pramāṇas* and yet they do not contradict each other nor entail that their objects are not external to the cognitions perceiving them. An analogous example to Tsongkhapa's blazing iron ball may be found in the rare but not unheard-of example of those with low-capacity pain receptors in the skin. Such animals can be subjected to the same painful objects that most humans would experience as painful and yet they would experience no pain whatsoever, such as the naked mole-rat who experiences certain acids and chemicals – such as the capsaicin used in pepper sprays – as painless.⁴¹⁰ Can we accurately describe their sense cognition as inaccurate, or wrong?

The difficulty of holding that the cognitions in all three of Tsongkhapa's examples are undeceived epistemic instruments on the one hand, and yet deceived regarding their appearance on the other, will open Tsongkhapa's position up to the charge of internal

⁴⁰⁹ Young 2022: 4.

⁴¹⁰ For more details, see Young 2022: 117-119.

contradiction. One might also enquire, why do all the cognitions in the Example need to be accurate? Is it not more reasonable to assume that the human or god's perceptions are more veridical, as their karma and *kleśas* are lighter and the *pretas* are heavier and thus should more actively affect their capacity to accurately warrant sense data? This is an interpretation that as we have seen Rongzompa took, and as we shall see Mipham defends.⁴¹¹ However, the red-hot iron ball example may pose more of a challenge to Rongzompa's reading of the Example, as on his account the yogi would have developed further along the spiritual path and thus should have a more accurate mode of perception than the average person who experiences the red-hot ball as burning. Indeed, for Rongzompa's "relative theory of the purity and validity of perception", the yogin's perception would be more epistemically warranted about the coolness of the iron ball than the ordinary human's that perceives it as hot.⁴¹²

Be that as it may, does Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the Example mean that a yogin's perception of the water as a goddess means he perceives a different object, and not the human water? While this issue, as far as I am aware, is not explicitly addressed in any of Tsongkhapa's works on Madhyamaka or Vajrayāna, from the above we are obliged to say they do indeed perceive different objects. Such a yogic vision would seem to be no more than an instance of imputed matter that is a *dharmāyatana* (*chos kyi skye mched*), matter that only appears to mental consciousness,⁴¹³ for this is how he categorizes the mentally produced skeletons produced in the meditation on the impure (*aśubhabhāvanā*), mentioned

⁴¹¹ See chapter 6.

⁴¹² See chapter 3.

⁴¹³ This includes the matter that appears in dreams, arises through taking vows, the space appearing only to the mind, and the like, see Hopkins 1984: 232-235. I have not been able to find an exact Sanskrit equivalent of *chos kyi skye mched kyi gzugs kun brtags*. The closest from Negi's *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary* (1995: vol. 3, 1240) is *dharmāyatanikamrupam*.

above.⁴¹⁴ This interpretation is supported by Tsongkhapa's descriptions in his *sNgags rim chen mo* of how the mentally created pure appearances of the deity and maṇḍala arise during generation stage (*utpattikrama*, *bskyed rim*) practice of Vajrayāna. Such visualised objects are not visible matter but appear only to the mental consciences.

Once one is greatly familiar, upon being meditatively absorbed in deity yoga, other appearances to the eye consciousness etc, do not arise. Since the mental consciousness intensely engages with that object [the deity and maṇḍala], the potential of the immediately preceding condition (*samanantara pratyaya*, *de ma thag rkyen*)⁴¹⁵ for the visual consciousness, and the like, degenerates, because of that the visual consciousness etc. temporarily do not arise. Although other appearances of colour etc do not arise, it is not that those appearances are blocked by generation stage practice. For as the Lord of Reasoning [Dharmakīrti] says:

Through consciousness becoming fixed to a certain object,

It is without the capacity to grasp a different object. (*Pramāṇavārttika* I.112cd)⁴¹⁶

Therefore, due to this very special appearance, when one obtains the potential to block ordinary appearances [other than the deity and maṇḍala] to the mental consciousness, one has accomplished the purpose [of this practice].⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Tsongkhapa 2008: 340.

⁴¹⁵ An immediately preceding condition is defined by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośa* II: 62: *cittacaitta acaramā utpannāḥ samanantarā*. (Gokhale 1946: 80). Basically, they are all minds and mental factors, other than the mind that enters nirvana without the remainder of the aggregates. For more details see the translation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012, vol. 1: 663-664.

⁴¹⁶ The full verse from the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter in Sanskrit reads: *yadyekakāliko 'neko 'pyekacaitanyakāraṇam / ekasyāpi va vaikalye syānmandaśvasitādiṣu* (Shastri 1968: 44). The Tibetan reads: */rnam shes nus pa nges pa'i phyir/ /gcig ni gcig gi rgyu yin te/ rnam shes don gzhan chags pa yis/ /nus med don gzhan mi 'dzin phyir* (D 4210: 111b.6).

⁴¹⁷ Tsongkhapa 2019, 661-662: *goms pa che bas lha'i rnal 'byor la mnyam par bzhag pa na mig gi shes pa la sogs pa'i snang ba gzhan mi 'char ba ni/ yid kyi shes pa don de la rjes su zhugs drags pas mig la sogs pa'i shes pa skye ba'i de ma thag rkyen gyi nus pa nyams pas de dag re zhig ma skyes pas kha dog la sogs pa'i snang ba gzhan ma shar ba yin gyi/ snang ba de dag bskyed rim gyis bkag pa min te/ rigs pa'i rgyal pos/ "rnam shes don gzhan chags pa yis// nus med don gzhan mi 'dzin phyir"// zhes gsungs pa bzhin no// des na khyad par can gyi snang bas yid shes kyi ngor tha mal pa'i snang ba 'gog pa'i nus pa thob na des dgos pa 'grub la/ dngos po la lhar ma song yang lha'i bcos min gyi nga rgyal skyes na 'ang des dgos pa 'grub bo//* (Also translated in Yarnall 2013: 144-145).

On this interpretation, the yogin perceiving water as the deity Māmakī does not possess a more refined form of conventional knowledge.⁴¹⁸ This perception is not analogous to a chemist's specialised understanding of water's properties compared to the basic knowledge of an uneducated individual. Instead, the ordinary human and the yogin perceive entirely different objects. Consequently, Tsongkhapa's mereological explanation appears to avoid the issue raised by Rongzompa—that the perception of the ordinary human might be deemed more accurate than that of the yogins. However, it must be admitted this is a rather reconstructive account, as Tsongkhapa does not explicitly address the yogin's perception of water as a deity in his writings on the Example. While he unquestionably acknowledges that water and similar phenomena can be perceived as deities within Vajrayāna practice—especially during the physical isolation (*kāyaviveka*, *lus dben*) of the completion stage⁴¹⁹—it remains uncertain whether such perceptions are equivalent to those described in the passages just cited. That is, it is unclear if when a yogin on the completion stage perceives water as the deity Māmakī they are simply perceiving mentally produced matter, which is not water at all.

v. Conclusions

Tsongkhapa has provided a radical and nuanced alternative to the Yogācāra's idealistic interpretation of the Example by proposing a mereological explanation that attempts to avoid epistemic relativism and scepticism. He argues that the Example, although used by Candrakīrti in the context of several examples of illusion, is of a different nature to them. It is in fact not an example of illusion at all. The beings' cognitions in the Example who

⁴¹⁸ Māmakī is generally understood to be the purified entity or purifying agent of the water element in Vajrayāna Buddhism, such as in the *Guhyasamājatantra* literary tradition (see Kirti Tsenshap 2011: 160-161, and Wedemeyer 2007: 158, 161).

⁴¹⁹ See the translation of Tsongkhapa's masterpiece on the completion stage of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* called the *rDzogs rim rim lnga gsal sgron*, translated in Kilty 2014: 167-199.

perceive their objects in surprising ways are all accurate *pramāṇas*. They are merely perceiving their share of the general object, that is the exclusive domain of beings with similar karmic lots. Likewise, although it is not explicitly mentioned, Tsongkhapa's mereological solution also avoids Rongzompa's, and as we shall see, Mipham's concerns that an ordinary being's perception of water is more epistemically accurate than that of the yogin who perceives it as a goddess.

Tsongkhapa's stress on the relative accuracy of deceived knowledge and thereby on the truth of conventional objects will be heavily criticised by Taktsang, Gorampa, and Shakya Chokden. Before exploring their positions, we will first examine Khédrupjé's interpretation, as he endeavours to elaborate on and support the perspectives of his teacher, Tsongkhapa.⁴²⁰

4.3.1 Khédrupjé's Life and Work

⁴²⁰ As mentioned above, Rongtön Shéja Künrik, Tsongkhapa's younger contemporary, was also a significant figure in Central Tibet offering a doctrinal alternative to the Réndawa-Tsongkhapa lineage, both in the 14th century. Since he also discusses the Example several times in his works on Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, it would have been ideal to fully discuss his interpretation within the context of his Madhyamaka writings here in this thesis, especially given that Rongtönpa's Madhyamaka has barely been touched upon by modern scholarship. For now, I can merely make reference to and translate the most pertinent passages. Rongtönpa's most extensive discussion and refutation of Tsongkhapa's explanation is found in his commentary to Nāgārjuna's *Suhṛllekha* (Rongtön 2008a, vol. 1, 628-632). The discussion is however not particularly well developed and does not address the principle epistemic concerns that Tsongkhapa attempts to solve. The whole section is translated in Appendix I. Rongtönpa also discusses it in his commentary to *Madhyamakāvatāra*, VI.71. Rongtönpa 2008b, vol. 6, 425: *chu 'bab pa'i klung la yi dwags rnams la rnag tu snang ba dang mi la chur snang ba la sogs pa la yul dang shes pa po yod med mtshungs pas yul med pa'i shes pa mi 'grub bo/ /don 'di la rnag tu snang ba'ang snang ba ltar mi bden te/ mi la chur snang ba'i phyir/ chur bden pa'ang ma yin te/ lha la bdud rtsir snang ba'i phyir ro/ /des na snang ba thams cad ji ltar snang ba ltar mi bden pa'o zhes shes par bya'o/ /shes bya med pa'i shes pa rgyad par bkag zin to/* ('As for the stream of water, it appears as pus to those hungry ghosts, as water to humans, etc. Here, one cannot prove that these cognitions do not have objects, for these objects and their cognizers are equal in either existing or not existing. In relation to the object here [in the Example], although it appears as pus, that appearance is not true, for it appears as water to humans. It is also not truly water, for it appears as nectar to gods. Therefore, one should understand that all appearances are not truly how they appear. I have already refuted extensively that there exists a cognition with a nonexistent object of knowledge.'). Rongtönpa also briefly discusses the Example in his commentary to the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* traditional attributed to Maitreya, see Rongtönpa 2008c, vol. 7, 340, although it adds little to the above. In sum, Rongtönpa does not appear to provide a nuanced discussion of the Example and does not explicitly address its sceptical and relativistic ramifications.

Khédрупjé (1385–1438) is reported by tradition to have been one of Tsongkhapa’s most talented direct disciples and early defenders of his master’s views. He appears to have been a prolific and versatile polemicist, who possessed from an early age a confidence in his ability to outsmart even very famous and senior debaters of his day.⁴²¹ He is likewise known for delving into the most difficult and obscure philosophical problems and providing extensive, if somewhat enigmatic, explanations of them. His masterpiece on Madhyamaka is no doubt his *sTong thun chen mo*, an enormous work spanning all the principal subjects related to Tibetan Madhyamaka discourse, those in Tsongkhapa’s *dGongs pa rab gsal*, and many that are not explicitly covered or are merely touched upon there. For example, Prāsaṅgika hermeneutics, and their uncommon presentation of the three periods of time. His treatment of the Example therein is of characteristic depth and complexity. Indeed, it is the most extensive commentary on the Example and its related philosophical questions that I have found extant in Tibetan literature. The reason for this appears plain: the Example poses major problems for Tsongkhapa’s Madhyamaka and his emphasis on conventional *pramāṇas* as the warrants of conventional things (*tha snyad du tshad grub*). For if the many questions that arise from Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of the Example are not resolved, his Madhyamaka system and its stress on the nominal existence of things seem open to contradiction and rebuttal. In many of the arguments raised, Khédруп appears to be talking to genuine opinions that were prevalent during his day, as is evidenced by the vehemency and many personalised remarks in his arguments. As we will see, although Taktsang wrote his *Grub mtha’ kun shes* and its critique of Tsongkhapa after Khédруп had written his *sTong thun chen mo*, several points Taktsang raises are directly addressed by Khédруп. This is

⁴²¹ Cabezón 1992: 15.

perhaps not a surprise given that Taktsang states that his remarks therein are not purely his own and were opinions in circulation before and during his day.⁴²²

Overall, Khédrup's Madhyamaka is so close to that of Tsongkhapa that for the purposes of this study it is not necessary to unpack it as a separate interpretation. We shall, therefore, move directly into Khédrup's explanation of the Example.

4.4.2. Khédrup's Development of Tsongkhapa's Mereological Solution⁴²³

i. The Extremes of Epistemic Relativism and Scepticism

Khédrup's explanation begins with the following two questions: (i) do the objects of the various beings in the Example exist as pus *and* water, and (ii) are these external objects or not?⁴²⁴ The following two possible solutions are then proposed, solutions that certainly came to exist if they were not already fully formed during Khédrup's time.

In answer to [the first question], some say, "On account of some such reasons all phenomena are whatever one's mind makes them out to be, one simply cannot posit [with certainty] a single position [on the Example] that is like "this" and is not like "that"."

Others say, "Due to being manifestly true in the perspective of one's own mind, the single basis that is wet moisture is true pus in the hungry ghost's perspective, and it is true water in the perspective of the human", and so on.⁴²⁵

⁴²² Yakherds 2022: vol. 1, 88. Cabezón (1995: 657) considers it unlikely that Taktsang wrote this text while Khédrup was still alive.

⁴²³ The Yakherds 2021: vol. 1, chapter 4, focusses on Khédrupjé's defence of Tsongkhapa's account of conventional warrant in Madhyamaka, and covers many of the points surveyed below but with less attention paid to the Example and the precise steps in Khédrupjé's exegesis on it.

⁴²⁴ Khédrupjé 2009: 361. The following section has been made with reference to Cabezón's translation of the *sTong thun chen mo*, specifically (Cabezón 1992) 334-345.

⁴²⁵ Khédrupjé 2009, 361: 'di la gang dag rgyu mtshan de nyid kyi phyir chos thams cad rang rang gi sems kyis gang bzo bzo yin gyi mtha' gcig tu 'di yin 'di min gang du yang bzhag tu med do zhes smra ba dang/ rang rang gi blo ngo na thad ka thad kar bden pas brlan zhing gsher ba'i dngos po gcig nyid yi dwags kyi ngo na rnag tu bden mi'i ngo na chur bden zhes sogs su smra ba (also translated in Cabezón 1992: 334).

The former position clearly holds a form of scepticism regarding the capacity to definitively know anything whatsoever. The second seems to be holding a relativistic position, and one that appears to be a rough outline of Gorampa's, as we will see. These questions therefore succinctly sum up the two principal concerns Tsongkhapa was avoiding, and that seemed to arise from an overly simplistic reading of the Example. Khédrup's answer is rather straightforward: if all the cognitions in the Example are epistemic instruments of a single object, then epistemic instruments no longer perform their primary function as agents of verification since something cannot be and not be pus and blood. If such were the case there would be no difference in the validity between a Buddha and a heterodox teacher, nor in their doctrines, as everything is merely opinion. For this view, beauty or any attribute whatsoever is only ever in the eye of the beholder. Next in the discussion appears a possible sidestep in the form of a proposition that only some of the beings' cognitions are *pramāṇas*, and some are not. Let us say the human's is accurate whereas those of the other beings are not, due to karma. However, Khédrup responds such a rationale is hardly cogent as how can the human's cognition not also be from karma? For Khédrup, all the cognitions in this unique and yet possible scenario are *pramāṇa*.

ii. Transformation of Parts of the Human River

Following Tsongkhapa, the common object in this discussion is the 'flowing stream', and is unsurprisingly not accepted as pus, water, and nectar by Khédrup; it may however under certain conditions come to possess parts that are such substances. That is, these three distinct substances can be validly warranted by conventional *pramāṇas* to be themselves. As such, the common object may have certain parts or sections transform into pus and nectar, for example, upon the arrival of a ghost and a god who look upon the flowing stream. These

parts did not exist in the flowing stream before their arrival, that is, if we are referring to a flowing stream in the human realm at least.

Now, one may wonder how does the mere arrival of a ghost and god cause the fluid to transform? There are two causal factors involved here that create this transformation:

At such a time when a hungry ghost comes upon the [common] basis, through the previous instance of the wet moisture acting as the substantial [cause] (*upādāna, nyer len*)⁴²⁶ and the hungry ghost's karma the dominant condition (*adhipatipratyaya, bdag rkyen*),⁴²⁷ one part of that full vessel of wet moisture transforms into pus and blood. In similar fashion, when a god comes upon that [common] basis, through the previous instance of the wet moisture acting as the substantial cause and the god's karma the dominant condition, one part of that full vessel of wet moisture transforms into nectar. However, when the god or the hungry ghost leave that [common] basis, since the dominant condition of their karma is not complete the subsequent continuity of pus and blood or nectar does not arise.⁴²⁸

Khédруп then continues, when all the beings are observing the substance, it is the negative karma of the preta that blocks them from seeing the nectar or water part, and the positive karma of the god that blocks them from seeing the pus part. To further clarify what would happen if the preta or god would then take a bowl of the substance, Khédруп adds that since the object is now only an object of the preta-type or god-type of being, the rest of the parts of the liquid now all transform into pus or nectar respectively. If one wonders what the substance was to begin with, prior to this cross-species sup, Khédруп states that it was water

⁴²⁶ A *nyer len gyi rgyu* (*upādānakāraṇa*) generally refers to the previous instance of an entity that transforms to become the present entity, such as a seed turning into a sprout. For a typical definition from a Gelugpa source, see Perdue 1992: 544, for its use by Dharmakīrti in his theory of inference, see Oetke 1991: 256.

⁴²⁷ This condition exerts “dominance” in the production of its result. Its exact nature is difficult to pin down in Abhidharma sources, as an illustration the *Mahāvibhāṣā* says it is ‘like a dharma that is non-obstructive’ (see Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012: vol. 1, fn 1045, for more details).

⁴²⁸ Khédрупjé 2009, 364: *gang gi tshe yi dwags gzhi der nye bar 'ongs pa na brlan zhing gsher ba skad cig snga mas nyer len dang yi dwags kyi las kyis bdag rkyen byas pa las brlan zhing gsher ba snod gang po de'i cha shas gcig rnag khrag tu skye zhing/ de bzhin du gzhi der lha nye bar 'ongs ba na brlan zhing gsher ba snga mas nyer len dang lha'i las kyis bdag rkyen byas pa las cha shas gcig bdud rtsir skye ba yin la/ lha dang yi dwags gzhi de nas song ba na las kyi bdag rkyen ma tshang bas rnag khrag dang bdud rtsi'i rgyun phyi ma mi skye* (also translated in Cabezón 1992: 336).

if it was in the human realm due to the dominant condition, human collective karma; or nectar if it was in a god realm, and so on. Khédруп's commentary on the sun-moon example and the red-hot iron ball example add little to Tsongkhapa's explanation.

iii. The Karmic Matter (*las gzugs*) Objection⁴²⁹

The next objection concerns an obscure phenomenon called 'karmic matter/form' (*las gzugs*), and an objection that Dharmakīrti refutes within a longer discussion rejecting external objects in the Pratyakṣa chapter of his *Pramāṇavārttika*. Khédруп's opponent references the discussion and argues that Dharmakīrti refuted the suggestion that it was this karmic matter that accounted for why a single being could appear as pleasant or unpleasant to two different observers since such karmic matter obscured one or another of the different aspects from appearing to the observers. The opponent thereby argues that since Dharmakīrti rejected the notion that a single being could possess two contradictory aspects—pleasant and unpleasant—it is contradictory for Khédруп to hold that a single body of water can possess contradictory aspects.

Khédруп responds by reproving the opponent for fundamentally misinterpreting Dharmakīrti's discussion.⁴³⁰ The position in questions holds that karmic matter causes

⁴²⁹ Khédруп 2009: 366-368, and Cabezón 1992: 337-338.

⁴³⁰ The discussion is found in *Pramāṇavārttika* III. 412-414: *mandam tadapi tejah kimāvṛterihā sā na kim / tanutvaṃ tejaso 'pyetadastyanyatrāpyatānavam // 412 // atyāsanne ca suvyaktaṃ tejastat syādtisphuṭam / tatrāpyadr̥ṣtamāśritya bhaved rūpāntaraṃ yadi ?// 413 // anyonyāvaraṇāt teṣāṃ syāt tejovihatistataḥ / tatraikameva dr̥ṣyet tasyānāvaraṇe sakṛt // 414 //* (Shastri 1968: 220-221).

Tibetan in D 4210, 134a.5: */sgrib phyir de 'dir cis ma yin/ /srab phyir snang ba'ang de lta nyid/ /gzhan du srab min yod pa nyid/ /shin tu nye la snang ba ni/ /cher gsal de yang snang bar 'gyur/ /gal te der yang mthong med la/ /brten nas gzugs gzhan 'byung 'gyur na/ /de dag rnams ni phan tshun du/ /bsgrib 'gyur de phyir snang ba ni/ /sgrib byed de la gcig snang 'gyur/*

My following translation is based on the Tibetan. The brackets are based on Khédруп's own commentary (Khédруп 1998: 373-375) to the *Pramāṇavārttika*: '[If external objects do not exist, when one looks at a distant object, why is it unclear? If one says it is] due to obstruction [from the appearing atoms included in the mist and atmosphere]. Why do those [atoms] not obstruct [objects] here [that are near to the perceiver]? [If one says] because the [obstructive atoms here are few and] dispersed. Then, likewise, a different [form that is not near to the perceiver should] also exist that is dense [when one looks at a distant form]. And, appearances that are extremely close, would come to appear extremely clearly [just like one's eye lashes and the like]. If there

objects seen at a distance to appear unclear, while those viewed up close appear clear. Their premise is that karmic matter is thinner or transparent (*gsal ba*) in proximity and thicker or opaque (*mi gsal ba*) at a distance, thus enabling clearer perception as one approaches an object. According to this theory, karmic matter interposes itself between the sense faculty and its object. After refuting this claim through several *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, Khédруп emphasises that he is not arguing that some form of karmic matter prevents hungry ghosts from perceiving the portion of the flowing stream that constitutes clean water.⁴³¹

iv. Further Objections

1. Contradiction with the *Pretatiryagmanuṣyāñāṃ*-Verse

There are seven further major arguments against his position that Khédруп discusses next and that are worth examining here as they are not explicitly addressed by Tsongkhapa. The first concerns an apparent contradiction with the *pretatiryagmanuṣyāñāṃ*-verse from the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, and its mention of ‘one object seen in divergent ways’.⁴³² If we assert various parts of the whole are the object of the beings’ perceptions, why does it say ‘one object’? Khédруп finds this a ridiculous objection and easily deals with it via the

arises [in between the sense power and the object] another form, in dependence on [right and wrong] karma which is invisible [to the perceiver], the [karmic form and the object] would mutually obstruct each other. Due to which, the appearance [of the object to the sense consciousness] would be obstructed. Only the appearance of [karmic form] would appear [to the perceiver of the object, whether up close or from a distance, the object could not].’

Devendrabuddhi’s remarks to these points in his *Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā* (D 4217: 238b.6-239b.5) are quite close to Khédруп’s here. This discussion will be picked up again by Gorampa (chapter 5: 197), Shakya Chokden (chapter 5: 218-219, and Appendix II), and Rongtönpa (Appendix I) who all seem to understand Dharmakīrti in the same way as Khédруп’s opponent here and argue against Tsongkhapa and Khédруп’s mereological argument in a similar fashion.

⁴³¹ It remains unclear whether *las gzugs* functions as a distinct category or merely serves as a shorthand for matter/form arising from karma. There appears to be no direct Sanskrit equivalent, and the term is absent from both the *Pramāṇavārttika* and Devendrabuddhi’s commentary, *Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā*. However, Cabezón (1992: 337) translates *las gzugs* as if it were a categorical term, inserting brackets to indicate an unspecified ‘heterodox’ non-Buddhist system—though Khédруп does not make this distinction

⁴³² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, D 4048, 16a: *yi dgas dud 'gro mi rnams dang/ lha rnams ji ltar rigs rigs su/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/*. ‘Since hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and gods have different minds [i.e. perceptions] concerning a single entity each according to the class [of beings to which they belong], it is maintained that [external] objects do not exist’. See Chapter 2, fn. 131.

mereological explanation: just as a single person can perform six different functions with six different parts of their body, and yet we still consider the person to be a single entity, likewise with the river.⁴³³

2. Objects Would not Displace Each Other

The second objection here concerns the displacement of objects: if the pus, water, and nectar are all present at one time when the ghost, human, and god are on the riverbank, then one object would not displace another, since these distinct sense objects would all be occupying the same place. This objection clearly presumes that Khédrup's mereological explanation pertains to physical sections of the object and not merely properties or qualities. It also assumes the basic "abhidharmic" notion that space represents the absence of obstructive contact, and it is this absence that obstructive *rūpa* fills.⁴³⁴ Such a space therefore cannot be filled twice by parking another *rūpa* in its place. Khédrup's response once more employs a mereological argument: if this objection were true, then a whole could not occupy the same spatial dimension as its parts. He then makes the point that his teacher Tsongkhapa did not accept that in the space occupied by a water molecule (*rdul*) there also exists a pus or nectar molecule. He evidently is responding directly to a real criticism of Tsongkhapa's reading, one that Taktsang later makes in his *Grub mtha' kun shes*.⁴³⁵

3. Contradiction with the *Vimśikā*

A third objection is based on the *Vimśikā*'s account of a river appearing as pus and blood to hungry ghosts, as discussed in chapter two.⁴³⁶ The objection here attacks the mereological interpretation from a slightly different angle, this time through attempting to show a

⁴³³ Khédrupjé 2009: 368, Cabezón 1992: 338-339.

⁴³⁴ Cabezón 1992: 339, n.1055.

⁴³⁵ See chapter 5: 182.

⁴³⁶ Khédrupjé 2009: 369-370, Cabezón 1992: 340.

contradiction with scripture, specifically with the *Prakarāṇa Viṃśatikāṭīkā* by Vinītadeva discussed above.⁴³⁷ The argument attempts to show that since Vinītadeva claims there is not even a drop of pus and blood, and thus there certainly cannot be a river full of it,⁴³⁸ Khédруп's claim that the beings' cognitions are epistemic instruments would be incorrect. Khédруп responds by first clarifying the context of the text now being cited. The *Viṃśikā* is a text refuting external objects, and thus argues there is in reality no external pus and blood impinging upon the awareness of the hungry ghosts. Such appearances arise due to karma. Vinītadeva's point merely argues there are no external objects and does not attempt to refute the capacity of the pus and blood to function at all, but merely to function as food and drink. As the *Viṃśikā* and its *Svavṛtti* clarified in the very previous passages (v.4),⁴³⁹ objects that are not a different entity from the perceiving mind may still function to produce effects, as in the example of wet dreams, and hell guardians producing pain in hell beings. Vinītadeva, therefore, argues that although the pus and blood are of the nature of cognition, they can still function to produce benefit and harm.⁴⁴⁰ As such, Khédруп is bolstering the relative accuracy of these beings' perceptions in relation to pus, but not in relation to the externality of pus, a position with marked similarity to Jñānavajra's discussed above in chapter two.⁴⁴¹

4. Contradiction with the *Suḥṛllekha*

A fourth objection pushes back against Khédруп's position that the hungry ghost's visual consciousness is an epistemic instrument in regard to the pus, by attempting to show a contradiction with another Indian work, this time the *Suḥṛllekha*.⁴⁴² In this text, there is

⁴³⁷ Cabezón refers to this as the *Viṃśatikāsvavṛttiṭīkā*.

⁴³⁸ *Prakarāṇa viṃśatikāṭīkā*, D 4065: 177a3-177a4: *klung rnag gis gang bar mthong ste gcig 'gas ni ma yin no/ de la rnag thigs ba 'ga' yang med na rnag gis gang ba'i klung lta ga la yod.*

⁴³⁹ Silk 2016: 7 & 43-49.

⁴⁴⁰ *Prakarāṇa viṃśatikāṭīkā*, D 4065: 178a.4-178b.2.

⁴⁴¹ See p.71.

⁴⁴² Khédрупjé 2009: 371-372, Cabezón 1992: 340-341.

mention of hungry ghosts who see a tree laden with fruit but upon approaching the tree, the fruit disappears.⁴⁴³ The objection argues that if Khédруп was correct, then the fruit would actually have disappeared from the tree, as their cognitions of the absence of fruit are supposed to be *pramāṇa*. Khédруп has an ingenious response. When hungry ghosts approach the Ganges River and see it barren their eye consciousnesses are valid regarding the earth and stones at the bottom of the river, but the conceptual thought “there is no water here” that is subsequently generated is a wrong consciousness (*log shes*). The river is of course full of water, existing in the human world and being utilised by humans, however, the hungry ghosts’ unfortunate karma blocks their perception of water but still allows them to see the river bed. As such they are half right and half wrong, as it were. It is similar, Khédруп goes on, to the ghosts who approach a fruit-laden tree, their eye consciousnesses are accurate regarding the branches and the like, but their conceptual thought that believes there are no fruit, is a wrong consciousness.⁴⁴⁴

Khédруп then goes on to list several consequences that would follow if the food that is said to turn into fire when it reaches a preta’s mouth were utterly non-existent and only a mere appearance.⁴⁴⁵ It follows the food would not burn their mouths, nor could “the mere appearances” that arise for hell beings of being tortured cause physical suffering, and holding this position would therefore be deprecating the law of karma. If one responds that these mere appearances can cause physical suffering, then, likewise the mere appearances of falling hairs to one with an eye disorder could function as hair and be platted, the mere appearance of bees to one with an eye disorder could sting one, and the mere appearance of water in a mirage could be drunk. These consequences are extremely serious for Khédруп

⁴⁴³ See Tharchin and Engle 2012: 106. (Nāgārjuna *Suḥrillekha*, stanza 95).

⁴⁴⁴ As Cabezón notes, technically speaking it is a wrong consciousness that is mistaken with regards to its conceived object (*zhen yul la 'khrul pa'i log she yin pa*). See Khédруп 2009: 371.

⁴⁴⁵ Khédрупjé 2009: 372-373, Cabezón 1992: 342-343.

and Tsongkhapa as they would mean that all attempts to distinguish whether objects appearing to consciousness exist or are illusory would be pointless. The world would fall into utter ontological and ethical chaos. ‘Could there be a greater denial of the law of cause and effect than this?’⁴⁴⁶

5. Bringing the *Madhyamakāvātāra* to Bear on the Matter

Khédrup next brings in the short passage from the *Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.71ab discussed above, to further undermine the view that the pus and blood appearing to the ghosts is just a mere appearance.⁴⁴⁷ As the reader will remember, the verse in question and its auto-commentary are as follows:

Also, a hungry ghost’s awareness of a flowing river as pus,

Is similar to a sense afflicted with an eye disorder. [VI.71ab]⁴⁴⁸

In line with the explanation given above “Whatever hairs are seen through the power of an eye disorder” [6.54b] one should know also other types [of consciousness] to be similar to that.⁴⁴⁹

Khédrup reminds his audience that here Candrakīrti is amid a refutation of the Yogācāra view that there are no external objects, and as a corollary, that the Example does not prove their point. Rather the case of the Example is similar to that of a person afflicted with an eye disorder, in that both the object, which the person with the eye disease perceives, and the consciousness have the same ontological status, they both lack intrinsic existence. External objects do, therefore, exist as long as they remain unexamined via the lens of ultimate analysis (*don dam pa'i dpyod pa*). If Candrakīrti meant that just as there is no actual falling hair, there likewise is no pus and blood at all (Taktsang and Sakya Chokden’s readings), it

⁴⁴⁶ Khédrup 2009, 373: 'di 'dra las las 'bras la skur pa btab par 'gyur ba gang zhig yod/

⁴⁴⁷ Khédrupjé 2009: 374-375, Cabezón 1992: 343-344.

⁴⁴⁸ Candrakīrti *Madhyamakāvātāra*, D 3861 207b.3. (Sanskrit in Li 2015: 13).

⁴⁴⁹ Chandrakīrti *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, D 3861, 271b.

would absurdly follow that the debate between the Mādhyamikas and Yogācāras only concerns whether or not the basis of these two types of appearances (the hair for one with an eye disorder or the pus for ghosts) exists. It would not concern the ontological status of cognition and its object, which upon a careful reading of the context is clearly the subject of this debate. This consequence is once more clearly directed at his contemporary opponents, as evidenced by Khédруп's characteristic vehemency in his rhetoric.

6. Contradiction with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

A sixth objection is now made on the basis of the following statement by Śāntideva:⁴⁵⁰

Who is it that intentionally makes

Those weapons for [punishing] beings in hell?

Who makes the burning iron ground?

From where does the mass of fire come?

All such things were taught by the Buddha

To come from the negative mind.⁴⁵¹

The objection takes this passage quite literally, arguing that Śāntideva here is showing us that all the torturous conditions in hell are simply mistaken appearances that arise through negative karma since no one actively set those fires alight or fashioned the hell guardians' weapons. Khédруп's response is essentially the same as above, in that if these hellish phenomena do not exist apart from being mere mistaken appearances, then there would be

⁴⁵⁰ Khédрупjé 2009: 375, Cabezón 1992: 344.

⁴⁵¹ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, V. 7-8ab: *śastrāṇi kena narake ghaṭitāni prayatnataḥ / taptāyaḥkuṭṭimaṃ kena kuto jātāśca tāḥ striyaḥ // 5.7 // pāpacittasamudbhūtaṃ tattatsarvaṃ jagau munīḥ /* (Vaidya, ed., 1960: 52). D 3871, 10b.1-2: *sems can dmyal ba 'i mtshon cha rnams/ /su zhig gis ni ched du byas/ /lcags sregs sa gzhi su yis byas/ /me tshogs de dag ci las byung/ de 'dra de dag thams cad kyang/ /sdig sems byung bar thub pas gsungs/*. Khédруп 2009: 375, Cabezón 1992: 344.

no difference in the physical pleasure or pain experienced in hell or a deva realm as they are equal in being non-existent mere appearances, and scepticism regarding karma would be entailed. Rather, Śāntideva means that no one plans to make (*blo sngon du btang nas byed pa po'i skyes bu gzhan med pa*)⁴⁵² such environments and the objects therein, it is the negative karma created by beings' minds that is the creator.

7. Objection Regarding the Quantity of Pus in a Bowl

The seventh and final objection that Khédруп chooses to address concerns an intriguing situation and highlights a controversial aspect of his interpretation of conventional *pramāṇa*.⁴⁵³ Following the line of reasoning Khédруп has presented above, when all of the beings in the Example are assembled and look at the one bowl full of the common object it would seem that they only see their exclusive part of the substance in the bowl, a drop of pus, nectar, or water. However, this seems counterintuitive and would seem to contradict the Example itself, which illustrates the perception of a (whole) river, and not just a drop. To reiterate Khédруп's position, he does believe that when an assembled group of beings all look at a bowl full of water there appears a substance corresponding to the karma of the individual perceiver, and the basis of that appearance also has the capacity to function in accordance with that appearance. It therefore exists conventionally. He also holds that each of the beings' eye consciousnesses are warranting and accurate regarding their own particular substance. However, they need not be accurate regarding the precise measure of the substance in the bowl. For, 'there need not appear the precise amount of the [substance] in the full bowl of pus, or the full bowl of nectar, etc' to the various being's perception of them.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Khédруп 2009: 375.

⁴⁵³ Khédруп 2009: 375, Cabezón 1992: 344.

⁴⁵⁴ Khédруп 2009, 376: *bdud rtsi phor gang dang rnag phor gang sogs kyi tshad mtshungs nges can du snang mi dgos te*.

This may seem like a sidestep, but upon analysis, it is not all that bizarre. We do not always perceive the exact dimensions of an object, such as the ocean, but usually only a given section. If, however, Khédrup continues, we must explain our position with the criteria that the beings see a bowl full of their species' substance, then in such a unique situation the beings will still be accurate regarding their individual objects, but not in relation to the exact quantity of them. Presumably, then, the perception of the bowl full of pus would be a wrong consciousness regarding the water and nectar that exist in the bowl and are taken to be pus. This is another instance of how a conventional epistemic instrument can be partly accurate and partly inaccurate.⁴⁵⁵ Khédrup follows his teacher Tsongkhapa and accepts that conventional *pramāṇas* are accurate in relation to their *gzhal bya* (*prameya*), i.e. their main object, or their apprehended object (*'dzin stangs gyi yul*) – and yet are deceived regarding how it appears.⁴⁵⁶ It is thus sufficient to not mistake pus for water, and to realise it as pus, for the preta's cognition to warrant pus. But here, we see a further detail to the marginal accuracy that is ascribed to epistemic instruments by Khédrup: a single sense cognition can be valid regarding the identity of its object despite being actively wrong, not only in relation to how its object appears to possess *svabhāva*, but also regarding the object's quantity or size.⁴⁵⁷ Perhaps it is similar to an accurate eye consciousness's perception of a sofa in the dark. Although it may very well be valid regarding the identity of the sofa, it can easily be wrong regarding its location. For instance, if one has inadequate lighting and recognises the sofa but still stubs one's foot on it.

Khédrup's response here to the objection concerning the quantity of the pus in the bowl conforms with his response in relation to a preta's accurate eye perception seeing only the

⁴⁵⁵ See Yakherds 2021: vol. 1, 117.

⁴⁵⁶ Khédrupjé 2009: 406; Cabezón 1992: 371-372.

⁴⁵⁷ In Lockean terms, one could say that the beings are in agreement regarding the primary qualities of, say, shape and quantity, but diverge in relation to the secondary qualities of colour, smell, and taste. Interestingly, Khédrup argues the beings may be inaccurate in relation to the former, and yet accurate regarding the latter.

branches of a fruit-laden tree, or only the stones and earth at the bottom of the Ganges River. In all three examples, it is the eye consciousness that is said to be accurate, albeit limited in what it has access to, be it the water in the Ganges, the fruit on the tree, or the quantity of liquid in the bowl. His explanation of all three examples coheres with basic epistemic commonsense: we never have access to all the qualities of the objects we perceive. Some parts or qualities will always be hidden from us, due to their size, external conditions such as distance from the object, other objects obscuring our view, or even (over)-familiarity with it, as well as internal conditions such as inaccurate mental projections, perceptual biases, and other cognitive limitations. This position acknowledges the inherent constraints of ordinary perception. Yet, this is acceptable within conventional epistemic practice, and need not undermine the relative accuracy of conventional *pramāṇas*. As Forman puts it:

[T]he three beings [in the Example] still are part of a shared world, and it is with regard to the conventions and standard conditions of that world that we can say each being has failed to apprehend the liquid in its entirety.⁴⁵⁸

4.4.2. Conclusions

While Tsongkhapa and Khédруп appear to have provided a much more developed solution to the problem of epistemic warrant within the context of intersubjectivity than Réndawa, their critics would respond that such a theory implies a universal standard of warrant. One that is not dependent on context, and thus one that entails foundationalism.

Is the Tsongkhapa-Khédруп theory of the Example, and their epistemology more generally, foundational and independent of context? The answer hinges on whether deceived knowledge can truly be considered knowledge—can it genuinely function as *pramāṇa*? For Tsongkhapa and Khédруп, the answer is simply, yes. This position stems directly from Tsongkhapa's three-fold criteria for conventional existence and epistemic warrant,

⁴⁵⁸ Forman 2020: 914.

discussed above, which are intentionally undemanding.⁴⁵⁹ They must be so, for Mādhyamikas who recognize that all conventions are deceiving and all conventional cognitions ultimately deceived could not sustain a theory of knowledge requiring a high-degree of infallibility. Under such stringent criteria, objects are invariably shown to lose their self-identity under certain conditions, particularly when subjected to ultimate analysis with Madhyamaka logic. Any knowledge-claim would always be undermined and be shown to be deceiving.

The tacit presumption within the Tsongkhapa-Khédруп theory then is this: within our shared world of institutionalised norms with all their relative heuristics, an apple is an apple if our shared conventional knowledge of that fact has not been undermined. It not having been undermined means it is known, if at some later date the apple in fact turns out to be a rare species more accurately defined as a pear, then knowledge is updated and the previous understanding is now invalid regarding the apple as an apple. This theory works as it presumes a shared world of knowledge that is constantly in the process of being modified and updated, a shared field of knowledge that presumes standard conditions and agreed conventions but always with the caveat that these are potentially open to change.⁴⁶⁰ As such, the theory is no more foundational than the statement “Darcy is a kind-hearted man”. As the tacit context is clearly accepted by the listener and explainer. One need not qualify it with useless verbiage such as “the fictional character Darcy is well portrayed as a fictional embodiment of a person demonstrating sympathetic qualities”, such would be useless and may even undermine the heuristic nature of language.

⁴⁵⁹ See p. 146-147.

⁴⁶⁰ See Yakherds (2021: vol. 1, 74) for a similar reading of Tsongkhapa’s epistemology: ‘Epistemic practice, according to the Gelug tradition, is thereby guaranteed to be self-correcting and progressive, even if not perfect’.

The Tsongkhapa-Khédrup theory protects itself on both flanks from two obvious lines of attack: From radical relativism as it bolsters the normativity of conventions, a normativity that itself incorporates the idea that knowledge may change and become outdated. It also allows for the possibility that although one may be mistaken, given the weight of evidence one is most likely not. Tsongkhapa's theory is also shielded from radical scepticism as within the context of a shared and thus normative world, the knowledge that an apple is an apple is entirely feasible and is transactionally not in dispute. This is Tsongkhapa's context: one that is relative, normative, open to improvement and therefore not foundational.

Our next exegete Taktsang will push back against this Tsongkhapa-Khédrup notion of a universal standard of warrant. He will utterly reject the possibility of epistemic instruments in Madhyamaka. Deceived knowledge is not knowledge.

Chapter 5: The Sakyapa Response

5.1.1. Taktsang

Taktsang Lotsawa (1405-1477) was born in the Taklung (*sTag lung*) area of Yardrok (*Yar 'brok*).⁴⁶¹ He was schooled and ordained within the Sakya tradition, at a time when the tradition had seen a dramatic decrease in its political power, wealth, and religious hegemony. This occurred roughly parallel to the establishment and increase in power of the newly forming tradition that followed Tsongkhapa. Taktsang's powerful and astute critique of Tsongkhapa's philosophy is unlikely to be entirely politically motivated, as his criticisms do appear to be thoroughly grounded in soteriological concerns, although it would be imprudent to assume Taktsang was impervious to the changing spiritual and political climate of his time. Interestingly, he was a monk at Drepung ('Bras spungs), a Gelugpa monastery, and a student of Jamyang Chöjé Trashi Penden (1379-1449), a direct disciple of Tsongkhapa.⁴⁶² He also had students from within Tsongkhapa's followers too, such as Norzang Gyatso (1441-1527),⁴⁶³ the teacher of the second Dalai Lama, Gendün Gyatso (1476-1542). Nonetheless, Taktsang wrote the first methodical critique of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka, and is considered one of three principal opponents to Tsongkhapa's view,⁴⁶⁴ the others being the Sakya scholars Gorampa and Shākya Chokden,⁴⁶⁵ collectively known as *Go sha stag gsum* in Tibetan. We will examine their critiques one by one.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Kodani 2017: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Taktsang-Lotsawa-Sherab-Rinchen/10579>

⁴⁶² Jinpa 2019: 353, and 355.

⁴⁶³ Yakherds 2022: vol. 2, 4.

⁴⁶⁴ See Van der Kuijp (1983: n. 46) for more details, and a list of Taktsang's secular writings.

⁴⁶⁵ There were, however, other critics of Tsongkhapa that predate Taktsang, such as Ngorchen Künga Zangpo (1382-1456), and Rongtön Shéja Künrik, as we saw above. For more details, see Jinpa 2019: 355-357, and D. Jackson 1989: 6.

⁴⁶⁶ The following discussion of Taktsang's Madhyamaka is heavily indebted to the work of The Yakherds (2021), and constitutes a summary of their findings.

5.1.2. Taktsang's Madhyamaka

Taktsang's philosophical concerns with Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Prāsaṅgika are articulated as the “eighteen great burdens of contradiction” (*'gal ba'i khur chen bco brgyad*) in his *Grub mtha' kun shes*, a doxographic summary of Buddhist tenets. His critique appears in the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka section and revolves around Tsongkhapa's answer to the problem of epistemic relativism in Madhyamaka. The debate between their two positions pivots on the two most essential meanings of *kun rdzob* (*saṃvṛti*) in *kun rdzob bden pa* (*saṃvṛitti-satya*): that of being merely ‘conventional’, or of being ‘obscurational’. Tsongkhapa generally emphasises and favours the former while Taktsang emphasises the latter. For Taktsang, to advocate for a robust epistemology in Madhyamaka removes any possibility for anti-foundationalism, since by accepting that deceived epistemic instruments are accurate regarding deceiving objects one inadvertently reifies both.⁴⁶⁷ Taktsang's concern is that once we grant epistemic instruments any sphere of legitimate operation, we have already conceded too much to substantialist thinking. The very act of demarcating a domain where these instruments function “correctly” (even if only conventionally) implies the stable truth of epistemic subjects and objects, thereby undermining the utter rejection of *svabhāva* that is the heart of authentic Madhyamaka.

However, for Tsongkhapa, it is precisely the opposite. By describing a uniquely Madhyamaka epistemology one actually eliminates the possibility of relativism and by extension foundationalism: for if one cannot provide a coherent explanation of dependent arising, one will have no ground for a coherent explanation of emptiness, and thus one will by implication fall into the extreme of foundationalism. For Tsongkhapa, the solution lies

⁴⁶⁷ Yakherds 2022: vol. 1, 79. In Taktsang's words: *rang tshugs mi thub na tshad mas grub pa 'gal te/ tshad grub kyi don ni bslu med dang bslu med kyi don ni tshugs thub las ma 'das pa'i phyr ro* (Taktsang 2007: 267, English translation in Yakherds 2022: vol. 2, 25).

not in rejecting these instruments entirely (which would lead to incoherent relativism) but in carefully delimiting their scope of application. By maintaining their conventional reliability while denying their ultimate referentiality, he argues that one can avoid both the extreme of foundationalism, which absolutises these instruments, and the extreme of rampant relativism, which renders all reasoning meaningless.

Taksang however will have none of that. He argues Madhyamaka is anti-epistemology. It is certainly not conducive to the Pramāṇavādins' epistemology, as Tsongkhapa to a certain extent assumes. This is because Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's system – according to Candrakīrti – accepts that epistemic instruments are undeceived regarding the intrinsic characteristics of their objects,⁴⁶⁸ and it is through grasping such characteristics that epistemic instruments acquire their warrant. It is, therefore, contradictory for Tsongkhapa to claim to be rejecting intrinsic existence and at the same time accept epistemic instruments. Moreover, all claims, philosophical or otherwise, are invariably shown to be false since they are undermined by their inability to withstand ultimate analysis. Mādhyamikas may well describe the institutions of the world and how the world believes and articulates its understandings, customs, and beliefs, but only – as The Yakherds describe it – in an anthropological sense.⁴⁶⁹ They would never accept such reifying and beguiled practices and assertions in their own system, as they know all such objects to be deceptive and the cognitions of them to necessarily be mistaken. To accept that conventions are deceptive and yet relatively true and warranted is simply contradictory. By extension, to accept that cognitions can be both mistaken and accurate (or deceptive and non-deceptive) is also a

⁴⁶⁸ See Candrakīrti, *Bodhisattvayogācāracaṭuṣṣatakaṭikā*, (*Byang chub sems dpa'i rnal 'byor spyod pa bzhi brgya pa'i rgya cher 'grel pa*): D 3865, 196b.2-4; quoted in Cutler, et al 2000-2003: vol. 3, 165. However, several modern and traditional scholars question the assertion that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are foundationalists. For references and a brief summary of their various opinions, see Forman 2020: 906, n.1.

⁴⁶⁹ Yakherds 2021: vol. 1, 66.

contradiction for Taktsang. He thus exposes 18 apparent contradictions in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka, which according to The Yakherds all revolve around four points:

(1) the notion of warrant cannot be separated from foundationalism, and the Prāsaṅgika system is antifoundational, (2) no claim or position withstands analysis, and so any expression of knowledge can be exposed as false; (3) to take any set of faculties as warranting is arbitrary, and so no epistemic or cognitive faculties can be warranting; and (4) knowledge entails being correct about the object of knowledge, and we are always mistaken in some respects about any object.⁴⁷⁰

Be that as it may, Taktsang does however provide us with three contexts of discourse around which he weaves his position on the final incompatibility of *pramāṇas* within Madhyamaka.

As his *Grub mtha' kun shes* says:

I have understood that in general all teachings of the Victor—and in particular the scriptures of Nāgārjuna and his heirs—can be put into practice with great ease if one relates their statements to three contexts: (1) that of no examination and analysis; (2) that of slight analysis on the basis of rational cognition; and (3) that of thorough analysis on the basis of the ineffable.⁴⁷¹

The first context of discourse, that of no analysis (*ma dpyad pa'i gnas skabs*), concerns the relative truths of the world. This includes the non-analytical and pre-philosophical perspective and epistemic practices that are embodied by normal worldly people who do not engage in philosophical reasonings to determine the final nature of objects, illustrated with the archetype of the “cowherd” who represents the non-philosophically minded individual. It also includes the conventional descriptions of various conventional phenomena included in the Buddhist base, path, and result, such as the aggregates, various levels of realisation, and the *rūpakāya* of a Buddha. Taktsang also includes the relative truth of the three types of āryas, namely the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas who have eliminated the *kleśas* and yet still experience the appearance of real objects during post meditation periods,

⁴⁷⁰ Yakherds 2021: vol. 1, 81-82.

⁴⁷¹ Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 58.

because their obscurations to knowledge (*jñeyāvaraṇa*, *shes bya'i sgrib pa*) have yet to be purified. Objects that appear to these three types of āryas are called the relative truth of yogins or Mādhyamikas and are posited without analysis of the ultimate.⁴⁷² These objects may be employed practically for both worldly and transworldly purposes by Mādhyamikas through recourse to this non-analytical purview, while remaining aware that such engagement is ultimately deluded.

The second context, that of slight analysis (*rigs shes kyi chung zad dpyad pa'i gnas skabs*) is the context in which Mādhyamikas temporarily engage in the positing of theses to reject the object of negation, establish the selflessness of persons and of *dharmas*, and reverse their clinging to real objects. In this context, the ultimate is described as a non-implicative negation (*dgag med pa*) of *svabhāva* – a logical negation of something in which nothing positive is implied and is the figurative ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*).⁴⁷³ The realisation of this object, Taktsang concedes, may conventionally be considered an epistemic warrant of it.⁴⁷⁴ In this context, then, the Mādhyamika skillfully employs relativistic conceptual dichotomies to gradually transcend all concepts and bifurcations.

The final context, that of thorough analysis, is the frame of references of one who has pacified all conceptual fabrications. That is, all notions of objects being warranted by subjects and all conceptual dichotomies. It corresponds to the meaning implied in all of the sūtras and Madhyamaka treatises that teach the ultimate through rejecting all four *koṭi*.

⁴⁷² Taktsang 2007: 295-296. English in Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 61.

⁴⁷³ Taktsang 2007: 297-298. English in Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 63-64. For Taktsang, Gorampa, and Shakya Chokden, an figurative ultimate (**paryāyaparamārtha*, *rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) or concordant ultimate (*rjes mthun pa'i don dam*) is exclusively an object of conception as realised by the rational analysis of non-āryas; whereas the fully qualified ultimate (**aparyāyaparamārtha*, *don dam bden pa mtshan nyid pa*), is exclusively realised non-conceptually and is the domain of āryas during meditative equipoise. For more on the Indian antecedents to these terms in for example Bhāvaviveka's (c. 5th cent.) works, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 229. We shall return to these two ultimates several times in the following chapters.

⁴⁷⁴ Taktsang 2007: 302. English in Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 68-69.

Taktsang will not accept such an ultimate is a non-implicative negation, as it is entirely beyond description and conception. This form of analysis comes after and as a byproduct of slight analysis.

These three contexts have different purposes or goals: the first helps one to engage in the Buddhist path through cultivating ethics and the like, the second enables one to realise the figurative ultimate, eventually leading to personal liberation, the final context of thorough analysis helps one to transcend all duality of subject and object and attain full awakening, that is, omniscience. Taktsang accepts the notion of conventional epistemic warrant in the first context, in an “etic” descriptive sense. In the second such mundane epistemic instruments are seen to be deceived by ultimate epistemic instruments, and in the final context even the notion of a nondeceptive ultimate epistemic warrant is seen to be deceiving, as there simply is no foundation of which knowledge can know.

In essence, Taktsang recognises that Mādhyamikas may accept conventional epistemic practices from the perspective of the world’s non-analytical cognitions, and accept the temporal value of ultimate epistemic warrant in the second context. But in the final analysis he does not believe any object can ever be established, as warrant itself necessarily implies that there is a real and foundational thing.

5.1.3. Taktsang on the Example

Taktsang’s interpretation of the Example rebuffs Tsongkhapa’s interpretation in reference to *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI.71b, by first arguing that it is nonsensical to claim two pieces of obstructive matter can be parked in the same space without displacing each other (a problem that Khédrupjé explicitly addressed).⁴⁷⁵ Likewise, he argues it is contradictory to claim that

⁴⁷⁵ See, chapter 4, p.166.

a single bowl of liquid can be accurately certified as nectar, water, and pus via the distinct *pramāṇas* of the different beings observing it.

It is not suitable to assert as the meaning of ‘Also, a hungry ghost’s awareness of a flowing river as pus’ [in *Madhyamakāvātāra* 6.71b], that a bowl full of a wet and fluid [substance] is epistemically warranted by the individual six types [of beings] due to being the individual karmic appearances for those six types, that is, appearing as nectar, water, and pus for gods, humans, and hungry ghosts [respectively].⁴⁷⁶

It makes no sense to hold that epistemic instruments are warranted regarding conventional things when the same thing is accurately identified as an entirely different thing by a different species’ *pramāṇa*. Both charges, however, are rather incomplete representations of Tsongkhapa’s position and seem to ignore his mereological account of the general object, the flowing liquid (*chu klung*), and its different physical parts; since, without further qualification Tsongkhapa would certainly agree with Taktsang’s basic points here.

Taktsang, like Gorampa and Shakya Chokden as we shall see, also does not accept the distinction Tsongkhapa draws between the Falling Hairs Example and the Example. For Taktsang they are both examples of illusion:

Since [Candrakīrti’s *Bhāṣya*] commentary explains that the two [examples] are the same, it is contradictory to assert that the falling hairs do not exist but that the pus, which appears in the place of the flowing stream, exists and this is established by an epistemic instrument.⁴⁷⁷

That is, it is contradictory to explain that the cognition perceiving floaters is wrong, but the hungry ghost’s perception of pus is accurate, as both are under the dominion of the same

⁴⁷⁶ Taktsang 2007, 281-282: *gzhan yang brlan zhing gsher ba phor gang la lha mi yi dwags sogs la bdud rtsi dang chu dang rnag tu snang ba sogs rigs drug so so'i las snang yin pas rigs drug so sora'i tshad ma grub po zhes smra ba 'di/ chu 'bab klung la yi dwags rnag blo yang zhes pa'i don du 'dod pa nyid mi 'thad* (also translated in Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 42-43).

⁴⁷⁷ Taktsang 2007, 282: *'grel bas gsungs pas de gnyis mtshungs par bshad pa gang zhig skra shad med par 'dod pa dang chu klung gi gzhir rnag tu snang ba'i rnag tshad grub tu yod par 'dod pa 'gal bas so//* (also translated in Yakherds: 2021: vol. 2, 43).

fundamental ignorance,⁴⁷⁸ and thus are mistaken about their objects. After all, ‘if one is mistaken about something it is contradictory to [accurately] warrant it’.⁴⁷⁹ For Tsongkhapa, however, such a criticism cannot account for the difference between a wrong consciousness (*log shes*) and a conventionally accurate epistemic instrument, between an eye consciousness seeing a mirage and an eye consciousness seeing a lake, and the proponent of such a view may as well therefore abandon any attempt at Madhyamaka or at liberation.

Articulating Taktsang’s critique here, Forman argues Tsongkhapa’s position is unable to distinguish the pus from the falling hair via an epistemic coherentist position, that is, the accuracy of an epistemic instrument being warranted via its corroboration and coherency with other conceptual and perceptual *pramāṇas*. He argues that falling hair does not ‘cohere with our conceptual standard conditions, and thereby is false’, but neither does the pus, as it is simply not part of our perceptual world.⁴⁸⁰ That is, the warranting of an object is relative to the standard conditions usually necessary for its certification being met: there are no internal (cataracts) or external (insufficient light) conditions adversely affecting the cognition. And thus, that the pus is warranted, and the falling hairs are not, is not something that coheres with other human epistemic instruments, as humans do not see water as pus. He thus labels this a “scope problem”: if we narrow the scope of certification to allow for warranting under standard human conditions (such as functional human eyes, and sufficient light) and thereby invalidate the falling hairs, we then exclude the possibility of validating the *preta*’s eye consciousness of pus, as it is now beyond our perceptual “scope”. Likewise, if we expand the standard conditions under which something may be certified, a scope that will now include the warranting of the pus, we lose the capacity to invalidate the falling

⁴⁷⁸ Yakherds 2021: vol. 1, 80.

⁴⁷⁹ Taktsang 2007, 109 (v.13b), & 274: *yul der 'khrul dang de la tshad ma 'gal* (also translated in Yakherds 2021: vol. 2, 34).

⁴⁸⁰ Forman 2020: 917.

hairs as we have now opened the door too far by allowing *pramāṇas* to cohere with those beyond our ken, and they are thus no longer “standard” conditions. If the preta’s eye consciousness seeing pus is a *pramāṇa* despite it being beyond our ken and not cohering with other human *pramāṇas*, it follows that the falling hair is also validated by those with an eye disorder, as it need not cohere with other human *pramāṇas* to be warranted.⁴⁸¹

To respond to Forman’s point, while the distinction between pretas perceiving pus and those with eye disorders seeing falling hairs cannot be reduced to mere numerical differences – there presumably are more pretas seeing pus than humans seeing falling hair, the crucial point lies in how these two types of perception function within their respective epistemic frameworks. For pretas, the perception of pus is a central, consistent, and systematic component of their realm. Their perception is part of a coherent network of experiences that we can say defines their species’ environment. In contrast, the perception of falling hairs is an anomalous aberration, a pathological outlier within the “standard” system of human perceptions. It is also inconsistent with the other cognitions of the perceiver – they cannot touch the falling hair. While those with eye disorders may share this particular misperception, it remains disconnected from the broader perceptual framework within which they live. This qualitative distinction allows us to maintain epistemic coherentism while addressing the scope problem outlined by Forman. The preta’s perception of pus is epistemically valid because it exists as an integral element within a comprehensive and internally coherent perceptual system. As such, the question of its validity rests not on scope adjustments but on the coherent connection within realm-specific perceptual frameworks.

5.1.4. Conclusions

⁴⁸¹ See Forman (2020) for further details, and his slight adjustment to Tsongkhapa’s position to maintain epistemic coherentism.

For Taktsang, to articulate reality in the emic sense of shared human everyday perception and not as a mere etic spectator to worldly institutions inevitably commits oneself to deceptive epistemological and metaphysical claims. This is because having philosophical commitments entails the acceptance of universal standards of discourse and assertions, that are therefore institution-free and non-contingent.⁴⁸² Taktsang contends that once we grant legitimacy to any universal epistemic or metaphysical standards—no matter how modest or conventionally circumscribed—we have already stepped outside the radical non-foundationalism that authentic Madhyamaka demands. The problem is that the very project of establishing a universally valid criteria for truth-claims, knowledge, or even ultimate reality inevitably reintroduces subtle forms of essentialism. For him, even apparently innocent claims about “how conventional truth functions” or “what counts as reliable conventional knowledge” smuggle in assumptions about stable epistemic subjects and mind-independent objects. This is anti-Madhyamaka. The Yakherds succinctly sum up Taktsang’s criticism of Tsongkhapa’s approach: ‘inasmuch as Tsongkhapa requires that epistemic instruments have normative force and ground warrant, his epistemology and ontology must fail,’⁴⁸³ for the greater the normative force, the correspondingly greater the resulting foundationalism.

In essence then, the Example is insightful for illustrating the primary point of divergence between Tsongkhapa’s and Taktsang’s Madhyamaka. For Taktsang it illustrates the relativity and thus deceptivity of conventions, be they *prameya* or *pramāṇa*, and thus does not allow for any truth or reliability beyond the anthropologically designated type, i.e., as conventionally agreed by non-Mādhyamika human beings in everyday contexts. For Tsongkhapa, on the other hand, it illustrates the relativity, emptiness, and thus feasibility of

⁴⁸² See Yakherds: 2021: vol. 1, 83.

⁴⁸³ Yakherds: 2021: vol. 1, 84.

conventions, which are by definition contextual. It does not illustrate an epistemology that is context independent, even if it does illustrate a cross-convention and universal epistemic principle that holds in all contexts, and yet is not separate from them. This principle operates universally precisely because it emerges from and remains grounded in the contextual interdependence that characterises all conventional things. Rather than transcending contexts, it reveals the very structure of contextuality itself—the mutual dependence of knowers and known that constitutes the very fabric of conventions. As Nāgārjuna's famous dictum goes: *pramāṇas* are established via *prameyas*.⁴⁸⁴

5.2.1. Gorampa: Life and Works

Gorampa (1429-1489) hailed from Bomlungda ('*Bom lung mda*') in the Gowu (*Go bo*) area of Kham (*Khams*), eastern Tibet. Like many of the exegetes surveyed so far, he became a novice monk at an early age, studied and showed mastery of the classical subjects of Buddhist philosophy while still in his twenties, coupled this with Tantric studies and practice, and eventually became a famous teacher, abbot, and prolific author of both philosophical and esoteric treatises. As with his contemporary and fellow Sakyapa religionist Taktsang, Gorampa lived after the decline and subsequent overthrow of the Sakya tradition's political hegemony in Tibet by the Pagmodrupas. In this period many Sakyapa lamas and institutions saw a marked decline in their spiritual and political authority, and the associated prestige and financial patronage. As noted above, this all occurred alongside the gradual rise to power of Tsongkhapa's followers,⁴⁸⁵ eventually culminating in

⁴⁸⁴ See Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*: v.40-41, and Westerhoff 2010: 80-82. As Garfield notes, Nāgārjuna's discussion of *pramāṇa* in this context is probably 'the first explicit defence of epistemological coherentism in the history of world philosophy' (Cowherds 2011: 28).

⁴⁸⁵ For more on the changing political climate of Gorampa's time and milieu, see Cabezón 2007: 41-45, and also Komarovski 2011: 17-23, who relates it more specifically to Gorampa's contemporary Shakya Chokden, as we will see in the next section.

the Ganden Phodrang government under the fifth Dalai Lama. For lamas like Gorampa who saw their own tradition's renown for scholastic supremacy being seriously challenged by Tsongkhapa and his followers, it is not all that surprising that he would launch an intellectual attack on the founder of this newly homogenising tradition. During his lifetime all three main Gandenpa monasteries, Ganden (*dGa' ldan*), Drépfung (*'Bras spungs*), and Sera (*Sera*), in and around Lhasa had been built, and several Gandenpa monasteries also appeared in Gorampa's region of Kham.⁴⁸⁶ As a beneficiary of the rising Rinpung house, he also was not entirely withdrawn from the politics of his day.⁴⁸⁷ It seems some even attributed his early death in his sixties to his involvement in the hostilities that were developing between Tsang (*gTsang*) and Ü (*dBus*).⁴⁸⁸

That said, Gorampa's critique of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka is unlikely to merely be a political jab, it is a highly articulate and astute appraisal that reveals the subtle philosophical issues in Tsongkhapa's interpretation; uncouth as it is at times, it is nonetheless a serious intellectual challenge. So much so in fact, that Gelugpas such as Jétsünpa (1469-1544/46),⁴⁸⁹ and the first Jamyang Zhépa (1648-1721)⁴⁹⁰ wrote subtle and harsh responses to Gorampa's charges. The fifth Dalai Lama even banned Gorampa's works from monastic institutions and had many of them destroyed.⁴⁹¹ As a result, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that his works were collected and allowed to be published, and since then Gorampa's commentaries have become standard textbooks in Sakya monasteries and are also utilised by the other non-Gelug traditions.

⁴⁸⁶ Cabezón 2007: 42.

⁴⁸⁷ Cabezón 2007: 43.

⁴⁸⁸ Dreyfus 1997: 27, and D. Jackson 1989: 21.

⁴⁸⁹ Jétsünpa 2003: 354-504. This volume also includes his refutation of Shakya Chokden.

⁴⁹⁰ See a discussion of his refutation of Taktsang in Yakherds 2021: chapter 9.

⁴⁹¹ Kassor 2021: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gorampa/>.

5.2.2. Gorampa's Madhyamaka

Gorampa's Madhyamaka exegesis constitutes three complete works and one incomplete text on Madhyamaka. The three complete works are his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, a shorter polemical work directly addressing the Shentong view propounded by Dölpopa “the eternalist”, and Tsongkhapa “the nihilist”; the *lTa ba ngan sel*, a complete commentary on *Madhyamakāvātāra*, that also directly responds to several of Tsongkhapa's ideas; and his much larger *dBu ma'i spyi don*, covering many of the points covered in the previous texts but in much greater detail, and illustrating Gorampa's view on many of the key Madhyamaka ideas taught by his Indian and Tibetan predecessors. According to Kassor, Gorampa's presentation of Madhyamaka in these texts does not appear to have changed significantly and is remarkably consistent.⁴⁹² In addition to the three works above, there is also an incomplete commentary called *Yang dag lta ba'i 'od zer* that comments on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.⁴⁹³ For our purposes, the first two texts are the most relevant as they provide a well-developed interpretation of the Example, as we shall see in due course.

The relevant points to our discussion of Gorampa's Madhyamaka may be best illuminated, as with many post-classical Tibetan interpretations of Madhyamaka, by showing how it contrasts and directly responds to Tsongkhapa. As Komarovski observes, to fully appreciate the views of Gorampa an understanding of Tsongkhapa's system is necessary.⁴⁹⁴ Gorampa's approach in his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed* explicitly critiques Tsongkhapa's view via two perspectives: a critique of Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the ultimate, and of the conventional. In terms of the former, the most relevant for our purposes is his rejection of

⁴⁹² Kassor 2011: 123.

⁴⁹³ Cabezón 2007: 37.

⁴⁹⁴ Komarovski 2011: 5.

Tsongkhapa's interpretation and employment of the *catuṣkoṭi*.⁴⁹⁵ As we saw in the section on Réndawa, Tsongkhapa and his followers famously interpreted the object of negation in general, and the *catuṣkoṭi* (in its various forms) specifically with qualifications that avoided a literal and straightforward reading of the argument.⁴⁹⁶ They were thus able to maintain the laws of classical logic wherein two negations cancel each other out.⁴⁹⁷ Things not being existent actually meant not being “ultimately” existent (*don dam du yod pa min*), and things not being non-existent, meant not being “conventionally” non-existent (*kun rdzob tu med pa min*).

Gorampa had two principal issues with this reading. The first concerned Tsongkhapa's first qualification “ultimately”, which in certain contexts seems to qualify each *koṭi*.⁴⁹⁸ On this reading, if ultimate reality is characterised by the mere stark non-implying negation (*med gags*) that Tsongkhapa proposed, then what is the point of the other three *koṭis*, they would be merely a repetition.⁴⁹⁹ Gorampa's point is that if things are not ultimately existent, not ultimately non-existent, not both ultimately existent and non-existent, and not neither ultimately existent nor ultimately non-existent, then it would be sufficient to simply say nothing is ultimately existent, as the other three *koṭi* simply say the same thing in different words. Perhaps his point is similar to refuting that a circle has four corners, in such a case there is no need to individually reject each corner, it is sufficient to merely refute that a circle

⁴⁹⁵ For discussion of Gorampa's use of the *catuṣkoṭi* in modern literature, see Tillemans 2009, and Kassor 2013. For a thorough treatment of the *catuṣkoṭi* and its canonical antecedents in the Pāli canon, see Seyfort Ruegg 1977.

⁴⁹⁶ See Tsongkhapa's *Lam rim chen mo* (English translation in Cutler, et al 2000: vol. 3, 127- 153, & 189; Tibetan in Tsongkhapa 1985: 580-606, 637-638.)

⁴⁹⁷ Tillemans 1999: 134. For Tsongkhapa's arguments why such a law must apply in Madhyamaka, see Cutler, et al 2000: vol. 3, 146-147. Also, see Seyfort Ruegg (1977) for a thorough treatment of why such classical laws of logic such as those of double negation, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle were accepted by Indian Mādhyamikas.

⁴⁹⁸ For instance, in his *Rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (Tibetan in Tsongkhapa 1973: 377-378; English in Ngawang and Garfield 2006: 447-448), and the *Lam rim chen mo* (English in Cutler, et al 2000: vol. 3, 265, Tibetan in Tsongkhapa 1985: 710.)

⁴⁹⁹ Tibetan and English translation in Cabezón 2007: 124-125

possesses corners. Furthermore, Gorampa argues, why do the Madhyamaka texts constantly endorse the rejection of all wrong views if there fundamentally is only one, that things do not exist “ultimately”?⁵⁰⁰

His second point is more stinging and concerns the fourth *koṭi*, phenomena being neither existent nor non-existent.⁵⁰¹ He argues that if Tsongkhapa’s arguments for rejecting the “neither existent nor nonexistent” (*yod min med min*) argument works, which is based on the common notion of a double negative (*dgag pa gnyis kyi rnal ma go ba*) whereby refuting existence thereby affirms its nonexistence, then Tsongkhapa’s reading of the first two *koṭi* will be turned back on himself via the fourth *koṭi*. If a hat is not “not ultimately existent” and not “not conventionally nonexistent” (as Tsongkhapa sometimes appears to consider the second *koṭi*), it would absurdly follow that it is ultimately existent and conventionally nonexistent, as two negations cancel each other out and thus equal a positive proposition.⁵⁰² A harsh pill to swallow for all Gelugpas, indeed.⁵⁰³ Gorampa himself does not believe that the rule of double negation elimination applies in the context of utilising the *catuṣkoṭi* to generate the Middle Way view.⁵⁰⁴

Gorampa’s rebuttal here revolves around what is the target of Madhyamaka reasoning, the object that is negated. Reading the *catuṣkoṭi* without qualifications that attempt to uphold classical logic, he considers existence (*yod pa*) as the object to be refuted – a massive over-extension of what should be rejected according to Tsongkhapa.⁵⁰⁵ For Gorampa, however,

⁵⁰⁰ Cabezón 2007: 124-125.

⁵⁰¹ See Cabezón 2007: 127-129.

⁵⁰² Shakya Chokden also finds the same fault with Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of the *catuṣkoṭi*. See below and (Komarovski 2000: 5, 33).

⁵⁰³ As Cabezón notes (2007: 127, n. 185) Khédrup specifically formulates his understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi* in such a way as to avoid this issue.

⁵⁰⁴ For several other absurdities that follow from an unqualified or literal interpretation of the *catuṣkoṭi*, see Séra Jétsünpa and Tillemans’s insights in Tillemans 1999b: 135-138.

⁵⁰⁵ As such, for Gorampa, if it is a conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*) it is not necessarily an existent, whereas if it is a relative truth (*tha snyad bden pa*) it is necessarily an existent. Likewise, if it exists

the argument does not imply that nothing exists, as it is a non-implicative negation and does not imply anything at all,⁵⁰⁶ rather, it merely indicates that the referent of the conceptual thought and the thought itself that captures this so-called “existence” *koṭi*, is mistaken. This is because for Gorampa the result of utilising the *catuṣkoṭi* is not merely an ontological negation (be it implicative or non-implicative)⁵⁰⁷ but it is also an epistemic one. The *catuṣkoṭi* helps one to establish both types of negation. Through negating the four metaphysical possibilities embodied in the *catuṣkoṭi* (an ontological negation), as a by-product the dichotomising conceptual thought that operates within the boundaries of the four *koṭi* is also rejected (an epistemic negation). The resulting wisdom then is considered the realisation of the Madhyamaka view,⁵⁰⁸ in Gorampa’s terms the view of *Freedom from Elaborations (spros bral)*.⁵⁰⁹ In essence, unlike Tsongkhapa who argues through negating the four *koṭis* a non-implicative negation is established and realised by the subject, Gorampa argues through such a logical nullification a non-implicative negation is established but the mere non-existence of existence is not realised; rather a transcendence of dichotomises is realised.⁵¹⁰

The difference is summed up by Cabezón:

conventionally, it does not necessarily exist, whereas if it exists relatively, it necessarily does exist. Gorampa 1979: 608: *kun rdzob bden pa yin na yod pas ma khyab cing/ tha snyad bden pa yin na yod pas khyab ces dang/ kun rdzob tu yod na yod pas ma khyab cing/ tha snyad du yod na yod pas khyab ces 'byung/*

⁵⁰⁶ Kassor 2013: 405.

⁵⁰⁷ For more details on these two negations according to Tsongkhapa, see his *dGongs pa rab gsal* (Tsongkhapa 2008: 180, English in Jinpa 2021: 195-196). Also, see Seyfort Ruegg (1977) and Westerhoff (2006) for a discussion of the closely related *prasajya* and *paryudāsa* negations and their applicability to Nāgārjuna’s *catuṣkoṭi*.

⁵⁰⁸ See the full discussion in Tibetan and English translation in Cabezón 2007: 128-129.

⁵⁰⁹ This wisdom as realised by an ārya in meditative equipoise, is also an ultimate truth for Gorampa (Thakchoe 2007: 16, 62-64.)

⁵¹⁰ Kassor (2013: 403-407), highlights an interesting nuance to Gorampa’s points here on the *catuṣkoṭi*. Gorampa in his *dBu ma 'i spyi don* draws a distinction between applying qualifications such as “not ultimately existent” and “not conventionally nonexistent” in the context of eliminating the two extremes in a *dilemma*; but, in the context of eliminating all extremes with the *tetralemma* one should not apply such qualifiers. Kassor designates the first a logical tool, the latter a soteriological tool.

For Tsongkhapa, the problem of ignorance lies in the fact that the mind improperly reifies objects, imputing real or inherent existence to things that lack it. For Gorampa, the chief problem lies in the fact that the mind operates through a dichotomizing filter that continuously splits the world into dualities (existent/nonexistent, permanent/impermanent, and so forth).⁵¹¹

This emphasis on the fundamentally flawed nature of conceptuality, while also recognising its relative value, leads Gorampa to accept the two types of ultimate discussed above in the section on Taktsang: A concordant (*rjes mthun*) ultimate or figurative ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam bden pa*), and the fully qualified ultimate (*don dam bden pa mtshan nyid pa*). The former is exclusively the object of conception as certified via the rational analysis of non-āryas, the latter that of perception and the exclusive domain of āryas during meditative equipoise.⁵¹²

This emphasis on the limited and confounding nature of thought relates closely to Gorampa's rejection of Tsongkhapa's presentation of the conventional.⁵¹³ Being Mādhyamikas, both accept all *kun rdzob bden pa* or conventional truths are posited via conventional usage (*kun rdzob tha snyad kyi dbang gyis bzhag pa*). On Gorampa's account, Tsongkhapa believes this only means they are posited by means of linguistic expressions (*ming gi tha snyad*). That is, conventions acquire their natures in dependence on the linguistic expressions given to them. Gorampa feels this has missed a step and does not precisely define conventions. For him, they are posited in dependence on appearing to mind, and not independently. Objects acquire their natures by being represented by the cognitions that understand them. Terms and linguistic usage may then qualify them, but this is a later

⁵¹¹ Cabezón 2007: 53.

⁵¹² Tsongkhapa in his *Lam rim chen mo* follows Bhāvaviveka and Kamalaśīla in accepting a concordant ultimate, but in a different sense to Gorampa. For him, the concordant ultimate is the conceptual realisation itself of emptiness by ordinary being's and by āryas during post meditative equipoise. See Tsongkhapa 1985: 669-670.

⁵¹³ For an in-depth treatment comparing Tsongkhapa and Gorampa's presentation of the two truths, see Thakchoe 2007.

step, primarily they are conventions because they acquire their natures through being cognised. Commenting on Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvayavṛtti*, Gorampa notes:

“[T]hings being posited by [linguistic] conventions” means that “things are posited by virtue of the way they appear to the mind of [beings] in the world,” and that based on that [cognitive act] “things are posited by means of language.” It refutes the belief that [things] are only linguistic conventions.⁵¹⁴

This interpretation that posits conventions from the perspective of a given awareness, and not from the less subjective and more general context of linguistic expressions, directly relates to Gorampa's interpretation of the Example and his attack of Tsongkhapa's non-contextual interpretation of it.

5.2.3. Gorampa's Interpretation of the Example

Gorampa argues that each of the other beings' eye consciousnesses of their species-specific objects are unmistaken (*ma 'khrul pa*), but only from their perspective (... *la ltos pa*):

The Prāsaṅgika system maintains that from the perspective of the eye consciousness of humans, the object [of that eye consciousness]— i.e., the water—does exist, since the eye consciousness [that perceives water] is nonerroneous. Since the other five eye consciousnesses [of the other types of sentient beings] are erroneous, however, the five objects of those [consciousnesses] are, from the perspective of the [human] world, mistaken [or false] conventionalities (*log pa'i kun rdzob*). From the perspective of a preta's eye consciousness, that same [that is, the preta's] eye consciousness is nonerroneous. Hence, its object—pus and blood—is true from the perspective of that same [preta] world, while the other five eye consciousnesses are erroneous, and so forth, where the [same thing can be said] to apply to each [of the other cases—that of hell beings, etc.].⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Translation and Tibetan quoted from Cabezón 2007, 134-135: *zhes 'jig rten pa'i blo la snang ba'i dbang gis bzhag pa dang/ de la brten nas ming gi tha snyad kyi bzhag pa sogs thams cad kyang tha snyad kyi dbang gis bzhag pa'i don du gsungs kyi/ ming gi tha snyad kho na la 'dod pa bkag pa'i phyir/ gal te de ni*

⁵¹⁵ Translation and Tibetan in Cabezón 2007: 140-141: *thal 'gyur ba'i lugs la mi'i mig shes la ltos te/ mig shes de nyid ma 'khrul bas/ de'i yul chu yod pa yin gyi/ mig shes gzhan lnga 'khrul bas/ de 'i yul lnga po yang 'jig rten nyid la ltos nas log pa'i kun rdzob tu 'dod pa yin la/ yi davags kyi mig shes la ltos nas mig shes de nyid ma 'khrul pas de'i yul rnag khrag yang 'jig rten nyid la ltos nas bden pa yin cing/ mig shes gzhan lnga 'khrul pa yin pa sogs thams cad la sbyar bar bya ba yin no/*

Given that all conventions are posited or warranted via their appearance to mind, the same is true for an accurate or erroneous cognition. These are posited or acquire their nature in dependence on being represented by given cognitions, and not in a context-independent general way like that of linguistic conventions that are more removed from subjectivity. So, a human's eye consciousness seeing water is accurate, and the water is water, in dependence on both of them appearing as such from the point of view of humans. For Gorampa, the general context of the specific realm's perspective, then, is specific enough, it would seem, to avoid scepticism as it maintains the relative accuracy of the beings' cognitions. This ascription of relative and realm-specific accuracy to the beings' cognitions by Gorampa distinguishes him from Taktsang, who argued it was contradictory for two cognitions to certify the same object in contradictory ways.⁵¹⁶

In his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed* and *lTa ba ngan sel* Gorampa posits in total eight absurd consequences that arise from Tsongkhapa and his followers' views on the Example. They are as follows: 1) That the singular body of Śākyamuni would be both beautiful and ugly since these two objects are non-erroneously perceived by the two humans Kaśyapa and Purāṇa.

2) That in a scenario when beings of the six realms all look at the bowl of water at the same time, the human who takes the bowl of water and drinks it would consume all six substances, since all six are supposed to occupy that collective substance in the bowl. Moreover, it would

⁵¹⁶ See p. 183 above. Unlike Taktsang, he also does not rule out the use of *tshad ma* in Madhyamaka discourse. Indeed, he considers Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the Example to be against 'factually based (inferential) reasoning' (*dngos stobs kyi rigs pa*), that is included within inferential epistemic instruments (*rjes dpag tshad ma*). See Cabezón 2007: 117 (n.162) & 141; and Gorampa's *lTa ba ngan sel* (Gorampa 1979: 610.) For more on factually based inferences (*vastubalapravṛttānumāna/vastubalānumuna*, *dngos stobs rjes dpag*), in the Logico-Epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti see Tillemans 1999b: 59 n.17, and Lati Rinpoche and Napper 1986: 81-82.

also follow in such a situation that it is impossible to drink a full cup of water.⁵¹⁷ This latter consequence appears to have already been dealt with by Khédруп, as we saw in the ‘Transformation of Parts of the River’ argument above. There, Khédруп argued that during a pan-realm river bank gathering, as soon as a bowl of the wet and fluid sextuple substance is taken and the collective object now becomes the exclusive object of use of one of them, say the preta, then all of the parts that were previously of various types, now transform into the class-specific appropriate object, pus, due to the preta’s karma.⁵¹⁸ This rationale will be directly challenged by the sixth, seventh, and eighth of Gorampa’s consequences, below.

In his *ITa ba ngan sel* Gorampa proposes several more consequences that follow from Tsongkhapa’s view that each of the beings’ cognitions are epistemic warrants in a general and pan-realm sense and not merely from the point of view of their species.⁵¹⁹ First, from the point of view of the subject: 3) There would be no qualitative difference between the one afflicted with an eye disorder seeing falling hairs, in the Falling Hair Example, and one with healthy eyes who does not see it (as discussed in *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI. 54, and 71), since both the visual cognition of the human and that of the ghost in the Example are epistemic warrants for the same river and Candrakīrti considers these two situations to be equivalent.

Now, from the point of view of the object: 4) When hell beings perceive the river as a mass of fire, it follows that the fire is not part of that river, since it is fire. The same is also true for gods in the form realm who can only perceive the river as space.⁵²⁰ The first point evidently relies on the abhidharma view that fire and water, being contradictory *dharmas*, cannot occupy the same place. 5) Similarly, the appearance of a white conch as though it

⁵¹⁷ These first two consequences are found in Gorampa’s *ITa ba’i ngan ’byed*. See Cabezón 2007: 140-143, for the Tibetan, and English translation.

⁵¹⁸ See pp. 162-164.

⁵¹⁹ A translation of this section of the *ITa ba ngan sel* by Tashi Tsering can be found in Yakherds 2021: 285-288. Here, I am merely paraphrasing this section of the text.

⁵²⁰ This characteristic of the Example was discussed by Asvabhāva, as seen in the chapter 2: 52.

were yellow to an impaired visual cognition is not the colour of the white conch. But for Tsongkhapa's view, the yellow colour would be the colour of the white conch, because there is no difference between the ghost seeing water as pus, and a human seeing it as water in terms of their both being epistemic warrants. This last consequence seems to ignore Tsongkhapa's mereological interpretation.

The following three absurd consequences clearly reply to the points Khédrup made above in the 'Transformation of Parts of the River' argument just mentioned. 6) It would absurdly follow from this that the illusory horses and elephants conjured through spells and intoxicants, are real horses and elephants, since when pretas see a river as pus and blood, real pus and blood arise newly as a result of their actions. 7) When a pot is seen up close clearly, and seen from a distance unclearly, these would actually be two different newly arisen forms due to karma, since when the six classes of beings observe a single river, there suddenly arises from karma new forms that are observed.⁵²¹

The final consequence (8) concerns the conflation of knowables (*shes bya khra leb tu song ba*), with regards to which Gorampa gives various examples, such as one part of a rope that is perceived as a snake becoming a real snake, one part of a hot entity becoming that of a cold entity, and the like.⁵²² These all follow from the assertion that there suddenly arise six different parts when the six beings observe a river. Gorampa sums up his arguments in the following way:⁵²³

These [consequences illustrate] the fault of not knowing how to apply, to both the object and subject, an uncommon differentiation of false and true conventions

⁵²¹ For Khédrup's response to this argument that we called the 'Karmic Matter (*las gzugs*) Objection', see chapter 4: 164, and Cabezon 1992: 337-338, Tibetan in Khédrup 2009: 366-368.

⁵²² Gorampa 1979: 658-660.

⁵²³ An alternative English translation of the following section by Tashi Tsering can be found in Yakherds 2021: 285-288.

through relying on the [perspective] of the world, as described in the system of the master [Candrakīrti].⁵²⁴

For the Cittamātrins a single referent can be represented in cognition in six different ways when seen by the six classes of beings since they hold that such subjective consciousnesses exist without a sextuple object. As for the position of our system, it is as [explained] earlier. For the master [Candrakīrti], with regards to conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*), when dividing [conventional] objects into those that are true and false, this is done through relying on conventional customs (*tha snyad*). The same is true when differentiating subjects.

Generally speaking, when positing a conventional referent for any one of the six types of being, be it a subject or an object, both are conventionally true [for that being]. But that referent is posited as a nonexistent convention, in terms of both an object and subject, according to how it is perceived by the other five types of beings. Now here, our teacher the perfect Buddha displayed the process of attaining enlightenment on earth, turned the wheel of Dharma, these teachings were collected, the treatises that comment on their intentions [were composed], all of these undertakings (*rtsom pa*) were done through relying [on the perspective of] humans. Due to this, in the perspective (*thong tshul*) of humans, they are relatively true (*tha snyad du bden pa*), but from the other beings' perspective, such referents are presented as untrue. Hence, from the relative (*tha snyad du*) point of view, in relation to the flowing river, both the water and the subjective cognition of that are true, and the other perspectives of it as pus and the like, in terms of both the objects themselves and the subjective cognitions of them, are posited as relatively untrue. This is the main essential point.⁵²⁵

From this we can see that Gorampa seeks to avoid scepticism by maintaining the relative accuracy of the beings' cognitions. This is done through asserting they are accurate and true,

⁵²⁴ Gorampa 1979, 660: 'di dag kyang slob dpon 'di'i lugs kyi 'jig rten nyid ltos bden pa dang / log pa'i kun rdzob kyi khyad par thun mong ma yin pa yul yul can gnyis ka la sbyar ba'i tshul ma shes pa'i skyon du 'dug go.

⁵²⁵ Gorampa 1979, 660-661: *sems tsam pa'i gzhi gcig la rigs drug gi mthong snang drug 'byung ba ni drug char yul med par yul can gyi shes pa yod par 'dod pas lugs 'di'i phyogs snga yin la slob dpon 'dis ni kun rdzob bden pa la tha snyad la ltos nas bden brdzun gnyis su yul la phye ba'i tshe yul can la yang de ltar phye bas spyir rigs drug gang rung gcig gi tha snyad gzhir bzhag pa'i tshe de'i yul yul can gnyis ka'ang tha snyad du bden la/ gzhi der gzhan lnga'i mthong tshul gyi yul yul can gnyis ka yang tha snyad du med pa rnam par gzhag go /dir ni ston pa rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas 'dzam bu'i gling du sangs rgya ba'i tshul bstan nas chos kyis 'khor lo bskor ba dang / bka' bsdu ba dang / dgongs 'grel gyi bstan bcos rtsom pa thams cad mi'i rten la mdzad pas/ mi'i mthong tshul la tha snyad du bden pa dang / gzhi de nyid du 'gro ba gzhan gyi mthong tshul la mi bden pa'i rnam bzhag mdzad pas/ chu 'bab pa'i klung la chu dang / de'i yul can gnyis ka tha snyad la ltos nas bden pa dang / rnam la sogs pa'i mthong tshul gzhan rnams ni yul yul can gnyis ka tha snyad du yang mi bden par bzhag pa ni gnad kyi don.*

not in a universal pan-realm context, but in the relative context of what is appropriate for specific species.⁵²⁶ Just as naked mole-rats experience acids and chemicals like capsaicin without pain while humans find them painful,⁵²⁷ each species' perceptual experience is undoubtedly accurate within its own biological framework. Accuracy or inaccuracy, true or untrue in Gorampa's terms, can only be posited in relation to specific beings' environments and cognitive systems, and never independent from them. One may ask, does this allow for a conventional distinction between a mirage and a lake, or between a cognition of a mirage and of a lake? It seems it does, as both may be posited as veridical or falsidical in relation to the human and animal cognitive and physical environment. By the same token Gorampa may also avoid rampant relativism, as he does not say every human's cognition is equally accurate. Rather, a human's cognitive accuracy is determined by the physical and epistemic conventions of her realm. We shall refer to this interpretation as Gorampa's "theory of species-specific relativism".

This division of, and ascription of accuracy to conventional subjects and objects via the perspective (*mthong tshul*) of the perceiver, is also how Gorampa divides the two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth may only be posited and certified via erroneous or non-erroneous perspectives, respectively.⁵²⁸ As conventional truths are not true in any sense, there is only one truth, that of the ultimate.⁵²⁹ However, this is not to say there is no point distinguishing amongst the obscuring, concealing (*rdzob pa*), and seemingly true conventional objects, and the obscured and seemingly accurate conventional subjects – Gorampa also wishes to avoid scepticism and relativism in relation to both.

⁵²⁶ For more on Gorampa's view of conventional epistemic instruments (*kun tu tha snyad pa'i tsahd ma*), see Dreyfus 1997: 492, n.33.

⁵²⁷ Young 2022: 118.

⁵²⁸ Thakchoe 2007: 70.

⁵²⁹ For more details on Gorampa's perspective on the division of the two truths, see Thakchoe 2007: 12-16, 40-43, 65-77.

5.2.4. Conclusions

For Gorampa, then, as with Réndawa, the subjective perspective is all-important for his presentation. Accuracy or inaccuracy is relative and only posited in relation to the epistemic standard conditions of the species in question. One may however ask Gorampa if this really avoids the spectre of radical relativism. Is his theory of species-specific relativism only meant to be an accurate interpretation of the Example from humans' perspective, and not also from the other beings' perspectives? It would seem it is, as the passage above shows, even the Buddha's turning of the wheel of Dharma occurred through relying on the human perspective and is only true in relation to it. Gorampa's solution to the problem of perceptual relativism, then, avoids radical scepticism by showing that each of the beings' cognitions is accurate, but only from the perspective of their species. It avoids rampant relativism by ascribing context (i.e. realm) dependent accuracy and thus does not fall prey to the self-defeating claim that every perception *tout court* is correct. Gorampa's localised "theory of species-specific relativism", then, seems to be a robust and cogent solution to the epistemic challenges that the Example provokes.

5.3.1. Shakya Chokden: Life and Context

Shakya Chokden (1428–1507), the third member of the *Go shAk stag gsum* trio to be discussed, was a contemporary of Taktsang and Gorampa. He likely brushed shoulders at least with the latter as they both spent periods of time in Sangpu Neutog (*gsang phu ne'u thog*) monastery, during the period when the monastery was occupied by both Sakyapa and Gandenpa followers.⁵³⁰ Like Gorampa, he was also a student of Rongtön Shéja Künrik.

⁵³⁰ Komarovski 2011: 19. Apparently, this may have not been the only life he spent in this monastery, as it is reported that during certain meditative experiences Shakya Chokden remembered being Ngog Lotsawa (that

Shakya Chokden was thus also deeply embedded in the religious and philosophically tumultuous period that saw the Sakyapa tradition gradually have its scholastic supremacy challenged in the wake of the rising political power and spiritual renown that Tsongkhapa's followers were experiencing. His life is similar to many of the luminaries in this period, receiving ordination at a young age, showing outstanding scholastic abilities, and collecting followers even in his twenties, gradually receiving greater recognition by the ruling elites of his time,⁵³¹ and eventually serving as an abbot⁵³² and composing multiply treatises on the Perfection and Mantra Vehicles.⁵³³

Shakya Chokden's writings are undoubtedly motivated by the changing times in which he lived. Indeed, one senses a certain bitterness in his estimation of the growing popularity in Tsongkhapa's teachings⁵³⁴ – teachings he felt were starting to corrupt his own Sakya tradition such that its followers were not even able to distinguish Sakya teachings from those of Tsongkhapa.⁵³⁵ It seems that due to the growing popularity of the Gandenpa's with the Phakmodrupa ruling house at Neudong, Shakya Chokden was even obliged to travel to Sera monastery to receive Gandenpa teachings.⁵³⁶ He was thus obviously dismayed by the apparent Gandenpa attack on his tradition 'from outside and within'.⁵³⁷ This explains the

is Ngok Loden Shérap, 1059 - 1109), and Mapcha (d. 1185), both previous occupants of this monastery (Komarovski 2011: 35-36, 50).

⁵³¹ Such as by Lowo Depa Tsangchen Trashi Gönpö, Dépa Tsangchenpa and Hor Shākya two powerful rulers of Tsang. Significantly he was on good terms with the Rinpungpa's of Tsang, and the Gyama rulers of Ü (Komarovski 2011: 36, 43).

⁵³² Specifically, Zi lung monastery in Shigatse, but which was later renamed by Shakya Chokden as Ser mdog can after he became its abbot.

⁵³³ For more details on Shakya Chokden's life and on his Tibetan biographies, see Van der Kuijp 1983: 10-11, Caumanns 2010: 205–239, Komarovski 2011: 23-50, and Higgins and Draszczyk 2016: 51-57.

⁵³⁴ See for instance his statements in *bDen pa gnyis kyi gnas la 'jug pa nges don bdud rtsi thigs pa* (Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4: 281), translated in Komarovski 2000, 40: '[All] these statements clearly show to the world that either [their author] didn't take even the slightest pains to look with an eye of intelligence at the garland of white light of Candra 's [i.e. Candrakīrti "the famous moon"] perfect elucidations, or with a brush of crooked discrimination he took dark ink stirred by evil ideas and coloured Candra 's face black.'

⁵³⁵ Komarovski 2011: 94.

⁵³⁶ Komarovski 2011: 28.

⁵³⁷ Komarovski 2011: 94.

plethora of writings Shakya Chokden wrote in response to Tsongkhapa's teachings. These concerned not only Tsongkhapa and his followers' interpretation of Madhyamaka (critiqued in his earliest writings during his thirties),⁵³⁸ but also several other typically important subjects of Tibetan scholasticism, such as the correct way to cultivate *gzhi gnas* and *lhag mthong*, the generation stage of Vajrayāna, doxography, epistemology, and hermeneutics. This contrasts with how respectful and open he is to the other Tibetan traditions of his time. For instance, he received many important teachings and empowerments from Kagyupa teachers, such as, the seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyatso (1454-1506),⁵³⁹ was a lineage holder for many important Kagyu transmissions,⁵⁴⁰ and wrote a trilogy of commentaries on the Dakpo Kagyü form of Mahāmudrā.⁵⁴¹

5.3.6. Philosophical Syncretism

Shakya Chokden was generally a pronounced advocate of an ecumenical and reconciliatory approach to philosophy.⁵⁴² However, like Gorampa as seen above, Shakya Chokden often presents his position as the middle way between Dölpopa's Shentong "eternalist" view (*rtag pa'i lta ba*) and Tsongkhapa's Rangtong "nihilist" view (*chad pa'i lta ba*).⁵⁴³ Interestingly, Shakya Chokden does not believe the Rangtong and Shentong views are intrinsically

⁵³⁸ Komarovski 2011: 343 n.124. Shakya Chokden's critique of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka is addressed in several commentaries, such as his *Stong thun chung ba dbang po'i rdo rje zhes bya ba blo gsal mgu byed*, (Shakya Chokden 2013c: vol. 4, 324-461), *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos* (Shakya Chokden 2013f: vol. 13, 118-122), *Zab rgya'i snying po bsdu pa rin chen gter mdzod chos tshan brgyad pa* (Shakya Chokden 2013g: vol. 13), and *Theg pa chen po dbu ma rnam par nges pa'i bang mdzod lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, (Shakya Chokden 2013h: vol. 14, 341–vol. 15, 695).

⁵³⁹ Stearns 1999: 62.

⁵⁴⁰ Van der Kuijp 1983: 16.

⁵⁴¹ See Higgins and Draszcyk (2016: 44-145) for a study of Shakya Chokden's views on Mahāmudrā.

⁵⁴² For instance, he considered the Rangtong and Shentong views of Dölpopa and Butön Rinchen Grup, respectively, to ultimately be non-contradictory (Stearns 1999: 63). He also objectively critiqued members of his own tradition such as Sakya Paṇḍita, for instance in his *sDom gsum rab dbye la dri ba legs pa* (Shakya Chokden 2013i: vol. 17, 334-345) he asks 100 pertinent questions about Sakya Paṇḍita's *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba*. Although, he explicitly states these were not meant as a criticism but rather as a clarification (Komarovski 2011: 37). He does however regularly criticise Réndawa (see Komarovski 2011: 97-99).

⁵⁴³ However, he still held Dölpopa in high esteem (Komarovski 2011: 94).

antithetical, indeed he considers them to be equally valid philosophical positions, and equally effective soteriological tools. He makes the rather obvious and yet rarely noted point that all philosophical positions consider themselves “madhyamaka”, in that they are the middle between the two philosophical extremes.⁵⁴⁴ In the same vein, he came to hold that the Alīkākāravāda (*rnam brdzun pa'i smra ba*) Yogācāra view propounded by Maitreya, Asaṅga, Dharmakīrti,⁵⁴⁵ and Ratnākaraśānti as distinct from the Satyākāravāda (*rnam bden pa'i smra ba*) or Cittamātra view, is equally worthy of the title “Madhyamaka” as the Niḥsvabhāvavāda (*ngo bo nyid med pa'i smra ba*) view propounded by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. His point is not merely rhetorical, as he takes great pains to illustrate their compatibility.

Although the distinction between the Alīkākāravāda and Satyākāravāda positions may be found in ‘embryonic form’ in Śākyabuddhi’s commentary to the Pratyakṣa chapter of Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika*,⁵⁴⁶ these terms themselves are not found in any of Dharmakīrti’s texts.⁵⁴⁷ They are also not found within Indic doxographies, which instead use Sākāravāda and Nirākāravāda.⁵⁴⁸ Since our discussion mainly concerns how Tibetans interpreted these positions, I shall for simplicity’s sake use the terms Alīkākāravāda and Satyākāravāda – the Sanskrit equivalent of the Tibetan terms used by Shakya Chokden and most Tibetans.

⁵⁴⁴ Komarovski 2011: 116.

⁵⁴⁵ He even came to hold that Dharmakīrti taught the Shentong view (Dreyfus 1997: 29, Komarovski 2000: 13).

⁵⁴⁶ Yiannopoulos 2023: 400.

⁵⁴⁷ This conclusion is based on word searches of the available Sanskrit editions within the GRETIL database of all known works on logic and epistemology by Dharmakīrti: *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā* and its *Vṛtti*, *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, *Nyāyabindu*, *Hetubindu*, *Sambandhaparīkṣā* and its *Vṛtti*, *Vādanyāya*, *Samtānāntarasiddhi*.

⁵⁴⁸ Aitken 2023: 477, n.19. According to Seton (2023: 590) there are, however, differences between the Alīkākāra and Nirākāravāda positions that have been missed by both traditional and modern scholars.

These two philosophical positions that became famous in Tibet were clearly known in India and came to represent two distinct strands of Yogācāra thought from the 11th century. The distinction between them revolves around the status of representational forms or *ākāra* (*rnam pa*) that are the content of cognition. The discussion directly bears on the dispute amongst Yogācāras on how a Buddha perceives conventions once she has undergone the fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*) that constitutes awakening: Satyākāravādins hold that consciousness is fundamentally intentional and thus such forms remain once awakened, Alīkākāravāda denies the existence of such forms once one is awakened.⁵⁴⁹ But the dispute also has far broader implications for Yogācāra epistemology more generally.⁵⁵⁰ As we saw in Chapter two, Yogācāra proponents rejected the Sautrāntika and other Abhidharma schools' understanding of cognition via representational forms (*ākārayati*) that holds cognition is produced through external objects projecting a representation of themselves to the perceiving awareness. They would, however, still maintain the theory of cognition via representational forms, but ascribe a different cause for them, namely *vāsanās* – karmic dispositions or habitual tendencies carried over from the past. It was these *vāsanās* that would produce both subjective (*grāhakākāra*) and objective aspects (*grāhyākāra*) of a single moment of awareness. The objective aspects are representational forms that arise as the content of consciousness and are of the same nature to it. For the Satyākāravādins, such as Dharmapāla (sixth cent.) and Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti (10th-11th cent.),⁵⁵¹ representational forms remain in non-dual awareness and once awakened: they are the means through which Buddhas accurately cognise conventions. Unlike unenlightened beings who see these representations as external to their own minds, Buddhas know them to be the nature

⁵⁴⁹ Seton 2023: 589.

⁵⁵⁰ Seton 2023: 589.

⁵⁵¹ McAllister 2023: 582, Seton 2023: 589.

of consciousness.⁵⁵² For the Alīkākāravādins, such as Sthiramati (sixth cent.) and Ratnākaraśānti (c. 11th cent.), they are unreal as they are illusory projections onto cognition itself, caused by ignorance, and are ultimately to disappear once awakened.⁵⁵³

According to Shakya Chokden, the Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda or Madhyamaka systems both lead to the ultimate goal of the ārya's direct realisation of reality; they both are even equally warranted paths leading to the state of buddhahood. He does however not brush over their clear differences: the two systems undoubtedly use different reasonings to realise the ultimate and employ different descriptions of the ultimate itself.⁵⁵⁴ For one, according to the Alīkākāravādins, the ultimate is an implicative negation (*dgag ma yin pa*) – a logical negation of something in which something positive is implied – whereas for the Mādhyamikas it is a non-implicative negation (*dgag med pa*) – a logical negation of something in which nothing positive is implied. They are also not equally profound in every way: the Niḥsvabhāvavāda system is more efficient for establishing the correct view through reasoning; the Alīkākāravāda system is more profound when it comes to articulating the ultimate wisdom experienced in meditation.⁵⁵⁵ They are, thus, different in terms of their views articulated conceptually in post-meditation periods (*rjes thob*); but they are not different in terms of the ultimate that is experienced during meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhaḡ*).⁵⁵⁶ His ecumenical and syncretic approach also extends to the differences between the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika Madhyamaka systems: According to Shakya Chokden, they

⁵⁵² Seton 2023: 589.

⁵⁵³ Seton 2023: 589. There is of course much more to be said on this subject, and specifically on the precise nature ascribed to the *ākāras* within Yogācāra metaphysics. For further discussion on Indian discourse on this subject, see Seton 2015, 2023, and Yiannopoulos 2023. For Tibetan explanations in traditional doxographies, see Hopkins 2003: 1996.

⁵⁵⁴ Komarovski 2011: 86-87.

⁵⁵⁵ See his *Tshad ma'i bstan bcos kyi shin rta'i srol rnam ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul gtam du bya ba nyin mor byed pa'i snang bas dpyod ldan mtha' dag dga' bar byed pa* in Shakya Chokden 2013j: vol. 19, 73. See Komarovski (2011: 210) for a translation of the relevant passage.

⁵⁵⁶ See Dreyfus 1997: 29, and Komarovski 2011: 168-183 for more details.

differ only in terms of their approach and methodology for inducing the correct view of reality – they do not differ when it comes to the correct final view itself.⁵⁵⁷ He was therefore an incredibly creative and dynamic thinker, unbound by the shackles of traditional Tibetan doxographic categories.

Shakya Chokden is considered by many to have set out as a Rangtongpa, and only later become a Shentongpa, or even a Jonangpa (*Jo nang pa*).⁵⁵⁸ This opinion is held by significant figures such as Tuken Lopzang Chökyi Nyima (1737–1802) in his famous Doxography *Legs bshad shel gyi me long*.⁵⁵⁹ However, it is clearly rather far from the mark. As mentioned, Shakya Chokden saw the Rangtong and Shentong views as complementary, and far from being a Jonangpa, he often criticises Dölpopa's interpretations of Shentong.⁵⁶⁰ This is not to say there was no development in the thought of Shakya Chokden, there clearly was. His unique and syncretic approach to re-thinking the standardised Tibetan doxographic categories, elevating the Ālikākāravāda system to a level equivalent to (Niḥsvabhāvavāda) Madhyamaka, began in his fifties and continued until his death.⁵⁶¹

Overall, the legacy of this uniquely gifted thinker is rather disappointing, despite the enormous contribution he made to all areas of Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism – amounting to some twenty-five volumes. His writings on epistemology for instance are extensive, the largest of any Tibetan luminary.⁵⁶² Apparently due to his direct and lengthy criticism of

⁵⁵⁷ See his *dBu ma'i byung tshul rnam par bshad pa'i gnam yid bzhin lhun po*, (translated in Komarovski 2000: 12-14, 46-49), and Komarovski 2011: 83. This is an opinion also shared by Mipham, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

⁵⁵⁸ Dreyfus 1997: 28-29. The Jonang tradition is often considered the fifth principal tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, and is always associated with the Shentong view originally taught by one of the monasteries earliest abbots, Dölpopa.

⁵⁵⁹ See the English translation in Lhundup Sopa, et al. 2009: 210, 318.

⁵⁶⁰ Tāranātha, however, did believe that despite surface level differences in their tenets, they both held the Shentong *view*, and were in agreement with how one is to *meditate* on it (Van der Kuijp 1983: 14).

⁵⁶¹ Komarovski 2011: 50. For more details on the development of Shakya Chokden's views see Dreyfus 1997: 28-29, Sterns 1999: 61-62, and Komarovski 2011: 102-108.

⁵⁶² For details of these nine large treatises, see Van der Kuijp 1983: 16-17.

Sakya Paṇḍita, the complexity of pinning his philosophical perspective down, and the way his thought transcended orthodox doxography (particularly in his embrace of both Shentong and Rangtong views), he experienced, as Komarovski explains, ‘the worst penalty a thinker of his calibre can pay—his views were misunderstood and largely neglected’.⁵⁶³ Although still considered by the Sakya tradition one of its greatest thinkers,⁵⁶⁴ he came to represent a heterodox branch of Sakya philosophy, while Gorampa’s “orthodox” interpretation of Sakya Paṇḍita became the more popular and widely studied.⁵⁶⁵ As such, the oral transmission of Gorampa’s works remains intact to the present day, but that of Shakya Chokden has been broken.⁵⁶⁶ Like Gorampa, however, his works were also suppressed by certain Gelugpas in the 17th century, which also contributed to their fall into obscurity until they were published again in Thimphu, Bhutan in 1975 by Kunzang Tobgey.⁵⁶⁷

5.3.7. Shakya Chokden’s Madhyamaka

iv. The Ultimate

To set the stage for Shakya Chokden’s interpretation of the Example and his refutation of Tsongkhapa’s reading,⁵⁶⁸ let us briefly survey salient and relevant features of his Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka vision. As mentioned, Shakya Chokden held that emptiness as articulated by Mādhyamikas is a non-implicative negation. This is however something that can only be cognised conceptually. This is because it is a mere universal

⁵⁶³ Komarovski 2011: 107.

⁵⁶⁴ He is counted by the Sakya tradition as a member of its esteemed “Six Ornaments Beautifying the Snowy Land” (*Gangs can mdzes pa’i rgyan drug*), a group of masters only second to the “Five Foremost Venerable Founders” (*rJe btsun gong ma lnga*): Sachen Kūnga Nyingpo (1092–1158), Sönam Tsemo (1142–1182), Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216), Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyeltsen (1182 – 1251), and Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (1235–1280), Komarovski 2011: 3–4. See Migmar Tseten 2008, for more details on these figures.

⁵⁶⁵ Dreyfus 1997: 27–28. Gorampa, in fact, directly challenged in two of his texts Shakya Chokden’s supposed criticism of Sakya Paṇḍita (Van der Kuijp 1983: 15–16).

⁵⁶⁶ Komarovski 2000: ix

⁵⁶⁷ Stearns 1999: 62, Komarovski 2011: 3.

⁵⁶⁸ In very essential terms, he refutes Tsongkhapa’s principal “innovations” in his *Chos tshan brgya dang brygad pa zhes bya ba’i bstan bcos* (Shakya Chokden 2013f: vol. 13, 118–122).

(*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, *spyi mtshan*) – a conceptually imputed and ineffective abstraction. The emptiness taught by Candrakīrti, therefore, is thus only a concordant ultimate (*mtshun pa 'i don dam*) and not the actual ultimate truth (*rnam grangs ma yin pa 'i don dam*).⁵⁶⁹ For Sakya Chokden, ultimate reality can only be realised perceptually, not conceptually.⁵⁷⁰ This is the direct opposite of how Tsongkhapa conceives the ultimate. As seen in the section on Gorampa above, Tsongkhapa held that any cognition that manages to accurately apprehend emptiness, whether it is conceptual or non-conceptual, is necessarily an apprehension of the genuine ultimate truth.

Shakya Chokden also found Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the *catuṣkoṭi* at fault for the same reasons as Gorampa.⁵⁷¹ In Shakya Chokden's interpretation of it, the negation of the second *koṭi*, the “non-existence” of phenomena, depends upon the negation of the first *koṭi*, the “existence” of phenomena. Similarly, the negation of the fourth *koṭi*, that phenomena neither exist nor do not exist, also eliminates the third *koṭi*, that they both exist and do not exist. This is because when one member of a pair of two things in a dichotomous relationship (*phan tshun spangs te gnas pa*) is refuted, the other is also necessarily refuted.⁵⁷² Presumably this is because they are mutually dependent, like long and short; if the existence of one is metaphysically rejected, by implication so is the existence of the other.⁵⁷³ Importantly, in

⁵⁶⁹ For more on these terms, see the section on Taktsang above, chapter 5: 181, fn. 473.

⁵⁷⁰ Komarovski 2011: 176 & 194-195, and Higgins and Draszczuk 2016: 48, 102. This is a very common view among non-Gelugpa interpreters, such as Taktsang, Gorampa, and Gendun Chopel. See Thakchoe 2007: 83.

⁵⁷¹ See, pp.190-192.

⁵⁷² See his *dBu ma'i byung tshul rnam par bshad pa'i gtam yid bzhin lhun po* in Shakya Chokden 2013b: vol. 4, 186: *gzhung du ni gnyis min gyi mtha' sel ba/ gnyis yin gyi mtha' khegs pa la thug pa dang/ med mtha' khegs pa yod mtha' khegs pa la rag lus pa sogs phan tshun spangs pa'i 'gal zla gcig khegs pa na cig shos khyang khegs par gsungs la*, ‘In the [Madhyamaka] treatises it is said that the elimination of the extreme of being neither [within the *catuṣkoṭi*] depends on the refutation of being both, and the refutation of the extreme of nonexistence, relies upon the refutation of the extreme of existence, as when one member [of a pair] in a dichotomous relationship is refuted, so is the other’ (also translated in Komarovski 2000: 33-34).

⁵⁷³ This interpretation of the relationship between two things in a dichotomous relationship differs from Tsongkhapa's, who follows Kamalaśīla's definition. Quoted in Tsongkhapa 2008, 219: *phan tshun spangs te gnas pa'i mtshan nyid kyi chos dag ni/ cig shos dgag pa gzhan sgrub pa med na med pa yin pa'i phyir/ gnyis ga ma yin pa'i phyogs su rtogs pa yang rigs pa ma yin*, ‘A pair of phenomena fulfilling the definition of being

his understanding of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka system, if one eliminates the true or intrinsic existence of phenomena, one does not establish their non-intrinsic existence, as these are both extremes and mutually dependent: you can't negate one without negating the other, you cannot have one without the other. If one believes the opposite, one will merely have suppressed one conceptual elaboration, say that of existence, by replacing it with another, that of non-existence.⁵⁷⁴

v. The Conventional

Shakya Chokden was a particularly severe critic of Tsongkhapa's notorious method of establishing conventional truths by means of conventional epistemic instruments (*tha snyad tshad grub*). He characterized Tsongkhapa's texts as 'those books that proliferate by taking as their core (*gzhung shing*) tenets that are strongly bent on conventional truth.'⁵⁷⁵ As we will remember, for Tsongkhapa conventional truths are warranted via conventional epistemic instruments, ultimate truths are warranted via ultimate epistemic instruments. Both truths are thus proven to exist conventionally and not ultimately (as that is the only way anything can be said to exist). Their respective certifiers do not contradict each other, as they have different spheres of expertise. Conversely, Shakya Chokden consistently maintained that in reality (and thus for Mādhyamikas) if something exists, it must exist truly, be ultimate,⁵⁷⁶ and be established by *pramāṇa*. Relative truths are inherently only objects of superimposition and reification by deluded cognitions – not existing they cannot be

in a mutually exclusive dichotomous relationship is that if something is refuted as one of the pair, if this does not establish it as the other, then it does not exist. It is also not feasible to conceive of a position that is neither'.

⁵⁷⁴ Komarovski 2000: 48.

⁵⁷⁵ Shakya Chokden 2013k, vol. 23, 323: *gtso bor kun rdzob kyi bden pa la lhag par zhen pa'i grub mtha' gzhung shing du btsugs pa las 'phros pa'i glegs bam gyi tshogs rnam* (also translated in Komarovski 2011: 93).

⁵⁷⁶ See his *dBu ma'i byung tshul rnam par bshad pa'i gtam yid bzhin lhun po* in Shakya Chokden 2013b: vol. 4: 185. (See Komarovski 2011: 94, 99-100, and 2000: 32, 41).

warranted by *pramāṇa*,⁵⁷⁷ (even if provisionally they may be described within conventions).

He thus draws a clear line between the ontological status of conventional truths and ultimate truths: the former do not exist, the latter do exist.

vi. Conventional Epistemic Warrant for the World and for Madhyamaka

Shakya Chokden delineates a distinction between worldly conventional epistemic instruments, and those of Mādhyamikas, in that there are many things said to exist or be warranted by conventional epistemic instruments in the world, such as external objects, but for the Mādhyamikas they do not exist at all, and hence are merely said to exist conventionally (*tha snyad du yod pa*). There are also two perspectives on “the world”: The world in the perspective of short-sighted non-ārya beings – beings without a perceptual realisation of the ultimate – for whom ignorance arises spontaneously in their mind stream and colours everything they know; and, the world in the perspective of āryas with transcendent vision, for whom the world consists in the various mental states arising in their mind streams that grasp the distinguishing characteristics of (conventional) objects. It is from the perspective of the latter that the āryas’ conventional truth is posited, as we will see below.⁵⁷⁸

In his *Ku mud kyi phreng mdzes*,⁵⁷⁹ a short work dealing with points of difficulty in the *Madhyamakāvātāra*, Shakya Chokden goes on to illustrate why external objects do not exist in Madhyamaka by showing that there are no epistemic instruments that could warrant

⁵⁷⁷ See *gZi bsam 'grub gling pa'i dge 'dun spyi'i dris lan ya mtshan bcu bdun pa*, (Shakya Chokden 2013k: vol. 23, 419–420.), and Komarovski 2011: 94, 100, and Komarovski 2000: 4.

⁵⁷⁸ *Lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, (Shakya Chokden 2014, vol. 14: 446-447).

⁵⁷⁹ *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i dka' ba'i gnas 'ga' zhig rnam par bshad pa ku mud kyi phreng mdzes*, Shakya Chokden 2013d: vol. 5, 326-352. As Komarovski observes, there is no precise information in the colophon when this text was written, but he judges it to most likely have been written after 1477 (Komarovski 2011: 343, n.129)

them.⁵⁸⁰ This is because, as mentioned, there is a world of difference between what the world considers as warranted and existent, such as the “I” that appears as real to an ignorant consciousness, and the conventions of the Mādhyamika.

If conventionally (*tha snyad du*) the cognition that perceives [external] objects (*don snang gi shes pa*) is warranted via epistemic instruments, which epistemic instrument warrants that [cognition]? It cannot be proven by itself (*de nyid kyis*), because it cannot be authoritative (*tshad mar*) in relation to that [cognition], and because one must seek out other epistemic instruments to posit that [cognition]. If it is said this is not correct, it will be proven with (i) reasoning and (ii) by showing the internal contradictions with your own assertions.

As for (i), any cognition that possesses dualistic appearances of subject and object through the power of ignorance, is necessarily not an epistemic instrument.⁵⁸¹ That is the case because [perceiving subject and object] is necessarily a false perception. As for (ii), well, [if you say that] external objects exist because there are epistemic instruments that cognise the appearances of these objects: In that case, there would exist a common locus that is [both] an epistemic instrument and a cognition with an appearance of an [external] object, in which case there would exist epistemic instruments that are unmistaken in their warrant of something possessing contradictory [qualities] because the direct perception of āryas sees the nonexistence of external objects.

Well then, if it is then said, external objects are proven with the epistemic instruments that are renowned to the world itself; you must think along the following lines. In the world, all cognitions that are not polluted by adventitious causes of error (*'phral gyi 'khrul rgyus*), and which are polluted by innate ignorance are considered authoritative. Thinking along these lines, if one then thinks that what is renowned as authoritative for the world must also be asserted as conventionally authoritative by Mādhyamikas, this would be mistaken just like the innate conceptions which grasp at a self of persons and of phenomena. If the innate [conception] grasping at “I” is not acknowledged as authoritative in the world, then what kind of epistemic instrument that is known in the world can posit the existence of the self?

Also, if the conception that grasps the earlier and latter [instances of a composite] as one, and the conception that grasps it as one solid whole (*ril po gcig*) are not acknowledged as authoritative (*tshad mar*), then why in the world are these posited as epistemic instruments (*tshad ma*) that are known in the world as the same (*gcig*)

⁵⁸⁰ Shakya Chokden also refutes that external objects are accepted in the Prāsaṅgikas system in *dBu ma rnam par nges pa'i chos kyi bang mdzod lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (Shakya Chokden, vol. 14: 442-444.)

⁵⁸¹ A point Taktasang would certainly agree on, as seen above.

par)? This must be considered. Therefore, if it is an epistemic instrument that is renowned in the world, it is not necessarily a conventional epistemic instrument also in the Mādhyamikas' own system, because if it were, there would necessarily arise mistakes through the power of innate ignorance.⁵⁸²

That is, within the conventions of the world one may posit an object that existed yesterday and the later instance of that object existing today as the same thing (despite being different) or one may posit the whole entity as singular (despite being composite); but such supposed authoritative cognitions cannot be part of the Mādhyamika's epistemology. Shakya Chokden then goes on to illustrate what a conventional epistemic instrument is in his Madhyamaka system:

If it is then asked, what are conventional epistemic instruments in our system? They are those epistemic instruments that depend upon āryas' conventions. Well then, don't [they] conventionally refute external objects? They do refute those [external objects], as although [external objects] exist in the world's conventions, they do not exist in āryas' conventions.⁵⁸³

That is, from the point of view of the object, Mādhyamikas assert that there are no external objects, and, from the point of view of the subject, they hold that there are epistemic

⁵⁸² *Ku mud kyi phreng mdzes*, Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 5, 345-346: *tha snyad du don snang gi shes pa tshad mas grub na de tshad ma gang gis grub/ de nyid kyis grub pa mi 'thad de/ de la yang de tshad mar mi 'thad pa'i phyir dang / de la yang 'jog byed kyi tshad ma gzhan btsal dgos pa'i phyir/ mi 'thad pa ci zhe na/ rigs pa dang khas blangs nang 'gal ba'i sgrub byed gnyis kyis so/ dang po ni/ gang ma rig pa'i dbang gis gzung 'dzin gnyis snang can gyi shes pa yin na tshad ma ma yin pas khyab ste/ de yin na mthong ba rdzun pa yin pas khyab pa'i phyir/ gnyis pa ni/ 'o na phyi rol gyi don yod par 'gyur te/ don snang gi shes pa tshad ma yin pa'i phyir/ 'o na gzhan yang don snang gi shes pa dang tshad ma'i gzhi mthun yod na/ gal ba la mi 'khrul ba'i tshad ma yod par 'gyur te/ 'phags pa'i mngon sum gyis ni phyi rol gyi don med par mthong ba'i phyir ro/ 'o na phyi rol gyi don 'jig rten nyid la grags pa'i tshad mas grub pa ci zhe na/ 'jig rten na ni 'phral gyi 'khrul rgyus ma slad cing /lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas slad pa'i shes pa thams cad tshad mar khas len pa'i phyir/ 'di snyam du 'jig rten na tshad mar grags pa de thams cad dbu ma pas kyang tha snyad pa'i tshad mar khas len dgos so snyam na/de yang 'khrul ba yin te/gang zag dang chos kyi bdag tu 'dzin pa'i rtog pa lhan skyes bzhin no/ /ngar 'dzin lhan skyes 'jig rten la tshad mar ma grags na ni/ 'jig rten la grags pa'i tshad ma gang gis bdag yod par 'jog pa yin/ zhes bsam dgos pa dang /snga phyi gcig tu 'dzin pa'i rtog pa dang ril po gcig tu 'dzin pa'i rtog pa 'jig rten la tshad mar ma grags na ni/ dag 'jig rten na gcig par 'jig rten la grags pa'i tshad ma gang gis 'jog ces bsam dgos pa yin no/ /de'i phyir/'jig rten la grags pa'i tshad ma yin na dbu ma pa rang gi lugs la tha snyad du yang tshad ma ma yin pas khyab pa la/ de yin na lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa'i dbang gis 'khrul par skyed dgos pa'i phyir/*

⁵⁸³ *Ku mud kyi phreng mdzes*, Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 5, 346: *'o na rang lugs la tha snyad pa'i tshad ma gang zhe na/ 'phags pa'i tha snyad la brten pa'i tshad ma rnams so/ 'o na tha snyad du phyi rol gyi don bkag pa ma yin nam zhe na/ de bkag pa de ni/ 'jig rten gyi tha snyad du yin gyi 'phags pa'i tha snyad du ma yin no/*

instruments that refute external objects, but both are āryas' conventions – stereologically useful descriptions. Mādhyamikas may assert “there is no self”, and may designate selflessness as the ultimate truth, but this merely refers to the concordant ultimate, since it is identifiable with conceptions. It is thus just another convention – albeit an ārya's convention – and yet is still a useful heuristic for eventually realising the actual ultimate as realised by āryas, which is entirely unreachable by words or concepts.⁵⁸⁴ For Sakya Chokden there is a clear distinction between the accuracy and applicability of the conventions of the world and the conventions of āryas.

Shakya Chokden provides further details in his *Lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*. There are two types of conventions that are acknowledged by āryas (*'phags pa la grags pa'i kun rdzob*): conventions (that are utilised) at the time of severing conceptual proliferations that grasp at objects as real; and conventions (utilised) at the time of severing conceptual proliferations that grasp at objects as unreal. The former is the ultimate truth of ordinary beings, the latter may provisionally be said to be the ultimate known to āryas. These points all highlight the contextual relativity underpinning Shakya Chokden's hermeneutics.⁵⁸⁵ Like his fellow Sakyapas Taktsang and Gorampa, Sakya Chokden rejects universal discourse that operates independent of a specific context.

5.3.8. Shakya Chokden's Interpretation of the Example

Shakya Chokden comments upon the Example more than ten times in his *Collected Works*. This may come as no surprise since the Example problematises several important issues that lay on the elusive boundary line between Madhyamaka and Ālikākāravāda Yogācāra,

⁵⁸⁴ *Ku mud kyi phreng mdzes*, Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 5: 346-47

⁵⁸⁵ For more details on Shakya Chokden's appeal to contextual relativity when defining the ontological character of a thing, see Komarovski 2000: n.145, and 2011: 198-199.

particularly concerning the status of external objects and *pramāṇa*; and because Shakya Chokden is particularly interested in illustrating the equal footing of these two systems.

i. The Example in *Lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*

The most thorough treatment appears in his *Lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, a work dedicated to clarifying various points of his Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka vision.⁵⁸⁶ The section concerns points arising from his presentation of conventional truth and specifically those related to his assertion that external objects exist conventionally (*tha snyad du*) and yet cannot be established by epistemic instruments. In this section we find the clearest and most detailed explanation of Shakya Chokden's own interpretation of the Example; in nearly all other instances he merely refutes others' interpretations, without offering an interpretation of his own.

If one equally accepts that external objects and the cognitions which appear as those objects both exist conventionally, then what is the meaning of the following statement of [Candrakīrti's] *Treatise*?

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus. [VI.71a]

There are two points to be covered here: (i) the actual meaning, and (ii) an explanation that clears away the eternalist view held by others.

(i) [The actual meaning]

If, on the occasion that a single basis appears as nectar, water, or pus and blood to a god, human, and hungry ghost respectively, it is a conventional truth, because the cognitions that appear as these objects and the objects – nectar etc – are true for each of them, [we would reply with the following]. At such a time, the water and the like are not certified by epistemic instruments as being a single entity, because in the perspective of epistemic instruments external objects and the cognitions that appear as them are equally nonexistent. As it is said by Candrakīrti:

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus

⁵⁸⁶ Shakya Chokden 2013: vol. 15: 61-69. The main section of this discussion is translated in Appendix II.

Is like [a visual consciousness] whose organ is afflicted with an eye disorder.
[VI.71ab]

The way they are the same is indicated with the lines:

Whatever [visual] awareness is afflicted by an eye disorder,

Through the influence of that disorder, sees falling hairs.

Relative to the awareness that sees, both [the cognition and falling hair] are true,

Whereas, for one who sees clearly, both are false. [VI.54]

Although this is the case, if one were to analyse the characteristics of this situation more precisely: regarding the single entity that appears as a fluid, when it appears to humans as water, that appearance is a correct conventional [truth] (*yang dag kun rdzob*) relative to that human; whereas, relative to the human the other appearances for the other beings must be regarded as false conventional [truths] (*log pa'i kun rdzob*). This is because the appearances for the other beings, relative to the human are considered (*dmigs*) to be polluted by superficial causes of error; whereas [their own] is not polluted. This explanation can be applied similarly for the other beings in the Example.⁵⁸⁷

What may appear to be true for the humans is so – as long as, relative to them their cognitions are not distorted by superficial causes of error such as cataracts or hallucinogens. (That is enough, there is no need for it also to be void of deeper causes of mistake like fundamental

⁵⁸⁷ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 15, 60-61: *tha snyad du phyi rol gyi don dang don snang gi shes pa gnyis ka yod mnyam du khas len na/ ji skad du/ chu 'bab klung la yi dwags rnag blo yang / zhes pa'i gzhung gi don ci zhe na/ 'di la dngos dang / gzhan gyis btags pa'i mtha' bsal ba'o/ dang po ni/ gzhi gcig gi steng du lta mi yi dwags dud 'gro rnams la bdud rtsi dang chu dang rnag khrag sogs su snang ba de'i tshe na/ kun rdzob tu ni bden pa yin te/ de dang der snang ba'i shes pa de dang de'i don bdud rtsi la sogs pa de dang der bden pa'i phyir/de'i tshe tshad mas ni chu la sogs pa'i dngos po gcig kyang grub pa ma yin te/ tshad ma'i ngor ni phyi rol gyi don dang don snang gi shes pa gnyis ka yang med mnyam du mtshungs pa'i phyir/ de skad du yang /rab rib dang ldan dbang po can mtshungs pa/ chu 'bab klung la yi dwags rnag blo yang / zhes gsungs la/ de gnyis mtshungs pa'i tshul yang /ji skad du/ dbang po rab rib bcas pa blo gang gis/rab rib mthu las skra rnams gang mthong ba/ de blo la ltos gnyis char bden pa ste/ don gsal mthong la gnyis ka'ang rdzun pa yin/ zhes gsungs pa de nyid do/ de lta mod kyi khud par zhib mor 'byed na 'di ltar/ rlan zhing gsher bar snang ba'i dngos po gcig nyid/ mi la chur snang ba de'i tshe/ der snang ba de nyid mi la ltos pa'i yang dag kun rdzob dang /gzhan rnams la de dang der snang ba de mi la ltos nas log pa'i kun rdzob tu bzahag dgos te/ de dang der snang ba de mi la ltos nas 'phral gyi 'khrul rgyus bsalad pa dang /ma bsalad pa'i khyad par dag dmigs pa'i phyir/ gzhan rnams la yang de bzhin du sbyar ro/*

ignorance.) Conversely, according to humans, other species' cognitions that perceive the same referent in contradictory ways are false, as they are polluted by superficial causes of mistake. What kind of mistake humans ascribe to these other beings is not spelled out by Shakya Chokden. He then goes on to extensively paraphrase almost word for word Tsongkhapa's and Khédrup's explanations of the Example and then refutes them.⁵⁸⁸ Instead of quoting this extensive section let us instead look at another more salient refutation of the Gandenpa's position.

ii. The Example in *Phung khams skye mched kyi rnam gzhaḡ*⁵⁸⁹

As the title indicates, this text focuses on the aggregates (*skandha*, *phung po*), constituents (*dhātu*, *khams*), and sense spheres (*āyatana*, *skye mched*) that are involved in the process of perception. The specific context in which the Example appears is that of the correct definition of the matter aggregate (*rūpa*, *gzugs*) according to the Yogācāra texts and system. After presenting two incorrect interpretations of the nature of matter in this system, he then presents a third. This position holds that for Yogācāras, matter is the potential that exists within the immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyayatā*, *de ma thag rkyen*)⁵⁹⁰ for, say, the sense consciousness that perceives blue.⁵⁹¹ To refute this interpretation, he says the following:

When a single entity appears as a fluid, and in the visual consciousnesses of gods, humans, and hungry ghosts it is perceived as respectively nectar, water, or pus and blood, are all three visual consciousnesses epistemic instruments, or is only one of them? If it is the first option [and they are all epistemic instruments], there would be an unmistaken (*mi 'khrul ba*) epistemic instrument in relation to the mutually

⁵⁸⁸ See Appendix II.

⁵⁸⁹ Shakya Chokden 2013a: vol. 4: 50-87.

⁵⁹⁰ An immediately preceding condition is defined by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośa* II: 62: *cittacaitta acaramā utpannāḥ samanantarā*. (Gokhale 1946: 80). Basically, they are all minds and mental factors, other than the mind that enters nirvana without the remainder of the aggregates. For more details see the translation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Gelong Lodro Sangpo 2012, vol. 1: 663-664.

⁵⁹¹ This position is refuted more extensively in *Tshad ma rigs gter gyi dgongs rgyan*, Shakya Chokden 2013c: vol. 10, 38-39.

exclusive or contradictory (*'gal ba*)⁵⁹² [that is, something being or possessing mutually exclusive qualities would be warranted].⁵⁹³ If it is the second option, and the gods and hungry ghost's visual consciousnesses are not epistemic instruments, then your thesis falls apart.

Regarding this, the Precious Lozang⁵⁹⁴ [i.e. Tsongkhapa] might object: Within a bowl full of a fluid, which possesses parts (*cha can*), there are three different substances that are its parts. It is these three individual [parts] that appear to these three visual consciousnesses; and, at such a time all three eye consciousnesses are accurate epistemic instruments.

This position is extremely absurd, for, it would follow (i) that their visual consciousnesses would be [conceptual cognitions] engaging [their objects] through elimination (*apoha pravṛtti, sel 'jug*),⁵⁹⁵ (ii) that the food of the three beings would become mixed up, and (iii) it contradicts the treatises of Dharmakīrti.

As for (i), are the object possessing the parts (*cha can*) and the three parts a single substance or different substances? If the latter, then the whole (*yan lag can*) would also be a different substance. If the former, the three visual consciousnesses which see in these ways, would engage their object through [conceptually] eliminating [the

⁵⁹² Shakya Chokden often uses this phrase to essentialise the issue of the Example, and to illustrate why the cognitions cannot be epistemic instruments. See also his *Tshad ma rigs gter gyi dgongs rgyan* (Shakya Chokden 2013e: vol. 10, 39.)

⁵⁹³ This calls upon the Buddhist philosophical principle of contradiction, developed particularly by Dharmakīrti. There are two types of contradiction: (1) contradiction in the sense of a dichotomous relationship (such as existence and nonexistence, deceptive and non-deceptive), and (2) contradiction in the sense that two things cannot abide together (such as hot and cold). For Tibetan uses of this principle, see Perdue 1992: 159-162, Manchester 2009: 243, 253. From the Indian side, see Bandyopadhyay 1988: 229-232.

⁵⁹⁴ Note the irony.

⁵⁹⁵ This concerns the Dignāga-Dharmakīrtian theory of exclusion (*apoha*) in the formation of concepts, and describes how terms and thoughts relate to their referent. This theory was originally developed by Dignāga in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* V (see Hatori 1968: 78, note 1.12). To speak in general terms, thoughts realise their objects through a process of exclusion, such that they arrive at them through excluding everything that is not the object, and through the medium of a *universal* (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). For example, the conceptual cognition realising a cow realises “cow” through excluding all non-cows. In contrast perception (*pratyakṣa*) realises its object directly without excluding anything. In this context, a cognition engaging [its object through] elimination (*sel 'jug, apoha pravṛtti*) is another term for a conceptual cognition, which highlights this exclusionary procedure. As such, the consequence Sakya Chokden draws here is that since the beings consciousnesses in the Example are agreed by all to be sense perceptions, which by definition are not cognitions engaging through conceptual elimination of other objects, it would follow that they are such eliminative engagers as they only realise their species' specific part of the object, through conceptually eliminating the other parts. For more details on eliminative engagers, see Lati and Napper 1986: 34-35, 141-142. For more on the *apoha* theory and its development see Dreyfus 1997: 205ff, and for its role in inference, see Kellner 2004. (Interestingly, based on word searches of the available Sanskrit editions within the GRETIL database and the Tibetan translation in the Derge edition of the Tengyur found in The Tibetan Buddhist Canons Research Database, the terms *apoha pravṛtti* and *sel 'jug* do not appear in any of Dharmakīrti's works on logic and epistemology.)

other objects], as their own appearing object (*snang yul*) is a full bowl of fluid and because they do not see the other qualities that are a single substance in terms of their establishment and abiding⁵⁹⁶ with that [substance which they do see].

As for (ii), when a god of the desire realm drinks the full bowl of fluid, they would experience the taste of that [substance] while they also drank the water, and the pus and blood. This is because whatever is drunk by them at such a time there is said to exist three different substances, [namely] the parts, in that [object] possessing the parts.

As for (iii) if you say there is no fault with that, since the other parts are not seen with the others through the power of karma, then this has already been refuted by Dharmakīrti (*rigs pa mkhyen pa*). As he has said [in his *Pramāṇavārttika*, III, 344]:

If one says it is due to obscuration [by karma] that [two discordant aspects of the external object] are not seen,

[In that case] one does not see it through the power of the [external] object.⁵⁹⁷

This is because he accepts the former position [that holds that the object is seen due to karma, and not due to their being an external object that projects its representation to the perceiver].⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ One substance in terms of establishment and abiding (*grub bde rdzas gcig*) refers to certain attributes ascribed to entities that come to exist and abide together simultaneously, for instance a pot and the impermanence of that pot.

⁵⁹⁷ Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, III, 344: *tamanekātmakaṃ bhāvamekātmatvena darśayat / tadadṛṣṭaṃ kathaṃ nāma bhavedarthasya darśakam* // (Shastri, eds. 1968: 202). The whole passage in Tibetan D 4210: 131b.3: *ma mthong sgrib phyir min zhes na/ /don gyi dbang gis rtogs mi 'gyur/ /du ma'i bdag nyid dngos de la/ /gcig gi bdag tu mthong byed pa/ /ma mthong ba de ci ltar na/ /don mthong byed par 'gyur ba yin/*. The brackets and following interpretation are based on Devendrabuddhi (*Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā*, D 4217: 224a.4-7.). See Appendix II, for Shakya Chokden's more detailed treatment of this point, and a translation of the relevant section of Devendrabuddhi's commentary. This discussion concerns the 'Karmic Matter (*las gzugs*) Objection' discussed by Khédrup in chapter 4: 164.

⁵⁹⁸ Shakya Chokden 2013 vol. 4: 57: *rlan zhing gsher bar snang ba'i dngos po gcig nyid lha mi yi dwags gsum gyi mig shes la bdud rtsi chu dang rnag khrag tu snang ba'i tshe/ mig shes gsum ka tshad ma yin nam/ gang rung gcig las gzhan gnyis min/ dang po ltar na 'gal ba la mi 'khrul ba'i tshad ma yod par 'gyur la/ gnyis pa ltar na lha dang yi dwags lta bu la mig shes tshad ma med par 'gyur la/ 'dod na dam bca' nyams so/ /'di la rin po che blo bzang pa na re/ cha can rlan zhing gsher ba phor pa gang gi steng na cha shas rdzas tha dad pa gsum yod pa de mig shes de gsum la so sor snang ba yin la/ de'i tshe gsum ka tshad ma yin no gsung ngo / /'di ni ha cang thal ches pa yin te/ 'di ltar mig shes sel 'jug tu thal ba dang/ 'gro ba gsum gyi zas 'chol bar thal ba dang /chos kyi grags pa'i gzhung dang 'gal ba'o/ /dang po ni cha can dang cha shas gsum po rdzas gcig gam rdzas tha dad/ gnyis pa ltar na yan lag can rdzas gzhan yod par 'gyur ro/ /dang po ltar na/ de 'dra mthong ba'i mig shes gsum po de sel bas 'jug par 'gyur te/ rang rang gi snang yul rlan zhing gsher pa phor ba gang po de mthong/ de dang grub bde rdzas gcig pa'i yon tan gzhan ma mthong ba'i phyir ro/ /gnyis pa ni 'dod pa'i lhas rlan zhing gsher ba phor pa gang po de 'thungs pa'i tshe/ chu dang rnag khrag 'thungs pa dang de'i ro nyams*

This point concerns Dharmakīrti's refutation of external objects. It revolves around the assumption, by those who accept them, that such objects produce cognition through projecting a representation or image of themselves to their perceiving consciousness. Dharmakīrti responds that if this were viable, there would be the absurd consequence that a single entity could project desirable and undesirable images to cognitions, and thus would bear contradictory qualities such as pleasant and unpleasant, since a single entity is undoubtedly often cognised by different individuals as though it possessed such discordant qualities. Also, on such an interpretation, one would no longer perceive the external object through the object revealing itself, since one perceives it through karma – the very position Dharmakīrti seeks to prove.

Moreover, when the form of a single being is looked at with the visual consciousnesses of an enemy, a friend, and a neutral party, are their visual consciousnesses epistemic instruments or are they not? If they are, there would exist unmistakable epistemic warrant of an object possessing contradictory [qualities]. If they are not, then your thesis falls apart. If at such a time the three visual consciousnesses [of the enemy, a friend, and a neutral party] are epistemic warrants of only the form of this individual being [observed], then although there is no difference between their [visual consciousnesses], there appears the [aspect of] “pleasant”, “unpleasant”, and “neutral” [in relation to that individual's form for the three onlookers] as these are conceptions. If you hold there is no fault with that, then as it is said [by Dharmakīrti] in upholding the former position:⁵⁹⁹

If it is conception that cognises [the form of that individual] as desirable and not desirable, then it is not a [sense] awareness of an [external] object.⁶⁰⁰

su myong bar 'gyur te/ de'i tshe na des de 'thungs pa gang zhig/ cha can de la cha sha rdzas tha dad pa gsum yod pa'i phyir ro/ gsum pa ni gal te nyes pa med de las kyi dbang gis cha shas gzhan dang /gzhan ma mthong ba'i phyir zhe na/ de lta rigs pa mkhyen pas bkag zin pa de nyid 'ongs pa yin te/ ji skad du/ ma mthong sgrib phyir min zhe na/ zhes sogs phyogs snga ma khas blangs pa'i phyir ro/

⁵⁹⁹ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4: 57-58: *gzhan yang skyes bu gcig gi gzugs la dgra gnyen bar ma gsum gyis lta ba'i mig shes tshad ma yod dam med/ yod na 'gal ba la mi 'khrul ba'i tshad ma yod par 'gyur la/med na ni khyod kyi dam bca' nyams so/ gal te de'i tshe/ mig shes gsum ka skyes bu gcig gi gzugs tsam la tshad ma yin tshul la khyad par med kyang yid du 'ong ba dang mi 'ong bar snang ba ni rtog pa yin pa'i phyir/ nyes pa med do zhe na/ de lta na ni ji skad du/ gal te 'dod dang mi 'dod par/ /snang ba rtog yin don blo min/ zhes gsungs pa'i phyogs snga ma khas blangs pa yin no/*

⁶⁰⁰ Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, III, 345: *iṣṭāniṣṭāvabhāsinyah kalpanā nākṣadhīryadi / aniṣṭādāvasandhānam drṣṭam tatrāpi cetasām //* (Shastri, eds. 1968: 203). Tibetan in D 4210: 131b.3: *gal te*

One cannot even say the discordant cognitions of a single object are a matter of different modes of conception, as Dharmakīrti has shown that such a theory merely bolsters his rejection of the idea that external objects are cognised.

Further, if you say that these consequences do not [apply to your position], then it should be said, “This is not the case, since there is no difference between a wrong consciousness (*log shes*), that is, all consciousnesses that perceive (*snang ba*) non-existents like the form of an individual [as it appears for an enemy, a friend, or neutral party], or the water and the nectar [that appear for the human and god], and your own position.” This is certain!⁶⁰¹

Shakya Chokden finishes with a jibe at his opponent’s position: their view is mistaken in that it grasps at a nonexistent, just like the beings in the Example grasp at their non-existent objects.

iii. The Example in *Tshangs pa’i dbyangs kyi rnga sgra*

Another relevant passage appears in Shakya Chokden’s *Tshangs pa’i dbyangs kyi rnga sgra*.⁶⁰² The context here concerns the way a Buddha’s wisdom realises the ultimate mode (*ji lta ba*) of reality and the multivarious (*ji snyed pa*) conventions – a typical subject of dispute in Tibetan discourse on Madhyamaka. After rejecting the common notion that any wisdom of a Buddha is only ever the wisdom of the Dharmakāya, and that the Rūpakāya is only a representation in the minds of beings,⁶⁰³ he then proceeds to refute Tsongkhapa’s

'dod dang mi 'dod par/ snang ba rtog yin don blo min. Again, brackets are based on Devendrabuddhi’s commentary (*Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā*, D 4217: 224a.7-224b.1).

⁶⁰¹ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4: 58: *'o na khyod rang la yang de dang der thal ba min nam zhe na ma yin te/ kho bo cag gi phyogs la ni skyes bu'i gzugs dang chu dang bdud rtsi la sogs pa med bzhin du snang ba'i shes pa thams cad log shes yin pa la khyad par med pa'i phyir ro zhes bya ba 'di nges pa yin no/*. A very similar refutation of the later generations of Tibetans’ (i.e., Tsongkhapa and his followers) mereological explanation, is found in his *Tshad ma rigs gter gyi dgongs rgyan*, (Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 10: 39-40).

⁶⁰² This text was written in 1474, a few years before Shakya Chokden would start to consider the Ālikākāravāda and Madhyamaka’s views as ultimately the same. So, at this point in his career he would still regard the Ālikākāravāda system as essentially Cittamātra and thus below Madhyamaka (Komarovski 2011: 104).

⁶⁰³ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4: 273-274.

explanation of the Buddha's cognition of multivariuous conventions. He closely paraphrases Tsongkhapa's explanation in his *dGongs pa rab gsal*, as follows:⁶⁰⁴

All conventional truths [may be defined as] objects found by a [Buddha's] wisdom that realises the ultimate mode of reality; and, this wisdom cognising the multivariuous [conventional] phenomena becomes [itself, that is a Buddha's] wisdom cognising the multivariuous [conventional] phenomena, in dependence upon those [very conventional objects].⁶⁰⁵

Shakya Chokden considers this to be contradictory with scripture, reasoning, and even Tsongkhapa's own system. It is with regards to the latter that Shakya Chokden posits the Example:

It absurdly follows [from your view] that the [Buddha's] wisdom cognising the multivariuous conventions is an epistemic warrant for all three, the water, nectar, and pus and blood, within the single entity that is the fluid, the part-possessor. Because you assert that within that part-possessor there exist all three of these parts that are conventional truths. If you accept this, it absurdly follows that it [the Buddha's wisdom cognising the multivariuous convention phenomena] is also an epistemic warrant for the falling hair that appears to one with an eye disorder. This is because the venerable Candrakīrti explained these two [examples] to be the same.⁶⁰⁶

Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the Example is fallacious because, Shakya Chokden argues, if the omniscient wisdom of a Buddha should see the three parts of the river, it would also see the non-existent falling hair that is perceived by someone with an eye disorder – because these two contexts are exactly the same for Candrakīrti. Again, this shows us that according

⁶⁰⁴ See Tsongkhapa 2008: 603, English in Jinpa 2021: 539-540.

⁶⁰⁵ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4, 274: *kun rdzobs kyi bden pa mtha' dag ji lta mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyis rnyed don dang/ ji snyed pa mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyang kho la ltos te ji snyed pa mkhyen pa'i ye shes su song ba yin no zhes zer ro*. For more details on such complex definitions of the two truths from the perspective of enlightened beings by Tsongkhapa, see Jinpa 2021: 540, n. 876.

⁶⁰⁶ Shakya Chokden 2013, vol. 4, 275: *ji snyed pa mkhyen pa'i ye shes de/ cha can rlan zhing gsher ba'i dngos po gcig gi steng gi chu bdud rtsi rnag khrag gsum ka la tshad mar thal/ cha can de'i steng na/ cha de gsum ka kun rdzob kyi bden par khyed kyi khas blangs pa'i phyir/ 'dod na/ rab rib can la snang ba'i skra shad la yang tshad mar thal bar 'gyur te/ zla ba'i zhabs kyis de gnyis mtshungs par bshad pa'i phyir ro*.

to Shākya Chokden all the beings' cognitions in the Example are deeply mistaken cognitions, as their objects do not exist.

This is in fact spelled out more clearly in his *Tshad ma rigs gter gyi dgongs rgyan*, where in the context of refuting the existence of matter in the Cittamātra system, he argues that one cannot distinguish any of the cognitions of the beings in the Example as epistemic instruments. He then even posits *Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.71 to illustrate once more that the Example and the Falling Hair Example both illustrate cognitions that perceive non-existent referents and argues that these are perfectly viable examples also for the Cittamātras.⁶⁰⁷ This is surprising as Candrakīrti himself uses both examples in a discussion that explicitly refutes the Yogācāra position.

5.3.9. Observations

Shākya Chokden's interpretation of the Example can be summarized by the following key points. He rejects the Gandenpa mereological interpretation, the co-existence of the nectar, water, or pus as parts of the perceived phenomenon, as well as any epistemic instruments that could verify these objects. He considers the whole scenario as a case of erroneous cognition and therefore does not need to explain how the beings' cognitions can all be equally accurate. Indeed, throughout the many passages in which he comments on the Example, be it from the Yogācāra or Madhyamaka perspective, the solution is always the same: External objects do not exist – as the only thing that can exist is the ultimate, which they certainly are not – and therefore none of these beings' cognitions can establish their object. The Example illustrates the same point as the example of the skeletons in the *aśubha*

⁶⁰⁷ Shākya Chokden, vol. 10: 40-41. In this context he also refutes external objects with sets of reasonings that accord with the Satyākāravāda and Ālikākāravāda.

meditation and Falling Hair Example: Since external objects do not exist in reality, according to Madhyamaka, neither do the cognitions perceiving them.

The question of how epistemic warrant may be possible in the context of intersubjectivity appears to be a non-issue for him. Epistemic warrant in reality, that is for Mādhyamikas, only exists regarding the ultimate. In contexts that question intersubjective agreement, such as the Example, Shakya Chokden essentially follows Gorampa (albeit less articulately): What is true and warranted in humans' conventions is true for them if the perceiver is not cognitively distorted according to what humans consider to be distortion. The cognitions of beings that contradict that are mistaken. Since the human's or the other beings' cognitions are not (really) warranting anything anyway, the ghoul of relativism is not a concern, similar to various readers' opinions on a fictitious character from a novel, which may legitimately vary. Can anyone really prove Mr Darcy is a good human?

5.4. Conclusions to the Classical Period of Discourse on the Example

All the discussions in this section revolve around how much epistemic relativism Madhyamaka can endorse in intersubjective situations. If relativism were a gangplank with the safe ship of a realist epistemology on the one hand, and the total abyss of rampant relativism on the other, Tsongkhapa and Khédрупjé would definitely be the closest to the ship. In answer to the question how much relativism Madhyamaka can endorse, they would answer: not very much. For if we simply say each being in the Example is accurate in their own perspective, it is quite hard to see how rampant relativism, where all perceptions are equally accurate, is avoided. They thus provide what the Yakherds have termed a “universal standard of warrant”, one that obtains in all contexts that involve reliable and instrumental cognitions, and one that is thus not “relative” to a specific species' realm, karma, or

perceptual apparatus. This is not unlike the universal impermanence of time across all realms.

Gorampa on the other hand allows a little more relativism, one that we have termed “species-specific relativism”. On his account, like Tsongkhapa, each of the beings warrant their own specific objects, and are only accurate regarding their respective object. They are accurate in relation to their own realm and the standard conditions that obtain within it, and yet, they are not held to be accurate on the basis of a pan-realm standard of legitimacy. As a rough example, perhaps, it is similar to the relativity involved in the dilation of time within Einstein’s theory of special relativity: just as the passage of time may “dilate” moving faster or slower depending on the velocity of the observer (faster for one stationary and slower for the one moving at a high speed, neither’s perspective being more accurate or representative of time). Likewise, in the Example, each of the beings’ perceptions accurately represent their object in relation to their point of reference within the six realms. Considering all instances in which Réndawa comments on the Example, his interpretation would seem to fit most closely with Gorampa’s.

Further along the gangplank leaning towards rampant relativism is Shakya Chokden. In his view, like in Gorampa’s, each object may be genuine and true for each of the beings, but unlike Gorampa he will not accept these objects are established to exist for Madhyamaka. Only existent things can be established by *pramāṇa* and since these cannot be said to exist, on any reliable account, none of the beings’ perceptions are accurate. He thus goes a little further than Gorampa and ultimately rejects the conventional existence of external objects. If we slightly modify it, Einstein’s theory of special relativity in relation to time is also an apt illustration of Shakya Chokden’s view of the Example: just as there is no absolute point of reference determining the speed of the passage of time, likewise there is no “gold standard” of warrant to judge the accuracy of each of the beings’ cognitions.

Finally, it is argued that Taktsang has ventured out the furthest along the gangplank leading to rampant relativism. Although his reading of the Example shares several features with his fellow Sakyapa's, viewed comprehensively he is the strongest advocate for a total rejection of epistemic instruments in Madhyamaka. They simply cannot exist in any sense, regarding the conventional or the ultimate, as all objects are deceiving and all cognitions deceived. In his first context of no "ultimate" analysis, that follows and describes the epistemic practices and conventions of the world, Taktsang does allow for an "anthropological" form of epistemic warrant, one described by the etic observer of the world's epistemic practices, and that is used for conventional things spiritual or otherwise. In his second context, that of slight analysis, one uses logic to refute *svabhāva* and establish the figurative ultimate, the Mādhyamika anthropologist sees through the world's deceiving epistemic practices. They know all conventional objects and subjects as equally deceiving. Such knowledge would be an ultimate epistemic warrant and is temporarily necessary to proceed to the next context. Taktsang's radical view, fully revealed in his third context of thorough analysis, which totally transcends all assertions and conceptual dichotomies, rejects any definitive articulation of epistemology. He thus differs from Shakya Chokden in more explicitly rejecting epistemology in the Prāsaṅgika's own system. Perhaps his view is like that of someone who simply refuses to believe in time, for such an abstract idea cannot be pointed to and found anywhere.

Taktsang and Shakya Chokden both consider the Example to be the same as the Falling Hair Example, and as such all of the being's cognitions are deceived and their objects non-existent. While not drawing a clear distinction between these two examples, Gorampa does hold that in the Prāsaṅgika system the water, and the like, exist and are conventionally warranted from the point of view of their respective observers. It is only Tsongkhapa and Khédrupjé who make a clear distinction between these two examples, as without it they find

no means of distinguishing between wrong consciousnesses such as a visual consciousness seeing a mirage, and a relatively accurate epistemic instrument, such as a visual consciousness seeing a lake. Of the four stages in the analogy of the gangplank, Tsongkhapa and Khédрупjé would be the most timid and Taktsang the most courageous. Tsongkhapa's strong emphasis on the relative and yet normative force of *pramāṇa* in Madhyamaka has thus led his Sakyapa critics to charge him with the fault of sneaking in foundationalism into Madhyamaka.

Although related discussions and translations of relevant texts can be found in the Yakherds 2021 volumes, a comprehensive exploration of the significant refutations of the Tsongkhapa-Khédрупjé interpretation of the Example by Kagyu authors deserves further attention. The distinctive analyses offered by figures such as Mikyö Dorjé (1507–1554) and Wangchuck Dorje (1556–1603), along with several centuries of Gelugpa responses to these critiques, will remain a *desideratum* for future scholarship. For now, our discussion concludes with Ju Mipham's exegesis of the Example, which offers a syncretic perspective that cleverly synthesises the disparate strands of this prolonged and complex debate.

Chapter 6: Post-Classical Syncretism

6.1. Ju Mipham: Life and Works

Ju Mipham (1846-1912) was born in the kingdom of Dege (*sDe dge*) in Kham, Eastern Tibet.⁶⁰⁸ His father was a well-to-do Tibetan doctor, and his mother the daughter of a minister in the Dege court. Like many Tibetan luminaries, he was a child prodigy, exhibiting a natural fluency in Buddhist doctrines and learning. One of his most famous works on the Great Perfection, the *Nges shes rin po che'i sgron me*, is traditionally said to have even been written when he was only seven years old.⁶⁰⁹ During his teens, he completed one year and a half of solitary meditation on the deity Mañjuśrī, a relationship he continued to cultivate throughout the rest of his life during the many years he spent in meditation retreats. Towards the end of his teens, Mipham was forced to leave Dege due to its invasion by Nyakye Amgon Gonpo Namgyel (1799-1865), the rebel leader from Nyakrong (*Nyag rong*) who sought to unify Kham. During this period, Mipham went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa and stayed for a month at Ganden (*dGa' ldan*) Monastery. This proved to be a formative time, as the visit allowed Mipham to learn the Tibetan system of debate, which at the time was not present within his Nyingma tradition. It also enabled him to become versed in the Gelug system's unique approach to Buddhist doctrine, which would heavily influence his own reading of Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and the Example, as we will see below.

Mipham was never officially recognized as a Tulku (*sprul sku*), a reincarnated Buddhist master, and unlike many Nyingmapa teachers he did not reveal any Termas (*gter ma*), sacred

⁶⁰⁸ At present there appear to be only two substantial biographies of Mipham, one by Künzang Penden (1862–1943), translated by Pettit (1999), and one by Jikmé Püntsock (1933–2004). Other biographies in circulation such as that by Düjom Rinpoché (1904-1987) translated by Kapstein (1991: 869-880) seem to be mainly based on these. For a survey of the contemporary work on Mipham's life, see Pettit 1999: 22. Pettit considers the most valuable sources of information for Mipham's life are the oral accounts of it by contemporary Nyingmapa masters, but these have never been systematically collected (Pettit 1999: 20).

⁶⁰⁹ Duckworth 2011: 4.

texts or objects said to have been previously hidden for the future benefit of disciples by Padmasambhava or other early masters. He did not hold positions of power in monasteries or public office. Instead, he spent most of his life traveling between various hermitages, engaging in intense solitary meditation. This is perhaps somewhat surprising given the significant impact and influence Mipham had on his Nyingma tradition. He initiated a scholastic revival of sorts within this tradition,⁶¹⁰ and his influence is still very much alive in the Nyingma monastic colleges (*bshad grwa*) in Tibet, Nepal, India, and in Nyingma institutes outside of Asia, where his works form a core part of their curricula.⁶¹¹ It was Mipham who introduced the Tibetan formal system of debate into the Nyingma tradition.⁶¹² So, what is it about Mipham that caused him to become such a revered and influential master from his day until the present? While the answer cannot be fully addressed here, it goes beyond his undoubtedly charismatic persona and life example, which, by all accounts, embodied all the Buddhist virtues of a realised teacher. What is without doubt is that the quality and enormous quantity of his oeuvre was also a significant factor. Mipham's collected works in their most recent edition (produced at Kaḥthok) spans thirty volumes – the second largest oeuvre of any Tibetan master according to Duckworth – all written during the breaks between his formal meditation sessions.⁶¹³ His works span all of the traditional subjects of Tibetan exegesis such as Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and Vajrayāna;

⁶¹⁰ Pettit 1999: 36. For more on Mipham's influence on Nyingma scholasticism, see below and Pettit 1999, and Duckworth 2011.

⁶¹¹ This statement is based on personal communications with monks engaged in these study programmes during field work in India, Nepal, and Tibet. Nico Hobhouse (HKU) completed his doctoral dissertation (2024) on monastic curricula in Nyingma monasteries in South Asia and discusses Mipham's influence in more detail.

⁶¹² Duckworth. "Mipam Gyatso," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed February 24, 2025, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Mipam-Gyatso/4228>.

⁶¹³ Bodong Penchen Choklé Namgyel (1375/6-1451) has the most, with more than one-hundred volumes (Duckworth, 2011: 55).

but also poetry, medicine, and astrology. He even wrote the first Tibetan commentary on the *Kāmasūtra*.⁶¹⁴

Duckworth suggests another factor for his popularity may be Mipham's distinctively Nyingmapa interpretation of typical subjects of Tibetan scholastic learning, which was the first of its kind.⁶¹⁵ As is common in Tibetan polemics, one distinguishes one's own system from others by way of refuting them. Mipham's criticisms, although they seem to have been written in a spirit of collegial critique, met with vehement reactions by several prominent Gelug teachers of his day.⁶¹⁶ As Mipham's biographer and student Künzang Penden relays:

At that time the Lord Protector, the Vajra-holder mKhyen brtse Rinpoche, commissioned me [Mipham] to write some textbooks for our tradition. In order to fulfil the command of the lama and cultivate my own intellect, and with the Buddha's teaching uppermost in mind, I wrote some textbooks on the cycles of sūtra teachings, etc. In those texts my explanations rather emphasized our own tradition. The scholars of other schools heard that there was a refutation [of their own system], so of course letters of refutation arrived here from all directions.⁶¹⁷

Prior to Mipham, within those Nyingma monasteries that offered formal programmes of study, Gelugpa or Sakyapa commentaries would be used for sūtra subjects. Mipham thus provided not only a well-founded tenable alternative to the dominant Sakya and Gelug interpretations,⁶¹⁸ but also one that engendered a uniquely Nyingma identity with a novel approach to Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and Vajrayāna.

6.2. Mipham's Thought

Illustrating the synergy between Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and the Vajrayāna's Great Perfection is a characteristic feature of Mipham's writing. Duckworth characterises Mipham

⁶¹⁴ Duckworth 2011: 4.

⁶¹⁵ Duckworth 2011: 11.

⁶¹⁶ See Phuntsho (2005) for a detailed discussion of the philosophical controversies, and Viehbeck (2014) for a case study of the correspondences between Mipham and the Gelug teacher Pari Rapsel (1840 – 1910?).

⁶¹⁷ Pettit 1999: 26.

⁶¹⁸ Duckworth 2011: 5.

as a “dialectical monist”,⁶¹⁹ whereas Wangchuk prefers the Sanskrit neologism “Yuganaddhavāda,” (*zung ’jug tu smra ba*) to avoid the complexities inherent in cross cultural superficial comparisons.⁶²⁰ Both perspectives highlight Mipham’s consistent emphasis on the “union” of various ideas: between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, Rangtong and Shentong, presence and absence, ultimate and conventional, the primordial purity (*ka dag*) and spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*) of the Great Perfection, and appearance and emptiness. This unifying approach serves as Mipham’s overarching guiding heuristic.

Although he did consistently emphasise the ultimate need to transcend reasoned argument, temporarily, Mipham exhorted his readers to not negate the value of conceptual analysis. This is a consistent theme throughout his *Nges shes sgron me*, a work unifying Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and the Great Perfection. After a discussion of the relative value of gradually employing rational analysis, and in contrast to a “sudden”⁶²¹ realisation of ultimate reality, he warns: ‘Woe to those idiots who say it can be realized in a moment—they are plagued with doubts!’⁶²² This is quite the statement coming from a Nyingmapa, whose tradition unilaterally accepts and emphasises the non-gradual and “sudden” approach to realisation of the ultimate. One should however not misunderstand Mipham here, he does not negate the possibility of sudden realisation for advanced individuals, but merely the abandonment of reason and conceptual meditation right from the outset for novices. For them it is necessary to understand Candrakīrti’s system in order to understand the Great Perfection.⁶²³

i. Mipham’s Madhyamaka

⁶¹⁹ Duckworth 2008.

⁶²⁰ Wangchuk 2012.

⁶²¹ See chapter 3: 103, fn. 262.

⁶²² Translation by Pettit 1999: 207.

⁶²³ See Pettit 1999: 209.

Mipham’s characteristic style of composition is that of a syncretist. As an active member of the influential Rimé (*Ris med*) or non-sectarian movement,⁶²⁴ Mipham exhibited great regard and fondness for all the Tibetan traditions, recognising their commonalities but never brushing over their difference. While forging his own unique brand of Nyingmapa Madhyamaka he was able to synthesise Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in ways that were similar to and perhaps inspired by Shakya Chokden. Just as Shakya Chokden saw these two systems not as antithetical but as both accurately representing ultimate reality, albeit with different descriptions, reasonings and examples used to realise it,⁶²⁵ Mipham also saw these two systems as complementary paths. In his commentary to Śāntarakṣita’s *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, Mipham goes to great pains to prove this.⁶²⁶ Recognising three approaches to the conventional within Madhyamaka, following Śāntarakṣita, Mipham emphasises the compatibility between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems.

In the Madhyamaka system there is a gradation (*snang tshod*) of [discourse on] conventional things, assertions on them from the perspective of how things simply appear and are known in the world without applying [philosophical] analysis to them; and assertions on them that follow the tenets of those who assert [external] objects such as the Sautrāntikas. Here in this text, however, discourse on the conventional is done in accordance with the Cittamātra system. As such, [Śāntarakṣita] inaugurates the system of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ This movement flourished the 19th century, primarily in Kham in Eastern Tibet, and is generally seen as a reaction to Gelug hegemony in central Tibet. Its members are seen to have cultivated solidarity among the non-Gelug traditions to counterbalance this hegemony. While there were undoubtedly political motivations, its leaders such as “the three Jamgöns of Kham”, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820 - 1892), Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé (1813–1899), and Jamgön Mipham himself, on all accounts seem to have also wished to preserve the integrity and celebrate the diversity of the various Buddhist traditions in Tibet, including the Gelug. For more see Smith (2001).

⁶²⁵ See Chapter 5.

⁶²⁶ Translation in Padmakara 2010.

⁶²⁷ Mipham 1984-1993b, 25-26: *dbu ma de la 'ang snang tshod kun rdzob kyi dngos po 'di ma brtags ma dpyad pa'i blo ngor snang tsam 'jig rten la grags pa ltar khas len pa dang/ dpyad pa'i grub mtha' mdo sde pa sogs don smra'i lugs ltar khas len pa yod kyang/ gzhung 'dir ni tha snyad kyi 'dod tshul sems tsam pa dang mthun par bzhed pas dbu ma rnal 'byor spyod pa'i shing rta'i srol dang por phye bar mdzad pa yin no/*. (Also translated in Padmakara 2010: 101). This distinction between three types of discourse on the conventional in Madhyamaka mirrors a similar reading of Candrakīrti by Salvini that recognises two levels of convention within Candrakīrti’s thought – equivalent to the first two mentioned here in this passage by Mipham. The first

In this commentary, at least, Mipham holds that the Yogācāra description of conventional truth is the most accurate depiction: external objects do not exist even conventionally, although their mere appearance certainly does, and is nothing more than a display of the mind.⁶²⁸ Moreover, Mipham, like Gorampa,⁶²⁹ despite commenting on Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka accepts characteristically Yogācāra doctrines such as *svasaṃvedana* (the natural capacity of the mind to be aware of itself) and *ālayavijñāna* (the mental basis that stores the seeds of previously created karma) as conventionally existing constructs, despite refuting their existence with *svabhāva*.⁶³⁰ The main issue Mipham sees with the Yogācāra system is its insistence that cognition, including these two facets of it, exists ultimately.

Mipham often chooses to distinguish his own system of Madhyamaka through a critique of Tsongkhapa and his Gelug followers. To delineate some of the salient features of Mipham's Madhyamaka and to frame our discussion of his interpretation of the Example, we shall do the same and illustrate how he often coheres and yet significantly departs from Tsongkhapa's ideas.

One of the fundamental similarities between Mipham and Tsongkhapa's exegesis is the explicit integration of a Dharmakīrtian form of *pramāṇa* into Madhyamaka.⁶³¹ Mipham would accept conventional things are warranted via conventional *pramāṇa*, ultimates via

are those common conventions that are the domain of unspecialised knowledge, for example, that an eye sees matter, no specialised analysis is applied to such conventions; the second requires a more refined and specialised form of knowledge and analysis to access, for example, that the eye sees in dependence on a material object, a sense faculty, and a previous moment of visual consciousness (and other similar Abhidharma categories). This second level of analysis has still not reached the ultimate level of investigation that rejects entities possess *svabhāva*. For more see Salvini 2023, and Fisher 2025c.

⁶²⁸ Although he adopts this position here in this text, in others like his *Nges shes rin po che sgron'i me*, as we will see below, he adopts a Prāsaṅgikas view that conventionally accepts external objects.

⁶²⁹ Gorampa 2005: 267-270. As Pettit (1999: 136) notes, Mipham appears to have been heavily influenced by the writings of Gorampa.

⁶³⁰ Padmakara 2002: 248.

⁶³¹ Wangchuk 2009: 221.

ultimate *pramāṇa*.⁶³² This shall be covered in more detail below. Additionally, Mipham's characterisation of the ultimate shares several commonalities with that of Tsongkhapa. For one, they both agree that phenomena are empty of ultimate existence, intrinsic existence (*svabhāvasiddhi, rang bzhin gyi grub pa*) and how these are defined, and unsurprisingly, accept the nominal and conventional existence of things.⁶³³ They also agree that the emptiness initially realised conceptually is a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) of *svabhāva*,⁶³⁴ that is, a negation of an object in which no positive thing is implied in its place. What is more, although disagreeing about the effability of the ultimate, both accept that in the context of delineating it and on the conventional heuristic level, one may verbally characterise and discuss it.⁶³⁵

That said, Mipham was also a staunch critic of some of Tsongkhapa's ideas, in particular his delineation of what is negated by ultimate analysis (*don dam pa'i dpyod pa*). Mipham holds that all conventionally existent phenomena are empty of themselves, and not just empty of *svabhāva* or true existence (as Tsongkhapa would have it). All existents are negated by ultimate analysis and thus do not exist ultimately.⁶³⁶ For Mipham as with most of the Sakyapas that we have looked including Réndawa, Gorampa, and Shakya Chokden,⁶³⁷ there is no need to qualify the negation of the first "existence" *koṭi*, within Nāgārjuna's *catuṣkoṭi*, with the qualifications "intrinsic" or "ultimate" existence.

As such, they clearly have different objects that are negated by Madhyamaka reasoning, and thus the emptiness of such hypothetical modes of reality should also be different. As a result, Mipham also disagrees with Tsongkhapa on how to divide the ultimate. For him we can

⁶³² Padmakara 2010: 101-102.

⁶³³ Padmakara 2010: 118; Cutler et al 2000: vol. III, 177-183.

⁶³⁴ Padmakara 2010: 156; Tsongkhapa 2008: 178.

⁶³⁵ Mipham 1993b: 422-423; Tsongkhapa 1985: 649, and 2008: 38.

⁶³⁶ See Mipham 2004b: 217.

⁶³⁷ See chapter 4: 124-125, chapter 5: 190-192, and 208-209, respectively.

distinguish two types: the figurative ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) and the actual ultimate (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*). Mipham characterises the two thus:

There are two types of ultimate truth: the figurative and the actual ultimate truth. The first is in every way an object of a [dualistic] intellect. Since it is merely [a conceptually] isolated idea (*ldog pa*) of the emptiness of true [existence], it is simply the object of a particular conceptual mind. Although it is not qualified to be the genuine ultimate, since it serves as a doorway leading to the [actual] ultimate, in the treatises it is designated with the terms concordant (*mthun pa*) and figurative ultimate.⁶³⁸

For Mipham, like Rëndawa and Gorampa, the actual ultimate is not merely the emptiness of the first extreme of existence, among the two extremes of existence and nonexistence, or of production among the four extremes of the *catuskoṭi*, that is production from self, other, both or from neither. Rather it is that beyond all extremes, even that of conceptual affirmations and negations.⁶³⁹ The actual ultimate, however, may be realised before the Path of Seeing (*darśanamārga*, *mthong lam*), as Mipham does hold that an ultimate beyond all affirmations and denials, the four extremes, and of apprehension (*ālambana*, *dmigs pa*), must be realised prior to being an ārya, a being who has directly realised emptiness. Without it, one would not have a concordant cause for an ārya's direct cognition of emptiness.⁶⁴⁰ Whereas, for Tsongkhapa, emptiness realised conceptually or directly, by non-āryas or by āryas is always

⁶³⁸ Mipham 1993c, 542–543: *de la don dam pa ni gnyis te/ rnam grangs pa dang rnam grangs min pa'i don dam mo// dang po ni rnam pa kun tu blo'i yul te/ de ni bden stong gi ldog pa tsam yin pas blo'i bye brag yid rtog bcas kyi yul tsam mo// de don dam mtshan nyid pa min kyang don dam rtogs pa'i sgor gyur pa'i phyir mthun pa'i don dam mam rnam grangs pa'i don dam zhes gzhung rnams su brda gdags par mdzad do//*

⁶³⁹ Padmakara 2010: 128.

⁶⁴⁰ However, there are alternative views on whether Mipham asserts that the actual ultimate is accessible to conceptuality. Forgues argues that Mipham does not accept this on the basis of texts such as the *mKhas pa'i tshul la 'jug pa'i sgo* (see Forgues 2020: 242), as does Viehbeck based on Mipham's *Rab lan* (see Viehbeck 2014: 160); while Dreyfus (2003: 335) holds that he does based on Mipham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* (Mipham 1993a: 7–8). I follow Dreyfus here based on his reading of the *Nor bu ke ta ka* where Mipham asserts that during the Path of Accumulation and Preparation there does exist experiential understanding (*go myong*) of the ultimate via a gradual negation of all four extremes and without apprehension (*dmigs pa*). For if there were not, there would be no concordant cause for an ārya's wisdom. That which is free from the elaborations that are apprehensions of all four extremes is a qualification Mipham often uses to define the actual ultimate in his writings on Madhyamaka. See for instance Mipham 1993b: 304.

the emptiness of *svabhāva*.⁶⁴¹ Mipham would consider such an emptiness to merely be the elimination of the first *koṭi*, the extreme of existence, and the figurative ultimate.

ii. Mipham's Pramāṇa

These two forms of the ultimate each have their own type of cognition that realises them, the figurative ultimate is realised by an ultimate conceptual *pramāṇa*, the actual ultimate by the non-conceptual wisdom of meditative absorption of āryas.⁶⁴² Ultimately however, since there is really only one truth, the awareness (*rig pa*) taught in the Great Perfection, there is also only one *pramāṇa*, self-arising wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*). This shall be covered below.

Mipham's emphasis on justified knowledge based on a Dharmakīrtian style of *pramāṇa* can also be seen in his commitment to the reliability of conventional epistemic instruments regarding conventions (*sāṃvyaavahārika pramāṇa, kun tu tha snyad pa'i tshad ma*).⁶⁴³ In typical syncretic fashion, he admits two types of conventional epistemic instruments through which he seeks to justify the transcendental vision of Vajrayāna Buddhism. The two types of conventional *pramāṇa* are tenable on the conventional level of non-(ultimate)-analysis: those which warrant mundane objects by the epistemic instruments of confined perception (*tshur mthong tshad ma*), and the epistemic instruments of pure visions (*dag gzigs tshad ma*) that warrant the visions of yogins and āryas.⁶⁴⁴ The former can establish that a table is a table, while the latter establishes Mahāyāna premises such as the existence of an infinite number of Buddha fields within every atom, and Vajrayāna concepts like the identification

⁶⁴¹ Tsongkhapa 1985: 649. Although following Bhāvaviveka and Kamalaśīla, Tsongkhapa does accept a concordant ultimate in the sense of the conceptual realisations themselves of emptiness by ordinary beings and by āryas during post-meditative equipoise. See Tsongkhapa 1985: 669–670.

⁶⁴² Padmakara 2010: 113–114.

⁶⁴³ This form of *pramāṇa* can be traced back to Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (Steinkellner, ed., 2007: 44.2–5), as noted by Wangchuk 2009: 220, fn. 20.

⁶⁴⁴ Translation in Dharmachakra 2009: 48–49. For more details see Phuntsho 2005: 115, and Duckworth 2011: 173.

of oneself as a tantric deity. This elegant solution reconciles and unifies Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, and Vajrayāna.

As we have seen, Mipham was by no means the first Nyingmapa to use Dharmakīrtian logic to justify the “view” of Vajrayāna Buddhism. He himself attributes his own tantric epistemology to his spiritual forefather, Rongzompa.⁶⁴⁵ While Mipham undoubtedly drew inspiration from what, following Wangchuk, we are calling Rongzompa’s “a relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception”, he also significantly built upon it. For Rongzompa did not explicitly formulate these two types of conventional warrant. However, just as Rongzompa employed such logical arguments within his broader project of proving the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*’s fundamental premise of the purity (*dag pa*) and equality (*mnyam pa*) of all phenomena, so did Mipham.⁶⁴⁶

6.3. Mipham’s use of the Example to Justify Vajrayāna

i. The *’Od gsal snying po*

In his own general commentary to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, called *’Od gsal snying po*, Mipham provides a Rongzompa-inspired answer to the question of the cognitive reliability and accuracy of the visions and perceptions produced by the Vajrayāna path. Like Rongzompa, Mipham was not content to consider the ordinary uneducated and unenlightened vision of water by a human as more epistemically valid than an advanced yogins perception of it as an enlightened pure appearance of a goddess. The following rationale works, Mipham holds, for one who asserts the existence of an external world:

A single [body] of water may be perceived (*snang ba*) as pus and blood by a hungry ghost, as water by a human, as a stream of nectar by those abiding in pure realms, and for knowledge holders, āryas that possess pure perception, as the body of the

⁶⁴⁵ Translated in Pettit 1999: 222.

⁶⁴⁶ See chapter 3: 96-97, and 102-106.

goddess Māmākī.⁶⁴⁷ For the latter, through touching the moisture they produce a nonconceptual meditative state full of bliss. For the Buddhas, who have completely exhausted all the latencies [of karma and obscurations], in the perspective of their perception of the ultimate (*ji lta ba*) none of those things appear, they have pacified without exception all conceptual proliferations (*spros pa*). In the perspective of their perception of the multivarious conventions (*ji snyed pa*), they perceive them as immeasurable spheres of utterly pure self-displays of wisdom.

Accordingly, one may doubt which one of those perceptions [in the Example] is an epistemic instrument, and which one of those objects is established as conventional reality? The purer the subjective cognition (*yul can*) is, the more valid it is. For all these [perceptions] establish the reality of what is seen. It is just like how a mind may grasp a [white] conch as yellow or as white. Due to this, all these appearances are in reality proven to be maṇḍalas of wisdom and enlightened bodies (*sku*) – because they are perceived as pure by those āryas who are free from the stains of mistaken [cognitions]. This is just like the perception of a white conch by one whose eyes are unafflicted.⁶⁴⁸

That is, appearances are fundamentally pure, for this is how they are perceived by those who are free from cognitive distortion. Mipham then begins a discussion that proves the above with *āgama* and *yukti*. Mipham’s argument based on *yukti* begins as follows:

It is well known and established in the world that a single object can be seen to appear in various ways. If one becomes familiar with the nondual innate sphere of purity of all phenomena one will perceive (*snang ba*) only appearances (*snang ba*)⁶⁴⁹ that are

⁶⁴⁷ As we saw in chapter 4: 158, fn. 418, Māmākī is generally understood to be the purified entity or purifying agent of the water element in Vajrayāna Buddhism, such as in the *Guhyasamājatantra* literary tradition.

⁶⁴⁸ Mipham 1984-1993c, 77-78: 'dir chu gcig la'ang yi dwags kyis rnag khrag /mis chu/ zhing dag pa gnas pas bdud rtsi'i rgyun/ gzigs pa dag pa'i 'phags pa rig pa 'dzin pa rnams la mA ma kl'i skur snang ste/ de la reg pas brlan pa'i bya ba byed la/ rol pa'i bde ba dang rnam par mi rtog pa'i ting 'dzin yang skyed par byed do/ /bag la nyal yongs su zad pa'i sangs rgyas rnams kyi ji lta ba'i gzigs ngor snang ba thams cad dang bral te spros pa ma lus pa zhi ba dang/ ji snyed pa'i gzigs ngor shin tu dag pa rang snang ye shes kyi spyod yul tshad med par snang ba'i bdag nyid du gzigs so/ /de ltar mthong ba de dag las gang zhig tshad ma dang/ yul gang zhig tha snyad kyi gnas tshul du grub snyam na yul can ji lta ji ltar dag pa de ltar tshad ma dang/ des mthong ba gnas tshul yin par grub ste/ dung ser 'dzin dang dkar 'dzin gyi blo dang yul bzhin no/ de'i phyir/ 'di ltar snang ba thams cad chos can/ gnas tshul la sku dang ye shes kyi dkyil 'khor du grub ste/ phyin ci log gi bslad pa dang bral ba'i 'phags pa rnams kyis dag par gzigs pa'i phyir/ mig skyon med pas dung dkar por mthong ba bzhin no/

⁶⁴⁹ Wangchuk (2009: 227) holds that the within Tibetan scholasticism the term *snang ba* primarily means “perceived or perceptible appearance” and secondarily “perception of an appearance”, while *mthong ba* and *gzigs pa* primarily mean “perception of an appearance” and secondarily “perceived or perceptible appearance”.

naturally pure, since it is established by inferential *pramāṇa* that there will occur such a perfected lucid perception.

This reason holds, since such perceptions are non-erroneous, and perceiving in this way is aligned with reality. If this is not the case, then the perceptions of pure [cognitions] would be misleading, and the perceptions of the impure would have to be true. If that is so, one must also assert that āryas possess wrong cognitions and ordinary beings correct ones. How could someone who understands reason and has devotion propound such a teaching as this? As such, higher perceptions can invalidate lower ones, but lower ones are not able to harm higher ones. The *Madhyamakāvātāra* [VI, 27] asserts:

Just as the sight of one whose eyes are afflicted with an eye disease,

Is not able to undermine the cognition of one without the disease,

Likewise, a mind that has forsaken stainless wisdom,

Can not undermine a stainless mind.⁶⁵⁰

Therefore, the Buddha's utterly pure perception of the various conventional objects sees all these phenomena as pure. Since one cannot progress beyond that [level of attainment], this is established to be the final conventional reality of those relative (*kun rdzob*) phenomena. Due to this, it is important to know that the various conventional phenomena possess two modes: the way they appear in the perspective of mistaken [cognitions], and their own conventional reality.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵⁰ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātāra*, VI. 27: *na bādgate jñānam ataimirāṇām yathopalabdhis timirekṣaṇāṇām | tathāmalaññānatiraskṛtānām dhiyāsti bādho na dhiyo 'malāyāḥ ||* (Li 2015: 7). D3861, 205b1: /mig ni rab rib can gyis dmigs pa yis/ /rab rib med shes la gnod min ji ltar/ /de bzhin dri med ye shes spangs pa'i blos/ /dri med blo la gnod pa yod ma yin /

⁶⁵¹ Mipham 1984-1993c, 79-81: 'di ltar yul gcig la snang ba mi 'dra bar mthong ba ni 'jig rten na mngon sum gyis grags shing grub la/ chos thams cad rang bzhin gyis dag pa 'i dbyings dang gnyis su med par goms pa na/ rang bzhin gyis dag pa nyid kyis khyad par gyur du byas pa 'i snang ba 'ba' zhis tu snang ba la gsal snang rab kyi mthar thug pa 'byung bar rjes dpag gis grub pa 'i phyir ro/ /rtsa ba 'i gtan tshigs de la khyab pa yod de dag pas mthong ba ni phyin ci ma log pa yin pa 'i phyir des mthong ba ltar don la gnas pas khyab bo/ gal te ma khyab na dag pas mthong ba rdzun la ma dag pas mthong ba bden dgos pas na/ 'phags pa rnams log shes can dang phal pa rnams yang dag pa 'i shes pa can du khas len dgos na de lta bu bstan pa 'di la gus pa dang rigs pa shes pa pa su zhis gis smra bar nus/ de ltar mthong ba gong mas 'og ma sun 'byin nus la/ 'og mas gong ma la gnod mi nus te/ 'jug pa las/ mig ni rab rib can gyis dmigs pa yis/ rab rib med shes la gnod min ji ltar/ /de bzhin dri med ye shes spangs ba 'i blos/ dri med blo la gnod pa yod ma yin/ zhes gsungs pa bzhin no/ de 'i phyir dri ma yongs su dag pa 'i sangs rgyas kyi ji snyed pa 'i gzigs ngor chos thams cad dag pa 'i tshul gyis gzigs pa gang yin pa de las bogs dbyung du med pa 'i phyir de kun rdzob kyi chos rnams kyi tha snyad kyi gnas tshul mthar thug yin par grub bo/ /tshul des na kun rdzob ji snyed pa 'i chos 'di dag la/ 'khrul ngor snang tshul dang/ kun rdzob rang gi gnas tshul gnyis su yod par shes pa ci nas gal che ste/ (also translated in Dharmachakra 2009: 46-48).

Mipham then highlights the absurdity of recognising that epistemic instruments of the confined perception (*tshur mthong tshad ma*) of ordinary beings are the only valid means of describing and investigating the conventional. For Mipham and Rongzompa, such a reading leads to the inevitable conclusion that an ordinary being's perception of a river as water is less epistemically accurate than an accomplished yogin's perception of it as the goddess Māmakī. Mipham's dual approach to conventional truth via the binary conventional *pramāṇas* directly resolves this doctrinal issue.⁶⁵²

ii. The *Nges shes rin po che'i sgron me*

In this text we find Mipham's most astute and rich discussion of the Example. Within it there is a novel solution to the sceptical and rampant relativistic issues the Example may entail. (The section is here translated in prose for ease of comprehension, rather than sticking to the versified format that Mipham wrote it in.)

As for the single body of water that appears to various sentient beings, at the time when it appears as something to a human, some people say the common observed object (*blta bya*) is water; and all those subjects (*yul can*) observing it are accurate. If the water possessed some kind of intrinsic nature, reliable cognitions and unreliable cognitions would not be possible; and if there is not a common appearance that is the object of the different [beings], then there could not be a perception of a common object of sight, it would be just like the awarenesses of a pot and a pillar.⁶⁵³

Mipham refutes two ideas here: that the commonly observed object is intrinsically water, and that there is not a common appearance for the various beings in the Example. Mipham

⁶⁵² As we concluded in chapter 4: 156-159, Tsongkhapa's mereological explanation appears to resolve the same issue by proposing different objects for the ordinary being and the yogin.

⁶⁵³ Mipham 1984-1993a, 100: *chu gcig 'gro ba so so la// mi gcig dngos por snang ba'i tshel/ la las thun mong blta bya de/ /chu yin de mthong yul can rnam/ / kun kyang tshad ma yin zhes zer/ /chu la rang bzhin 'ga' yod na/ /tshad ma tshad min mi srid cing/ /so so'i yul snang thun min na/ /ka bum mthong ba'i blo bzhin du/ /thun mong blta bya mi srid 'gyur/*. The entire *Nges shes rin po che'i sgron me* has been translated by Pettit. The following sections that I translate here, can also be found in Pettit 1999: 219-227.

thus seeks to establish the relative framework of an external world of “commonly observed” objects.

Some say [the common object] is simply the moisture (*rlan gsher tsam*). If just the moisture is common and not different for each of the [beings], there would occur many [different] appearances that are seen by a single human.⁶⁵⁴

Presumably, this is because the moisture present in pus and nectar should also appear to humans as it is the common object.

How could the [common] basis such as water or pus that does not exist for one, be seen by another? Moreover, how could the basis be the moisture for [the gods in the formless realm who only perceive] infinite space? If the wet moisture is identical with the water, it would not be suitable for it to appear as pus and the like, and yet if it were different from water etc, it could not be observed as moisture at all.⁶⁵⁵

That is, not only can water not be the commonly observed object, but neither can mere moisture. The unnamed opponent’s position on the common object appears to be the Tsongkhapa- Khédруп position.⁶⁵⁶ The position that it is the wet moisture (a quality present in nectar, water, and blood) seems a viable option as a commonly observed object but Mipham rejects this through proposing a dichotomy: the wet moisture cannot be identical to water or it could not appear as anything else. Presumably Mipham means by this that it could not appear to the undistorted cognitions of the other beings, and yet if it were different from water it could not be seen as wet and moistening, as this is the defining characteristic of water. One cannot see wet moisture without seeing water, one cannot see water without

⁶⁵⁴ Mipham 1984-1993a, 100: *la las rlan gsher tsam yin zer/ /thun mong so sor rlan gsher tsam/ /ma log yod na rlan gsher la/ /mi gcig mthong snang mang byung zhing/*

⁶⁵⁵ Mipham 1984-1993a, 100: *gcig mthong gcig la med pa yi/ /chu dang rnag sogs gzhi de gang/ /gzhan mang nam mkha' mtha' yas par/ /rlan gsher gzhi ru ga la 'gyur/ /rlan gsher chu dang gcig yin na/ /rnag sogs nyid du snang mi rung/ /chu la sogs las tha dad du/ /rlan gsher ci yang dmigs pa min/*

⁶⁵⁶ In chapter 4: 152, we saw Tsongkhapa assert that the *chu klung*, the flowing stream or liquid is the common object.

seeing moisture. As such, moisture does not appear to all the beings and thus cannot be the commonly observed object.

Mipham then goes on to refute two further options: one cannot hold that the common object is something that is established with ultimate analysis, for it would then exist with *svabhāva*, and one also cannot simply reject that there is a common visual object for that would entail the Cittamātra view.⁶⁵⁷ Despite Mipham's affinity with Cittamātra, in this text he is presenting Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika system.

Having refuted that water, wet moisture, and even "the appearance for a human" is the common object, Mipham then presents his own position that is very close to Rongzompa's.

Mere appearances are the common visual object because they are proven to be the basis that does not appear (*snang ba*) [in certain contexts] and appears [in others]. It is just like watching a dance performance, and the like.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Mipham 1984-1993a, 100-101: *mi gcig mthong snang so so la/ /thun mong blta bya mi srid cing/ /thung mong mthun pa'i dngos po la/ /so sor snang ba mi srid phyir/ /ltos nas bzhag pa tsam zhig las/ /dpyad pa'i gzhi zhig khas len na/ /gnas lugs yin par grub dgos pas/ /gang ltar brtags kyang mi 'thad nyid/ /thun mong blta bya med gyur na/ /sems tsam bzhin du yul med bar/ /shes nyid yul du khas len dgos/ /de ni 'thad pa ma yin te/ /yul med bzhin du 'dzin pa yang/ /don la med par 'dra ba la/ /zung 'dzin gnyis po 'ang kun rdzob tu/ /snang bar mnyam phyir gang snang ba/ /de la brtags nas gzung 'dzin gnyis/ /yod med phye ba mi 'thad de/ /yul snang yod kyang rdzun pa ltar/ /'dzin pa snang yang ma grub phyir/* 'Apart from simply relying on this presentation, if one [insists on] asserting a single basis of [ultimate] analysis, since it must then be established as the ultimate mode of existing (*gnas lugs*), however one analyses, one will always be incorrect. [However], if there does not exist a common visual object, then just like the Cittamātrins, no [external] objects would exist, and one must assert that just consciousness is the object [of all of the being's perceptions]. That is infeasible, for as long as one clings to the non-existence of the object (*yul*), which is similar to the non-existence of an [external] object (*don*), since the object and the subject are equal in appearing as conventions, and yet having performed [ultimate] analysis on an appearance, it is not correct to differentiate it, either the subject or the object, as existing or not existing. Although an object that appears does exist, it is false, because the subject and the appearance are not established [in reality].'

⁶⁵⁸ Mipham 1984-1993a, 101: */snang tsam thun mong blta bya ni/ / mthun par snang dang mi snang gzhir/ /yod par grub phyir de med par/ /mi rung zlos gar mthong sogs bzhin/*. I take *snang ba* here to mean appear as Mipham just refuted above that the common basis of the various cognitions could sometimes be seen and at other times not be seen: 'How could the [common] basis such as water or pus that does not exist for one, be seen by another'.

Mipham’s commentator Khenpo Künpel (1862 – 1943) helps clarify that this is similar to the un-analysed dancers in a play, who can at times be seen as the gods they emulate,⁶⁵⁹ and at others as ordinary humans.

Apart from this nominal existence other ways of existing are not possible. As such, if this [manner of existing] does not exist, everything that is perceived (*snang ba*) would not appear (*snang ba*) – just like space. The inability to see reality (*don dngos ji bzhin*) is a condition for inner and outer phenomena [to appear], like the appearance of horses and elephants due to the [condition] of sticks being blessed with a mantra by a magician. Therefore, it is not suitable to point to something with certainty and say the common visual object is [specifically] this.⁶⁶⁰

As such, in our system the basis is a non-specific (*ris su ma chad pa*) [union] of appearances and emptiness, everything that appears is not at all established [ultimately] for they are equal. Although a single thing can appear in multiple ways, for whomever appearance and emptiness are tenable, for them everything is tenable. For whomever, appearance and emptiness are not tenable, for them nothing is tenable.⁶⁶¹

By setting forth “mere appearances”, the union of emptiness and appearances, as the common object Mipham has avoided the two main issues he rejected above. He has avoided being obliged to refute external objects, and he has also not been forced to pin down a specific entity that appears in the same way to all the beings in the Example. “Mere appearances” provide a common object and yet one that is not simply in the minds of the various observers. It is a perceivable plain of experience with seemingly infinite possibilities to manifest in different ways according to the cognitive capacities of the observer. However, one may naturally ask if such an abstract object can essentially appear as anything: What

⁶⁵⁹ Pettit 1999: 514, n.680.

⁶⁶⁰ Mipham 1984-1993a, 101: *yod tsam 'di las ma gtogs pa'i/ yod pa gzhan nas mi srid pas/ 'di med na ni snang ba kun/ mi snang nam mkha' lta bur 'gyur/ phyi dang nang gi rkyen gyi ni/ don dngos ji bzhin mi mthong ba/ sgyu ma'i sngags kyis shing bu la/ rta dang glang por snang ba bzhin/ de phyir thun mongs blta bya ni/ 'di zhes nges par bzhag mi rung/*

⁶⁶¹ Mipham 1984-1993a, 101: *des na rang gi lugs la ni/ snang stong ris su ma chad pa'i/ gzhi nyid cir yang ma grub pa/ gang snang kun la mnyam pa'i phyir/ dngos gcig sna tshogs par yang snang/ gang la snang stong rung ba na/ de la thams cad rung bar 'gyur/ gang la snang stong mi rung ba/ de la thams cad rung mi 'gyur/* (Clearly a reference to Nāgārjuna’s *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, 70, and *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV: 14. See Westerhoff 2010: 129).

would be the criteria to distinguish its perceiver as accurate? Mipham thus now seeks to prove the legitimacy of epistemic warrant within his interpretation.

If it is asked, would not the division of reliable and unreliable epistemic instruments no longer be tenable? Whatever [object it may be], just that appears, other things do not appear, one thus sees [it] accordingly, and it is therefore not the case that percepts are not established. Therefore, all things naturally subsist in their own nature, due to being established by appropriate epistemic instruments as objects that are singular or multiple.⁶⁶²

Dependently arisen objects simply appear due to various factors. They are seen and established to do just that, to appear in such and such a way.

As such, in dependence [on dependently arisen appearances] epistemic instruments are established; but those phenomena are *not* established by epistemic instruments. If they were, that would be their ultimate manner of existing.⁶⁶³

Mipham does not want to fully endorse a Dharmakīrtian form of epistemic warrant where *pramāṇas* establish the real nature of the *dharma* they observe. Rather, *pramāṇas* are themselves established through establishing their respective “appearance”.

A single body of water is grasped by oneself, although it does not depend on being established by an epistemic instrument, and it is not simply self-established as it is not established by ultimate analysis. It [also] does not come to be warranted in the perspective of the hungry ghost. When one ascertains with inferential and direct *pramāṇas* one’s grasped object (*'dzin yul*), these [cognitions] are not deceived about what is to be engaged in or disregarded about the object. As such, it is not that epistemic instruments do not have an object (*don*). Therefore, the expression “a single body of water” is set forth in dependence on the sight of the human. [Similarly] in dependence on that of a god, one can grasp the visual basis as the single body of nectar.

When in relation to water the pus, water, and nectar are seen, a [mixed] collection of all three is not present. Yet, if not one of those objects is established, some other

⁶⁶² Mipham 1984-1993a, 101-102: *'o na tshad ma tshad min gyi/ /rnam dbye'ang 'thad pa med ce na/ /gang snang de nyid gzhan nyid du/ /ma snang de phyir tshul mthong des/ /gzhal bya mi grub ma yin te/ /gang phyir dngos kun rang bzhin gyis/ /rang rang ngo bo la gnas pa/ /gcig dang tha dad byar rung ba'i/ /tshad ma grub pa nyid kyi phyir/*

⁶⁶³ Mipham 1984-1993a, 102: *de phyir ltos te tshad ma nyid/ /grub kyi rang dbang chos rnam ni/ /tshad mas grub pa ma yin te/ /grub na gnas lugs nyid du thal/*

entity of visual perception different from these three cannot be established by *pramāṇa*. Since all three objects of sight would come to be nonexistent, the water seen by a human would not be water, and it would [likewise] not be suitable to be something other than water; “water” would be utterly nonexistent. In such a system of interpretation the presentation of epistemic instruments becomes infeasible.

Therefore, the object of a sense consciousness that is undistorted by a superficial cause of error must be established by a *pramāṇa*. This is just like the water that appears in a mirage.⁶⁶⁴

Mipham holds that epistemic instruments are established through establishing their relative appearance, this is their object. For example, the human’s visual consciousness establishes the “water” that appears to them, and simultaneously it is itself established as a visual consciousness of a human seeing water. This is just like how the appearance of water is established by the perceiver of a mirage. The visual consciousness is accurate regarding the appearance of water, but not in relation to the entity of water. Mipham then explains why such contradictory properties as the appearance of pus and water both can be established in relation to the same referent.

In the case of the hungry ghost, due to the karmic obscurations clean water does appear as pus, because if those faults are removed, it will once more appear as water. Due to this, the humans’ perception is warranted and yet can be transformed due to other conditions. Temporarily, the water is validly established but finally through performing [ultimate] analysis with awareness,⁶⁶⁵ since all of those [substances] appear due to karmic latencies, for others [without such latencies] the water appears as pure realms and enlightened bodies (*sku*).

⁶⁶⁴ Mipham 1984-1993a, 102: *chu gcig po yang rang 'dzin gyis/ /tshad mas grub kyang ltos med du/ /rang dbang kho nas grub min te/ /don dam dpyod pas mi grub cing/ /yi dwags ngor yang grub mi 'gyur/ /rang 'dzin yul la mngon sum dang/ /rjes dpag tshad mas nges pa na/ /de yul 'jug ldog mi bslu'i phyir/ /tshad ma don med ma yin no/ /per na chu gcig la zhes pa/ /mi yi mthong ba la ltos nas/ /bzhag ste lha la ltos na ni/ /bdud rtsi gcig la blta gzhir 'dzin/ /chu la rnag chu bdud rtsi ru/ /mthong tshe gsum ka tshogs min la/ /de gsum gcig kyang tshad min na/ /de las dngos po gzhan zhig tu/ /mthong ba tshad mas sgrub mi nus/ /mthong don gsum ka med 'gyur bas/ /mi mthong chu 'di chu min na/ /gzhan zhig chu ru mi 'thad pas/ /chu zhes bya ba gtan med 'gyur/ /de lta'i lugs la 'ang tshad ma yi/ /rnam gzhas 'thad par mi 'gyur ro/ /de phyir 'phral gyi 'khrul rgyu yis/ /ma bslad dbang po 'i yul de nyid/ /tshad ma yin par bsgrub dgos te/ /chu dang smig rgyur chur snang bzhin/*

⁶⁶⁵ Perhaps the use of *rig pa* instead of *rigs pa*, is not merely the scribes mistake, but a reflection of the ultimate Dzogchen view Mipham is leading his reader to in this text.

The perception of the human cannot be the only valid position. Therefore, through the obscuring conditions becoming increasingly purified, in relation to lower perceptions it is appropriate to assert that higher ones are increasingly accurate.

Finally, [one reaches] ultimate reality for there is no other singular thing apart from it. The perception of it is the only epistemic instrument; two different epistemic warrants [of ultimate reality] are not possible. The ultimate mode of reality is the single truth of union (*zung 'jug*), the epistemic instrument that is just self-arising wisdom. There is not anything else apart from unawareness that is to be abandoned, and awareness—merely awareness and unawareness. Therefore, through this manner [of asserting] epistemic instruments, everything that appears is established to have the nature of the divine (*lha*). This [teaching] is only found in the Nyingma tradition, and is the lion's roar of the excellent explanations of the omniscient Paṇḍita Rongzompa.⁶⁶⁶

To bring all this together: Mipham is not ready to follow Taktsang and reject the value of *pramāṇa* in Madhyamaka. Like Tsongkhapa, he finds a Dharmakīrtian form of epistemology fundamental to Madhyamaka discourse, though their interpretations ultimately diverge. Mipham's distinctive contribution lies in his endorsement of the union of emptiness and appearances as a field of experience with seemingly infinite cognitive possibilities—an extremely creative philosophical move. “Mere appearances” are the basis from which our human realm appears; it embraces all objects and all cognitive subjects. When it manifests as water, our human cognitions of the “appearance of water” are reliable cognitions that establish the nature of the appearance for what it is. When mere appearances manifest to a god as nectar, they too are cognitively accurate that is their field of experience. When they manifest to yogins as the goddess Māmākī, their perception is cognitively even more reliable

⁶⁶⁶ Mipham 1984-1993a, 102-103: /des na gnas skabs yi dwags nyid/ /las kyi sgrib pas chu gtsang ma/ /rnag tu snang yang skyon sel na/ /da gdod chu ru snang na'i phyir/ /ltos nas mis mthong tshad ma dang/ /gzhan pa rkyen gyis bsgyur ba'i phyir/ /re zhig chu ni tshad mar bsgrubs/ /mthar thug rig pas dpyad pas na/ /de kun bag chags snang ba ste/ /gzhan du chu nyid dag pa yi/ /zhing dang sku yang snang ba'i phyir/ /mi yis mthong ba de kho na/ /mtha' gcig tshad mar rung ma yin/ /des na sgrib rkyen je dag pas/ /mthong ba 'og ma la ltos nas/ /gong ma gong ma tshad ma ru/ /khas blang ba ni 'thad pa nyid/ /mthar thug de kho na nyid ni/ /gcig las med phyir de kho na/ /mthong ba'i tshad ma'ang gcig yin te/ /tshad ma gnyis pa mi srid do/ /gnas lugs bden gcig zung 'jug ste/ /tshad ma rang byung ye she nyid/ /spang bya ma rig gcig pu las/ /med phyir rig dang ma rig tsam/ /de phyir tshad ma'i tshul 'di yis/ /snang kun rang bzhin lhar sgrub pa/ /snga 'gyur ring lugs kho na ste/ /kun mkhyen rong zom paN+Di ta'i legs bshad seng ge'i nga ro yin/

than that of the god or the human, for although all perceive “mere appearances”, not all have the same capacity to access the purity inherent in them. As such, contradictory properties may be warranted in relation to the same commonly observed object, for different observers experience their own relative manifestation of the object. The union of emptiness and appearance manifests to them as their uncommon object in dependence on their cognitive capacity. There will thus never be an occasion for two equally accurate cognitions to both establish the same referent as possessing contradictory properties.

As explored in the section on Rongzompa, Abhidharma phenomenology supports the idea that beings in lower realms experience greater cognitive distortions compared to those in higher realms. This is evident in the system’s portrayal of *kleśas* as impairing a consciousness’s ability to perceive an *ālambana* and in its classification of certain *kleśas* as being exclusive to the *kāmadhātu*, while absent in the *rūpadhātu* and *ārūpyadhātu*. Additionally, the gradual abandonment of more coarse levels of attachment as one ascends through these three realms further underlines this point.

6.4. Conclusions

Mipham’s position, then, is so close to Rongzompa’s that we shall call it, closely following Wangchuk, the “Rongzom-Mipham relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception”: the relative accuracy of a perception is determined by its ability to access the inherent purity/equality of the appearance/emptiness field of perception. This theory allows Mipham to accomplish several important aims: Firstly, it allows him to integrate a Dignāga-Dharmakīrti styled epistemology into the ultimately deconstructive framework of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, within which the conventional existence of external objects is still maintained via conventional epistemic instruments. Mipham thus avoids rampant epistemic relativism. Secondly, this interpretation enables him to follow his Nyingma forefather Rongzompa, and thereby reinforce a uniquely Nyingma approach to Madhyamaka within

the Tibetan philosophical tradition. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Mipham, this interpretation helps him synthesise Madhyamaka and the Great Perfection by highlighting the ultimate unity of the two truths and of the singular epistemic instrument that realises their non-dual nature. This synthesis is crucial because the Great Perfection's principal doctrine is that all phenomena and all cognitions are fundamentally the nature of awareness (*rig pa*). The union of appearances and emptiness that Mipham articulates therefore provides philosophical grounding for the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*'s fundamental premise: all phenomena are ultimately equal and, consequently, fundamentally pure.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁷ Since the Tibetan polymath and iconoclast Gendün Chöpel's (1903–1951) life partially overlapped with Mipham's and since he also commented briefly on the Example in his *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* (Gendün Chöpel 1990, vol. 2, 369), a few words are in order here. Gendün Chöpel's discussion of the Example challenges the applicability of Dharmakīrtian reasoning to realms beyond our own, arguing that the thoughts and desires of animals do not correspond to our own, it is thus unsound to apply human logic and proofs to determine what exists for them. His point, as with much of that text is directed at Tsongkhapa and his followers' Madhyamaka, particularly their universal standard of warrant. Additionally, his discussion of the Example challenges Tsongkhapa's insistence on the prior identification of the object of negation. He questions why, given that we have been born as all six classes of beings and have, in those lives, identified pus, water, or nectar in our environment without needing communication with others, we must now exert so much effort to identify the object of negation—especially since we have been habituated to the appearance of it since beginningless time. For more detail, see Gendün Chöpel 1990, vol. 2, 369; and Lopez 2006: 111, 212.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

From this biography of the Example and focused account of perceptual relativism in Buddhist intellectual thought, we have uncovered several significant patterns and developments. As mentioned in the introduction, a more thorough examination of the extra-intellectual and socio-historical factors influencing this discourse would provide richer context than this focused discussion has been able to offer.⁶⁶⁸ These valuable threads of inquiry—including deeper engagement with epistemic relativism and scepticism in the thought of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, a more comprehensive exploration of tantric Indian sources which employ perceptual relativism repeatedly, and a deeper foray into the pre-classical Kadampa and classical Kagyupa interpretations of the Example together with their Gelugpa responses—are undoubtedly promising directions for future research that would yield a more complete intellectual tapestry.

The current picture we have drawn tells us several salient things about relativism within Buddhist intellectual history. From the Example's general absence in early Buddhist sources, despite its appearance in one Pāli sutta, we can conclude that perceptual relativism did not occupy a central place within so-called Early Buddhism. When the Example or related examples do appear, they tend to serve primarily moralistic and soteriological lessons, and illustrate different cognitive capacities based on the effects of karma, rather than explore deeper epistemological implications. The textual witnesses from our first thematic section—

⁶⁶⁸ It would be fruitful to consider, for instance, the extent to which the heightened prominence of perceptual relativism in Indian Buddhist thought from the 5th century may have been influenced by the Buddhists' need to respond to the growing influence and patronage of Śaivism within feudal courts. Perhaps perceptual relativism facilitated the Buddhists' esoteric transformation and the development of Buddhist tantra, a transformation that was more closely aligned with the courts' stately interests. For more on this transformation, see Davidson (2004) and Eltschinger (2013). A related hypothesis is considered by Bronkhorst regarding the Buddhist doctrine of illusionism, suggesting that it may have served as a strategic tool to confound and thereby undermine their Brahmanical opponents, thus diminishing their influence in the royal courts of medieval India (see Bronkhorst 2011: 171-172).

the moralistic usage of the Example—suggest a notable lack of concern with its potentially sceptical and relativistic consequences, despite recording what were apparently understood as real perceptual differences among beings.

As Yogācāra and Madhyamaka from *circa* the 4th – 11th centuries began to lean towards illusionism, these epistemological questions received greater attention. Yet, as observed throughout the first section of this study, there remains a surprising disinterest in the rampant relativistic implications of the Example. This disinterest in our Indian sources is perhaps surprising for us, given the airtime epistemic relativism receives in contemporary university curricula and broader intellectual culture, and yet, these issues simply did not command comparable urgency for the authors of our texts. Were there perhaps cultural factors at play here that made relativism less threatening? Or were such questions left for the teaching halls and debate courtyards, the oral dimension in which our authors and texts lived? If we are charitable to our authors, it is tempting to conclude the latter. For when we trace this tributary of thought north from India to Tibet, we see these questions immediately being addressed in the earliest instance of the Example by Rongzompa in the 11th century.

This leads us to our original research question regarding the extent of Tibetan innovation in their exegesis of Indian material on the Example. Seyfort Ruegg’s distinction between canonical *Indian* texts in the Kangyur and Tengyur and *Indic* texts authored by Tibetans proves revealing here. While Tibetan scholars likely conceived of themselves as merely filling interpretive gaps in the works of their Indian predecessors—providing necessary “internal” historical clarification⁶⁶⁹—there can be little doubt that the sophisticated complexities found in the Gelugpa, Sakyapa, and Rongzompa-Mipham elaborations on the Example substantially exceed what is explicitly attested in Indian sources.

⁶⁶⁹ As per the Lakatos/Tillemans sense of this term, see chapter 1.

In this regard, there are three models that may help us frame the conceptual journey that we have taken. Firstly, Westerhoff's "germination model" for understanding Buddhist philosophical development offers a formative heuristic.⁶⁷⁰ This model invites us to understand later doctrinal developments not as corruptions or dilutions of original teachings, but as legitimate and necessary unfoldings of conceptual seeds planted in earlier traditions that ripen at given points in history due to related socio-historical factors. This germination metaphor seems particularly apt for our Tibetan elaborations of the Example. Perhaps this model of philosophical development itself captures an intrinsic element of Buddhist doctrine which, at least with respect to conventional reality, appears inevitably to embrace certain forms of relativism. Under this model, the Tibetan elaborations we have covered thus represent not a departure from Indian Buddhism but its natural maturation.

Secondly, revisiting our trench analogy, the trench we have excavated in Buddhist thought also reveals insights into human networks and the dynamics of collective knowledge production. Hugon has distinguished between 'personal networks' (which require people to know each other) and 'intellectual networks' (that can span longer time periods with links in the chain not necessarily being contemporaneous) in relation to the Tibetan Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa networks from the 11th -13th centuries.⁶⁷¹ The trench we have dug here with the Example reveals its own array of personal but primarily intellectual networks that reach beyond the spaces and time periods we have been able to focus on. Yet, what we can see, especially with the Tibetan debates on the Example, is that the texts and the written records we have are obviously mere snapshots, nodes in this vast intellectual network that in a sense operates in a place beyond time. For many of our authors appear to pre-empt certain arguments that are only written down decades or centuries later; and certain authors tell us

⁶⁷⁰ Westerhoff 2018: 282.

⁶⁷¹ Hugon 2021: 139-141.

they are not just writing down their own opinions but those that were common in their day, while others respond to ideas written down 1000 years earlier. It now becomes apparent that such matrices of textual and intellectual nodes, phenomenological insight, and extra- and inter-personal debate is actually the nontemporal field within which our trench traverses.⁶⁷²

As mentioned in chapter 2, these many diverse reflections and understandings of the Example function like a second-order reflective application of the principle to itself: just as the river can be perceived in multiple ways by different beings, so too has the river trope itself been variously interpreted. Despite the diversity of opinions it contains, our network is teleological. It is a process of thought construction with a specific purpose, albeit a malleable one. That purpose is not merely to aid general Buddhist soteriological goals, but to instantiate a recognition in all connected with the network that they are not seeing all there is to see. There is more beyond their immediate sense impressions, or the theorised material and energetic minutiae that make them up. It calls into question our basic capacity to know and why it is that we are knowing. We thus cannot represent this intellectual network as polythetic, such that all members share characteristics, but no characteristics are common to all. They are bound by this shared enquiry.

A third metaphor of an ancient golden coin may also bring this long discussion on the Example into focus. When the coin was first minted it had a certain value and significance, both relative to its time and space. As this coin travels through the centuries, successive handlers come to ascribe it ever-greater significance and often increased value the more distanced it is from its original context. By the premodern and modern periods, the coin acquires even more significance, particularly among numismatists who analyse its features with sophisticated scholarly frameworks that would be unnecessary and irrelevant to its

⁶⁷² This now appears not dissimilar to Westerhoff's identification of texts, arguments, and meditative practices as the main factors at play in the development of Indian Buddhist thought, as mentioned in the introduction.

original creators and users. Technological advancements enable modern chemists to analyse the coin's elemental composition with hitherto unknown precision, revealing microscopic details that would have been imperceptible to its original creators and handlers. In like manner, the Example gestated in a certain time and place, let us say with Uttara's Mother in the 2nd century BCE India, as a response to immediate ethical concerns. Yet as it travelled across generations of Buddhist thought, it accumulated layers of interpretation and philosophical significance. Each generation of scholars encountered it through their own contemporary conceptual devices, integrating it into ever evolving theories of knowing. Once we reach the modern period, philosophers like Mipham now had uniquely sophisticated conceptual tools with which to assess the Example. What began as a relatively straightforward idea underlining ethical values, eventually became imbued with deeply complex and subtle meanings, eventually serving in Tibet as a touchstone for debates around perception.

This third metaphor is reminiscent of a theme discussed by Jorge Luis Borges in relation to Kafka and his precursors.⁶⁷³ Borges notes how “Kafka's precursors” have been created by Kafka. In that, through Kafka's influence, we now perceive their works through his lens, creating a quality in them through our Kafkaesque framework that did not previously exist. The question is not, for instance, whether Aquinas correctly understood Aristotle, but that the Aristotle we now know through Aquinas is something quite different. In like manner, Candrakīrti's influence on Tsongkhapa has led us to read Candrakīrti in this light—effectively creating a quality in Candrakīrti's thought that is “a precursor” to Tsongkhapa. Just like our golden coin is now deemed to have possessed qualities at its own time and place by numismatists in the present that were not manifestly known at its own time, our narrative has done the same. It has revealed qualities of the Example that appear to not have been

⁶⁷³ Borges 1995.

considered by its early exegetes. Our intellectual history has thus been both discovery and creation.

But can we draw a line between these two? Indeed, has our discussion got any further to resolving the epistemic questions that the Example provokes? Are we to conclude none of the interpretations discussed in this thesis, or perhaps even, that no interpretation is *optimum*? Are relativism and scepticism simply unavoidable issues, as Franco concedes in relation to periodisation schemes in historiography?⁶⁷⁴ Or in relation to hermeneutics, is any informed reading of a text equally valid as Stepien appears to assert?⁶⁷⁵ I think we do a great injustice to our sources if we concede this. Such is clearly not the opinion of any of our Tibetan authors.

Tsongkhapa's mereological explanation of the Example and his closely related three criteria that must be fulfilled for something to obtain as a convention,⁶⁷⁶ may be utilised succinctly to mitigate Franco's concern of the ineluctably relativistic and sceptical character of hermeneutical exercises like historiography. I propose that just as Tsongkhapa purports a universal standard of warrant, that is not contextually bound and yet is also not independent of it; likewise, as we conceptualise historical events and conceptual trajectories, our premises are obviously contingent on our position, and yet also take part in those universal human standards of warrant and agreement that need not be ultimately or always true in all contexts, and yet are "true enough" so as to allow for collective agreement. Within such a

⁶⁷⁴ Franco 2013: 25.

⁶⁷⁵ 'I am happy to go so far as to admit that any reading of a text is as valid as any other, and this on the grounds of the ineluctably grounded nature of hermeneutics as per Vico, the disavowal of textual finality as per Schleiermacher, the proclamation of authorial death as per Barthes, the deconstructive disavowal of logocentrism as per Derrida, or the dismissal of interpretive objectivity as per Gadamer, among the multifarious other factors that constitute me as a twenty-first-century heir to the continental philosophical and hermeneutical currents evoked by these few exemplary figures.' (Stepien 2024: 61).

⁶⁷⁶ See chapter 4: 146-147.

framework a given account may indeed be more informed than another, providing a level of certainty that avoids rampant relativism.

In like fashion, Gorampa's "species-specific relativism" that anchors the validity of a perspective to the realm and positionality of the perceiver, also privileges certain accounts of an object based on the context in which they pertain. For as discussed in chapter 5, even the Buddha's doctrine can only be said to be "true" within the perspective of the human world. Under this theory, a given reading of a text or conceptual history may be more justified than others within the human realm, or, to be even more restricted, within the scholarly domain in which it operates, with all the associated and agreed-upon scholarly conventions and academic methods. Returning to our coin metaphor, a certain scholarly account of the life of a specific Roman coin that takes into consideration its history, changing significance, monetary value, and elemental properties may be more justified than another—more true. Yet, this same account would be of little significance and arguably nothing more than conceptual hypothesis and conjecture to the cowherd or person on the street—it holds little or no truth. This contextual boundedness, then, proposed by Gorampa does not slip into Tillemans's "dismal slough",⁶⁷⁷ nor into scepticism, for it simply brings into relief the mutual dependency of conventional knowledge production.

What is more, Rongzompa's and Mipham's explanation of the Example that anchors the various perceptions to the common-object of "mere appearances" (the empty/appearance matrix of experience that has infinite cognitive possibilities), allowed them to incorporate the warrant of a common object as having contradictory properties, for it recognised the innate cognitive disabilities in sentient perception and a hierarchy of accuracy within them. We may also apply the Rongzompa-Mipham model to historiography and hermeneutics, in

⁶⁷⁷ See the Introduction: 4.

much the same way as we saw the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and Kūkai do respectively, in chapter 2. A given reading of a text or historical phenomenon may be more accurately represented by those more trained in and informed of the details that bear on the phenomenon. The greater epistemic clarity and precision of an observer will bear on their ability to more accurately engage with their object. Our own academic context recognizes such distinctions and degrees of accuracy of any given subject. Indeed, an infant learning to read may pick up a book on Roman coins and accurately understand the book's title; they are *pramāṇa* of the words. An undergraduate entirely new to the subject may read the book and gain a general account that is representative and yet easily superseded by the numismatist specialising in Roman mintage. The book is our common object and this theory allows for degrees of accuracy and yet does not fall into anything-goes relativism or no-one-can-know scepticism.

It appears to me that these three Tibetan interpretations of the Example – Tsongkhapa's, Gorampa's, and the Rongzom-Mipham approach – are the most nuanced and a synthesis of them may help us better understand perceptual relativism as a whole. Tsongkhapa suggests a universal standard of warrant that transcends and yet is embedded in, and cohering with, the universal context of discourse, strengthening normative agreement through allowing for the revision of conventions and epistemic accuracy. Gorampa's species-specific relativism acknowledges the contextual boundedness of truth-claims while still maintaining hierarchies of validity within those specific domains. Rongzompa and Mipham's approach recognizes both a common object of interpretation and the variable capacities of perceivers, creating space for ultimate epistemic expertise. Taken together, these three interpretations sustain the ultimate wisdom of āryas as the most authoritative knowledge of reality, while simultaneously preserving the possibility of a contextually grounded framework of conventional knowledge that may be progressively refined, enhanced, and perfected.

**Appendix I: Rongtön Shéja Künrik's Refutation of Tsongkhapa in His Commentary
to the *Suhṛllekha***

(Rongtön 2008a: vol. 1, 628-632)

For these lower classes of hungry ghosts, in the summer, even the moon becomes a cause of heat, and in the winter, even the sun becomes a cause of cold, so they intensely experience the suffering of heat and cold. If we explain this a little, for one object of appearance, due to the specific distinctions of karma of each of the six realms, there arise six ways of seeing. Furthermore, through the distinction of good and bad karma, there arise various ways of seeing, both good and bad. For example, for one object of appearance, due to inferior karma, it becomes pus and blood; due to middling, it is seen as water; and through the power of good karma, it appears as nectar.

Here, instead of explaining that there are different modes of seeing a single object, [You Tsongkhapa] explain there are six different ways of seeing six [different] substances. Sūtra says:

A single object, and yet different awarenesses of it.⁶⁷⁸

Your explanation contradicts what is said here that there are six ways of seeing a *single* object. Moreover, it is also harmed by the fact that if there are six different substances in the single appearance of water, what is suitable to appear [i.e. the five remaining objects] are not observed objects (*dmigs pa*).

If you say the [beings] are all mutually obstructed [from seeing these other five substances] due to their [specific] karma. Consider a situation when two people, an enemy and a friend, look at the same person, even though there are two aspects (*cha*) – pleasant and unpleasant

⁶⁷⁸ *ngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir*. This sūtra passage is unidentified.

– both of them do not see both of these aspects for their karma mutually obscures them. But this assertion is logically refuted by Dharmakīrti.⁶⁷⁹

Furthermore, you should understand the meaning of *Madhyamakāvatāra*:

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus

Is like [a visual consciousness] whose organ is afflicted with a visual disorder.

In short, just as the knowables do not exist [inherently],

likewise, the mind also does not exist [inherently]. [VI.71]

Consider carefully for what purpose this example, which was stated thus, was given.

According to your [interpretation], the example and the meaning are discordant, for [according to it] even within the sun there would be the substance of darkness. It also contradicts what is said in sūtra:

When the orb of the sun manifestly arises, the place of darkness does not exist and is not observed.⁶⁸⁰

And it would not be contradictory for lightness and darkness to abide together simultaneously.

According to you, for an example of things not truly existing as separate from the mind, why do you not give the example of one object appearing in different ways, but instead give the example of six substances? Saying that objects are not established from their own side also becomes false. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* says:

⁶⁷⁹ See the discussions of *las gzugs* (*karmic matter*) by Khédrup in chapter 4: 164, and the refutations of his explanation by Gorampa, chapter 5: 197, and Shakya Chokden in chapter 5: 218-220, and Appendix II.

⁶⁸⁰ *nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor mngon par 'char ba'i tshe mun pa'i gnas med cing mi dmigs*. This sūtra passage is unidentified.

Who made the burning iron ground?

From what did that mass of fire arise?

The Subduer said that all such things

[Come from] the negative (*sdig pa*) mind. [V. 7cd-8ab]⁶⁸¹

It seems you have not even heard the mere words of this text. Because yours is a very foolish presentation, one should not even give it a moments attention.

⁶⁸¹ Sanskrit in Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, V. 7-8: / *taptāyaḥkuṭṭimam kena kuto jātāśca tāḥ striyaḥ // 5.7 // pāpacittasamudbhūtaṃ tattatsarvaṃ jagau munīḥ* / (Vaidya, ed., 1960: 52).

Appendix II: An Excerpt from Shakya Chokden’s “Chapter Five of the Explanation of Points Proliferate from Conventional Truth, within The Ocean of Scripture and Reasoning, a Middle Way Treasury of Certainty”

(Shakya Chokden 2013 vol. 15: 61-69)

3. An Explanation of some of the differences of tenets that proliferate from the two truths.

(i) Explaining points that proliferate from conventional truth, and (ii) explaining points that proliferate from ultimate truth.

The first has four divisions:

- (i) Points that proliferate from explaining that although external objects are asserted conventionally (*tha snyad du*) they are not established by epistemic instruments.
- (ii) Indicating the assertion that disintegratidness (*zhig pa*) is a functioning thing (*dngos po*) is not a distinctive feature of the Prāsaṅgika system for the reason that this assertion of function is not renowned in the world.
- (iii) Indication that not accepting self-cognition is not a distinctive feature of Prāsaṅgika, by explaining the Mādhyamika system does not accept external objects, and yet there is cognition of the appearance of [external] objects, which is not proven by self-cognition.
- (iv) Although whatever grasps at true existence is posited as a conventional truth, after clearing away [wrong] assertions concerning the afflictive obstructions, indicating that the intention of Candrakīrti is that these [cognitions] that grasp at true existence are to be divided into those that are, and are not afflicted.

(i) [Points that proliferate from explaining that although external objects are asserted conventionally (*tha snyad du*), they are not established by epistemic instruments.]

If one accepts that conventional external objects and the cognitions which appear as those objects both exist in the same way, then what is the meaning of the following statement of [Candrakīrti's] *Treatise*?

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus.[6.71a]

There are two points to be covered here: (i) the actual meaning, and (ii) an explanation that clears away the eternalist view held by others.

(i) [the actual meaning]

If, on the occasion that a single basis appears as nectar, water, or pus and blood to a god, human, a hungry ghost and an animal, it is a conventional truth, because the cognitions that appear as these objects, and the objects - nectar etc - are true for each of them, [we would reply with the following]. At such a time, the water and the like are not warranted by epistemic instruments as being a single entity, because in the perspective of epistemic instruments external objects and the cognitions that appear as them are equally nonexistent. As it is said by Candrakīrti:

Also, a hungry ghost's awareness of a flowing river as pus

Is like [a visual consciousness] whose organ is afflicted with an eye disorder.

[6.71ab]

The way they are the same is indicated with the lines:

Whatever [visual] awareness is afflicted by an eye disorder,

Through the influence of that disorder, sees falling hairs,

Relative to the awareness that sees, both are true,

Whereas, for one who sees clearly, both are false.

Although this is the case, if one were to analysis the characteristics of this situation more precisely: the single entity that appears as a fluid, when it appears to humans as water, that appearance as [water] is a correct conventional [truth] (*yang dag kun rdzob*) relative to that human; whereas, relative to the human the other appearances for the other beings must be regarded as false conventional [truths] (*log pa 'i kun rdzob*). This is because the appearances of the other beings, relative to the human are considered (*dmigs*) to be polluted by superficial causes of error; whereas [their own] is not polluted. This explanation can be applied similarly for the other beings in the Example.

(ii) [An explanation that clears away the eternalist view held by others.]

It is set forth in the following way in the “luminous” writings of others: ‘Whatever it may be, all phenomena are created individually by one’s own mind, and there is nothing that can be posited such that “this is the [correct] position, and this is not”.’ And, also: ‘From the perspective of their own mind since it is unequivocally true, the single entity that is the fluid is true blood in the perspective of the hungry ghost, and true water in the perspective of the human.’

As for these assertions, they are the musings of fools, on par with the Jains. When that very single entity appears as such to all three visual consciousnesses of the god, human, and hungry ghost, either it is held that all of those visual consciousnesses are epistemic instruments, or a certain one is.

If it is the first option, that single entity would be the common locus for the three, pus and blood, water, and nectar; there would exist epistemic instruments that are unmistakable [warrants] of the contradictory; there would not be the slightest difference between what is established by epistemic instruments and what is not. This is because that single entity is both not established by an epistemic instrument as pus and blood and is established by an

epistemic instrument [as pus and blood]. As it was said: ‘since in the perspective of one’s own mind [these objects] are unequivocally true, it is not possible to posit a single position and say “this is [the correct] one, and this is not”’. In that case it must also be said that it is unsuitable to distinguish the value of a single position of the Buddhas or of the Tirthikas; or to differentiate the quality of our teacher the Buddha and the Tirthikas’ teacher. Hence, what greater depreciation of the Three Jewels could there be than that!

Perhaps it is the second option, and one is an epistemic instrument. If one argues that the sight of the god and hungry ghost are not epistemic instruments since they are mistaken perceptions polluted by karma, and the sight of the human is an epistemic instrument. [We would reply] the latter is also a mistaken perception [polluted] by karma, and thus would also not be an epistemic instrument. If the visual consciousnesses of the other beings are not epistemic instruments, since they are similar to the auditory consciousnesses etc, it would be impossible for there to be any epistemic instruments in the continua of the other non-human beings. Therefore, such speech is nothing more than that of cattle.

Well then, one may wonder how should one explain this scenario?

[Tsongkhapa and his followers would reply:] ‘The eye consciousnesses of all three beings, the god, human, and hungry ghost, are asserted to be epistemic instruments; and yet, the vessel full of the wet fluid is not asserted as the common locus of all three [substances], the water, etc. It is also not said in the place occupied by that full vessel there exists individual full vessels of water, pus and blood, and nectar. For, the full vessel is the part-possessor (the whole), and there arises a pus and blood part, a cool and clear water [part], and a nectar part. Moreover, initially that wet and fluid substance that arose in the human dimension (*yu!*) subsisted as water, and in the dimensions of the god and hungry ghost, initially, it also subsisted as nectar and pus, and blood respectively. But, when other beings approach and

are in the vicinity of the [substance] and the [other beings], through the power of the karma of the beings [the substance] newly transforms. Yet, from the outset these parts [of the substance] were not there and the three parts were not necessarily within the continuity of that [part-possessor, the substance]. Also, although when the full vessel of the wet and fluid [substance] becomes a visual object that is common [for all three beings], it transforms and comes to possess the three parts, and when it becomes the personal visual object [of one of the beings] it is only that of the respective being.’

To further clarify this hermeneutic (*bshad pa'i tshul*) it is said: ‘For example, when one who possess qualities of mantra touches and throws with their hand a red-hot iron ball, they do not [experience] it as hot; but when others touch, it is hot. In that [red hot iron ball] there are two tangible objects, one hot and one that is not, and these are [the objects] experienced by the two individuals. Just as it is said [in Nāgārjuna *Suḥrillekha*]:

For hungry ghosts in summer,

Even the moon is hot, and in winter even the sun is cold.

One should understand this through differentiating the part-possessor [the sun or moon] and its parts [the tangible objects experienced as hot or cold by hungry ghosts or humans].’ So, it has been written [by Tsongkhapa and his followers].⁶⁸²

Our response that illustrates the infeasibility of this explanation has two divisions: (i) refuting it through expressing extremely absurd consequences, and (ii) refuting [their attempt] at overcoming such faults.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸² See Chapter 4: Tsongkhapa’s Mereological Solution to the Example.

⁶⁸³ In this discussion not translated here Shakya Chokden refutes Khédrupje’s explanation of the *las gzugs* or “karmic matter” discussed by Dharmakīrti in *Pramāṇavārttika* III. 412-414. See Khédrup’s explanations in Chapter 4: 164, fn. 430, and a more succinct discussion below.

The first has three divisions that indicate (a) a contradiction with their own assertions, (b) a contradiction with reasoning, and (c) a contradiction with scripture.

(a) Since you yourself fling various extreme consequences at others, in like kind I will turn them back on you! When that full vessel of the wet fluid becomes a visual object common to the three, the god, human, and hungry ghost, are all three of their visual consciousnesses epistemic instruments, or are only certain ones? If it is the first option, the common visual object would be a common locus of the three [contradictory substances], there would exist epistemic instruments that are unmistakable in relation to the contradictory, there would not be even the slightest difference between what is warranted by epistemic instruments and what is not. Moreover, in that place occupied by the full vessel, the common visual object, there would exist three full vessels of water, etc, because in relation to that single place there simultaneously exists three epistemic instruments one that comprehends a full vessel of water, one that comprehends a full vessel of nectar, and one that comprehends a full vessel of pus and blood. What is more, the subject, the visual consciousness of the hungry ghost who looks upon the water in the human dimension, it absurdly follows that it is a wrong consciousness (*viparyayañña*, *log shes*) because it lucidly perceives its visual object as pus and blood in a place occupied by water. This should also be applied likewise to the other two [beings' visual consciousnesses].

If one responds, 'although at first it was occupied by water, due to karma it transforms into pus and blood'; although this may be said [we would reply as follows]: Take the subject the water in the human dimension, it absurdly follows that it is pus and blood, because the unmistakable visual consciousness that grasps pus and blood is manifestly directed at (*dn̄gos su gtod byed*) its aspect that is [pus and blood]. If the reason is not accepted, then, at such a time [when all three beings observe the vessel] it absurdly follows that their does not exist

a commonly observed visual object, because the three appearing objects (*snang yul*) are contradictory, and you do not accept a common apprehended object (*gzung yul*).⁶⁸⁴

Moreover, it absurdly follows that all phenomena are entirely created by one's own mind, one cannot [obtain] certainty in relation to a single tenet, you the opponent are like the Jains, for in reality a hungry ghost can create pus and blood in a place occupied by water and a god can create nectar. These all follow because a human can create water, and a god nectar, out of the pus and blood of the hungry ghost dimension. Furthermore, it absurdly follows that there are unmistakable epistemic instruments in relation to the contradictory, because there is an epistemic instrument that comprehends that full vessel, the part-possessor occupied by all three parts, as only water; and there are epistemic instruments that comprehend only the other two [substances]. You do accept this reason, because [you say] that the direct sense cognition that grasps the taste [of the substance] by the human, comprehends only water, etc.

If in response it is said, at such a time [when all three beings observe the vessel] all three parts are not complete, in that case, we may then ask the following. When the tangible objects such as the light of the moon and the red-hot iron ball are simultaneously experienced by two beings, are there two different tangible objects or aren't there? If there are not, this explicitly contradicts [your assertions]. If there are, it absurdly follows that when the light of the moon touches the hungry ghost's body, that light, having become the nature of heat is no longer a complete tangible object that is cool. This is because when the tangible object that is water is experienced by the hungry ghost it arises as only a tangible object that is pus and blood and an incomplete tangible object that is water. If it is said, on the contrary there is a common visual object, but since from the point of view of the other beings [the objects]

⁶⁸⁴ For details of these two objects, see Dreyfus 1997: 379-389.

are uncommon, [the objects appear] to be dissimilar; it absurdly follows that when the tangible object that is the light of the moon is simultaneously experienced by a hungry ghost and a human, a singular common visual object is not possible. This follows because the particular tangible object existing in the light of the moon that the hungry ghost experiences is not experienced simultaneously by the human, nor is it experienced by the other [beings present]. If it is then said, it is like that from [the point of view] of the parts, but the part-possessor is a common [object]. [Our response is] the two contradictory tangible objects heat and cold cannot abide together simultaneously, because of being contradictory. How could it be suitable [for them] to abide together simultaneously for up to an intermediate eon within a single basis?⁶⁸⁵

Not only that, but it follows that it is not possible for a single fluid to become a common visual object for the three beings, since, if it is a fluid it is contradictory that it is also a visual object for the visual perception of [all] the three beings. If it is a visual object and a direct object of the corporal sense perception of any of the three beings, then it must be a common object of experience of the three [beings], since this is your assertion.

(ii) Contradiction with reasoning.

The subject, that full vessel of the fluid that is the common visual object for the three beings, it follows that it is not a physical entity, because it is refuted that in its place⁶⁸⁶ there arises another physical entity where it exists.

Also, the subject, the eye consciousness that sees the colour of the water at that time [when the three beings gather and observe the vessel], it follows that it only partially engages with

⁶⁸⁵ Presumably Shakyā Chokden is referring to the lifespan of the sun.

⁶⁸⁶ *go ma* corrected to *go sa*.

its visual object, because it sees one part of it and does not see the other parts that are one substance with it in terms of their establishment and abiding.⁶⁸⁷

Moreover, the subject, that full vessel the part-possessor, it follows that it casts an aspect similar to itself to the unmistaken cognition perceiving it, because it is an external object. You also have to accept this entailment, because despite having engaged in rational analysis of statements [such as] “there are different awarenesses of a single entity” [from the *Mahāyānasamgraha*],⁶⁸⁸ you still insist that external objects exist. But this assertion is not possible, because it is harmed by the absurd consequences mentioned by [Dharmakīrti in his *Pramāṇavārttika*],

(If external objects exist,) how will they be experienced? If the entity that is ascertained [is due to it casting its aspect] from its own side, there would be the faults of that entity bearing many diverse [natures].⁶⁸⁹

Although you know this, there is no reason why although both the colour of the water and the colour of the pus exist in that part-possessor, one does cast its aspect to the eye consciousness that grasps it, and the other does not cast its aspect. It would also be contradictory for an object to cast an aspect similar to itself, according to the mechanism through which aspects are cast [according to the philosophical systems that accept them].

⁶⁸⁷ One substance in terms of establishment and abiding (*grub bde rdzas gcig*) refers to certain attributes ascribed to entities that come to exist and abide together simultaneously, for instance a pot and the impermanence of that pot.

⁶⁸⁸ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*. The Sanskrit contained in the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* reads: *tulyavastumanobhedād*. (Tatia ed. 1976: 42); Tibetan in D 4048, 16a: D16a: *dngos gcig yid ni tha dad*.

⁶⁸⁹ Parentheses are the unquoted lines of this verse, square brackets are my additions. Dharmakīrti *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, III, 342: *yadi bāhyam na vidyeta kasya samvedanam bhavet/ yadyagatyā svarūpasya bāhyasyaiva na kiṃ matam//* (Shastri, eds. 1968: 202).

D 4210: 131b.1-2: *phyi rol don ni yod na yang/ ji ltar nyams su myong nyid de/ nges pa'i bdag nyid rang ngo bos/ ma yin du ma'i bdag skyon phyir/ /*. The point being that Shākya Chokden's opponents are aware of this problem with the theory of how external objects produce cognition through casting their aspect to the perceiving consciousness. In that if this were viable, there would be the absurd consequence that a single entity could cast desirable and undesirable aspects to cognitions, and thus have the nature of being both pleasant and unpleasant, since a single entity is often cognised with these discordant aspects.

If you say our statement that there are no reasons [to prove why one colour casts its aspect while the other colour does not] is not established, for it is due to karmic obscurations that the other colours do not appear to one of the beings; in that case, as it is said by [Dharmakīrti in the *Pramāṇavārttika*, III. 344],

If one says it is due to obscuration [by karma] that [two discordant aspects of the external object] are not seen,

[In that case] one does not see it through the power of the [external] object.

A single thing would have diverse natures,

A nature that is seen,

And one that is not seen,

For [you say] one sees [a real] external object.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁹⁰ Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, III, 344: *tamanekātmakaṃ bhāvamekātmavena darśayat / tadadr̥ṣṭaṃ kathaṃ nāma bhavedarthasya darśakam //* (Shastri, eds. 1968: 202).

Tibetan in D 4210: vol. 174, 131b: *ma mthong bsgribs phyir min zhe na/ /don gyi dbang gis rtogs mi 'gyur/ /du ma'i bdag nyid dngos de la/ /gcig gi bdag tu mthong byed pa/ /ma mthong ba de ji ltar na/ don mthong byed par 'gyur ba yin.* The brackets are based on Devendrabuddhi, *Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā*, D 4217: vol. 175, 224a.4-7: *gal te ma mthong bsgribs gyur na/ /don 'dod pa dang mi 'dod pa la sogs pa rnam pa du ma can yang cig car mthong ba dag la gcig gi 'dod pa dang/ mi 'dod pa'i ngo bo ma mthong ba gang yin pa de ni 'dod pa dang mi 'dod pa nyams su myong ba grub par byed pa'i las kyis chod pa'i phyir ro zhe na/ gang gi tshe ji ltar goms pa'i don rtogs pa de'i tshe don gyi dbang gis rtogs mi 'gyur/ 'on kyang don gyi dbang gis rtogs pa ma yin te/ don ji lta ba bzhin du don rtogs pa ma yin no zhes bya ba'i tha tshig ste/ de dang ni du ma'i rnam pa can nyid yin pa'i phyir ro/ /gzhan yang du ma'i bdag nyid dngos po de la/ 'dod pa dang ni mi 'dod pa dag la sogs pa'i ngo bo gcig gi bdag nyid du ngo bo gcig la/ 'dod pa dang mi 'dod pa rnam par nges par mthong ba ma mthong ba de las zhes bya ba ji ltar na/ don mthong byed pa dag tu 'gyur/ /mi 'gyur ba kho na yin no zhes bya ba'i don to/ /de de ltar na gal te don ji lta ba bzhin du 'dzin par 'gyur na des don de ston par byed par 'gyur gyi 'dres pa'i ngo bo ma 'dres pa'i ngo bor ston par byed pas kyang ma yin no/.*

(‘If [it is said by our opponent that the aspect of an object] which is not seen is obscured [due to karma]. That is, a [single] object may be simultaneously seen by its observers to possess diverse aspects, such as being pleasant or unpleasant, since they are isolated [from the opposing aspect] due to their karma causing them to experience [only] the pleasant or unpleasant aspect. [We reply]: At such a time, then, when one realises a familiar object, one does not come to realise it through the power of the [external] object. Therefore, one does not realise it through the power of the [external] object, as [Dharmakīrti] says: “one does not realise the object in accordance with the reality of the [external] object”, since that [object] possess diverse aspects. Moreover, that entity with a diverse essence, that has a nature that is pleasant and a nature that is unpleasant, was referred to by [Dharmakīrti in the lines] one definitely “sees or does not see” the aspect of “pleasant or unpleasant”. Accordingly, the meaning is that those [apparent] perceivers of [external] objects, do not at all [perceive them].

This very previous position that was refuted by the stainless reasoning [of Dharmakīrti] is accepted by you!

Moreover, since you say “that which previously subsisted as the nature of water, later newly arises as physical pus and blood through the power of the hungry ghost coming nearby”, then as it is said:

Also, if independence on the unseen,
There arises another form,
They [both] would appear,
Since they mutually obstruct [each other]

The one that is obstructed would appear,
Simultaneously with the one unobstructed,
The natures of illumination and non-illumination,
Would be seen and not seen since one would obstruct (the other)

Why can one not see due to this,
That neither [external] objects nor non-objects exist?⁶⁹¹

Your position is thus refuted by all the treatises that teach reasoning!

Likewise, do the three karmic forms (*las gzugs*) within the three vessels mutually obstruct each other, or don't they? If they do not, then at the time [when all three beings are present] all three beings would see all three [substances], because the three are physical, suitable to

If that [external object] were as this [opponent holds], when one comes to grasp the object in accordance with how it exists, that object would thereby be revealed. Yet, it cannot come to be revealed to have an essence that is mixed [with pleasant and unpleasant aspects], and one that is unmixed.’)

⁶⁹¹ Dharmakīrti // *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, D 4210: vol. 174, folio/line 134a.5-6: *gal te der yang mthong med la/ /brten nas gzugs gzhan 'byung 'gyur na/ /de dag rnams ni phan tshun du/ /bsgrib 'gyur de phyir snang ba ni/ /sgrib byed de la gcig snang 'gyur/ /de ma bsgribs na cig car ni/ /gsal dang mi gsal rang bzhin dag /mthong 'gyur mthong med kyis gcig bsgribs/ /gang gis don dang don min med/ /de la ma mthong bas ci byed/*

be observed, and are not obstructed. If they are obstructed, at this time [when they are all present] the eye consciousness of the god would see the colour of the water in that basis, because the colour of the water obstructs the colour of the nectar that exists in that basis.⁶⁹² If it were otherwise, please teach this new manor of explanation, unknown in former times, with regards to the reasonings of Dharmakīrti!

No one but you, [has such a unique reading of] the following [by Asaṅga];

[Since hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and gods have]

Different minds concerning a single entity [each according to their species,

It is maintained that (external) objects do not exist].⁶⁹³

⁶⁹² See Khédrup's explanation of this, chapter 4: 164.

⁶⁹³ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*. The Sanskrit contained in the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* reads: *pretatiryagmanuṣyāṇāṃ devānāṃ ca yathārhatāḥ / tulyavastumanobhedād arthāniṣpattir iṣyate*. (Tatia ed. 1976: 42); Tibetan in D 4048, 16a: *yi dags dud 'gro mi rnam dang/ lha rnam ji ltar rigs rigs su/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ don ma grub par 'dod pa yin/*

Appendix III: List of the Tibetan Personal Names Included in This Thesis in Wylie Transliteration

Kar ma dkon mchog gzhon nu

Kun dga' grags

Kun bzang dpal ldan

Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer

Khri srong lde brtsan/btsan

mKhan chen ldog lhod pa kun dga' bzang po

mKhan po kun dpal

mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang po

Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge

Go rub lo tsA ba chos kyi shes rab

Gong ma grags pa rgyal mtshan

Grags pa rgyal mtshan

dGe ba'i blo gros

dGe 'dun chos 'phel

dGe 'dun grub pa

dGe 'dun rgya mtsho

dGe bshes seng ge rgyal mtshan

mGon po mam rgyal

'Gos chos grub

'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal

rGyal ba mtha' med

rGyal ba'i sras

rGyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen

rGya mtsho'i sde

Ngor chen kun dga' bzang po

rNgog blo ldan shes rab

Chos grags rgya mtsho

'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas

'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po

'Jam dbyangs chos rje bkra shis dpal ldan

'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus

'Jigs med phun tshogs

'Ju mi pham rgya mtsho

rJe btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan

Nyag skyed a mgon mgon po rnam rgyal

Ta'i si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan

sTag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen

Thang stong rgyal po

Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma

Dol po pa shes rar rgyal mtshan

bDud 'joms rin po che

Nag tsho lo tsā ba Tshul khriims rgyal ba

Nor bzang rgya mtsho

Pa tshab lo tsā ba Nyi ma grags

Pad ma dkar po

dPa' ris rab gsal

dPal gyi lhun po

Pho brang zhi ba 'od

Phyogs las rnam rgyal

'Phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan

'Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge

Ban de btsan dra

Bu ston rin chen grub

Bo dong pan chen

Byang chub rgyal mtshan

Byang chub 'od

Bla ma rmi lam pa brtson 'grus seng ge

dBang phyug rdo rje

Mar pa chos kyi blo gros

Mar pa do pa chos kyi dbang phyug

Mi bskyod rdo rje

rMa bya byang chub brtson 'grus

Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa

gTsang pa 'bre sgur/skur

Wang phab zhwun,

Ye shes sde

Ral pa chan

Rin chen bzang po

Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros

Rong ston shes bya kun rig

Rong ban rin chen tshul khrims

Rong zom chos kyi bzang po

lHa bla ma ye shes 'od

Sa skya paN Di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan

Sa chen kun dga' snying po

Sangs rgyas rtse mo

Sad na legs

gSer mdog paN chen shAkya mchog ldan

bSod nams rtse mo

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———. *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana* (*Theg pa chen po bsdus pa'i bshad sbyar*). D 4051.

Āryalaṅkāvatāramahāyānasūtra (*'Phags pa lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*). D 107. (Sanskrit in Vaidya, P.L. 1963).

**Āryamahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* (*'Phags pa yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo*). D 119. (Sanskrit in Waldschmidt 1950).

Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasamgraha*. (*Theg pa chen po bsdus pa*). P 5549, D 4048.

Buddha-avataṃsaka-nāma-mahāvaiṣṭya-sūtra (*sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo*). D 44-45. (For the Sanskrit of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* contained within see Vaidya 1960b).

Candrakīrti. *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*dBu ma la 'jug pa*). P 5262, D 3861. (see, Li, Xuezhū ed., 2015).

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