

Domain of the Illusory: Tsong khapa's Theory of Illusory-like Persons

Loden Jinpa

Introduction

Persons, according to Tsong khapa¹ (1357 - 1419) are illusory-like. They are illusory-like because while existing truly in one sense, they are nonetheless thoroughly unreal. For superior beings² (arya, 'phags pa) this seemingly paradoxical statement is, in fact, a straightforward description of how persons exist in reality. Ordinary beings however, do not apprehend persons as illusory-like. Instead they appear as if ultimately real, existing by way of their own character (rang gi mtshan nyid kyes grub pa) and established through their own power (rang dbang du grub pa). For Tsong khapa these appearances of real persons are false, deceptive and that which perpetuates suffering.

Tsong khapa is the founder of the Gelugpa³ (dGe lugs) school of Tibetan Buddhism and was born in the Tsongkha valley of Amdo province in northeast Tibet. He is arguably Tibet's greatest philosopher with his writing extending into eighteen volumes, much of which has been translated into English⁴. He was also a great poet, monastic reformer and meditator, spending many years meditating in caves throughout Tibet.

Tsong khapa's overall philosophical enterprise and in particular his insight into the illusory-like nature of persons and phenomena is about solving the problem of existential suffering. According to Tsong khapa the solution to this problem is found in the extirpation of the ignorance that reifies intrinsic essence in things and which functions as the root cause of existential suffering. The conception that reifies

essence in persons and phenomena is the root of suffering, as it pervades the cognitive process of ordinary unenlightened beings propelling them into dysfunctional actions. This misconception empowers dysfunctional actions in a self-perpetuating cycle of false appearances and dysfunctional actions. Therefore, his insight into the two-fold illusory-like nature of persons is soteriologically efficacious, both within the domain of the conventional and ultimate nature of persons, because it is the cognitive process apprehending their illusory-like nature, which is the mechanism of the extirpation of primal ignorance, the ignorance which binds ordinary beings to an unenlightened existence.

Much of Tsong khapa's philosophical pondering was spent enquiring into the two-fold illusory-like nature of persons and phenomena and asking questions such as: *what does it mean to be a person? In what sense can we say that today's "I" is the same as the "I" of yesterday* and so on. Therefore, Tsong khapa's philosophical exegesis of the two-fold illusory-like nature of persons interests me because I think he, more than any other Tibetan philosopher, understood Candrakirti's analysis of Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, took the soteriological significance of conventional truth seriously, and paid particular attention to its articulation.

In this essay, I will argue, not only did Tsong khapa correctly understand the Nagarjuna and Candrakirti's emptiness thesis put forward in their Madhyamaka treatises *Mulamadhyamakakarika* and *Madhyamakavatara* respectively, but he also added considerably to the debate on the nature of the two truths and personal identity, by positing validly established conventional persons and phenomena. I will defend Tsong Khapa's theory of illusory-like persons and show that not only is his presentation correct, but that positing intrinsic essence in persons is incoherent. I will also argue, that although intrinsic essence in persons and phenomena does not exist within either domain of the two truths, still nonexistence does not follow. I will do this by arguing that illusory-like persons and phenomena can be validly established within the domain of what the world holds to exist, and that persons and

phenomena are not simply mere fictional constructs of a deluded ignorant mind⁵ or utterly false and deceptive appearances.

Establishing the Real

Nagarjuna in the first verse of the XVII chapter of *Mulamadhyamakakarika* says:⁶

If the self were the aggregates, it would have arising and ceasing.

If it were different from the aggregates, it would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.

And in *Ocean of Reasoning* Tsong khapa says:⁷

If the self – the object of self-grasping – existed inherently, one could not escape two alternatives regarding its mode of existence. Thus we should analyse to determine whether it, through its own characteristics, is identical to or different from the aggregates.

If the self and the aggregates had the same nature, or if the self and the aggregates were entirely different in nature, many incoherent consequences would follow⁸. For Tsong khapa, if the person or self were to possess intrinsic essence or existed inherently, a conventional cognitive process would necessarily establish it at the time of analysing to find such a self. Tsong khapa asserts, since it is not found as one with its parts or separate from its parts, it does not possess intrinsic essence or as Tsong Khapa says: a self of persons is empty of inherent existence.

Self (bdag), *I* (nga), *person* (gang zag) and *being* (skyes bu) are all synonymous. When Tsong khapa speaks of a *self of persons* or self-identity (gang zag gi bdag), he is not referring to the valid conventionally existent self, merely imputed in dependence on its parts – the psychophysical elements. Rather, *self* here means *intrinsically existent self* or *inherently existent self*, while *persons* refers to

the conventionally or nominally existent self. *Intrinsic existence* or *essence* or *nature* (svabhava, ngo bo) according to Tsong khapa, has the meaning of *independence* (rang stobs bltos pa med pa can) or *objective* (yul gyi steng nas grub pa) or *natural* (rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa) existence or *existence under its own power* (rang dbang du grub pa)⁹. Within the various Indian and Tibetan philosophical literature, there are up to twelve different meanings of the term *nature* or *essence*¹⁰. From among these twelve different meanings of *nature* (svabhava, ngo bo), Tsong khapa is mainly concerned with a *fabricated nature* such as the heat of fire, a non-existent *object-to-be-negated nature* (pratisedhya, dgag bya'i rang bzhin), an existent *final nature* (prakrti, rang bzhin chos nyid) and emptiness (shunyata, stong pa nyid). Thus, the term *selflessness of persons* according to Tsong khapa refers to the non-intrinsic existence of conventionally existent persons or a conventionally existent persons lack of intrinsic essence.

Both Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka treatises have used the famed chariot example to illustrate how phenomena exist as mere imputations; existing in dependence on their parts and thus, chariots do not exist intrinsically or inherently. In Tsong Khapa's philosophical treatise Lam rim chen mo (byang chub lam gyi rim pa chen mo)¹¹, he cites Candrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*:¹²

A chariot is neither asserted to be other than its parts, nor to be non-other. It does not possess them. It does not depend on the parts and the parts do not depend on it. It is neither the mere collection of the parts, nor is it their shape. It is like this.

Tsong khapa says it is easier to understand the selflessness of persons by first understanding a chariots imputational nature. But for the chariot analysis to be successful it is vital to establish the pervasion of the seven-fold analysis by the predicate of the thesis. That is, in order to understand the selflessness of persons, it is vital to understand that if the self, I, person or being possessed independent,

objective, natural or intrinsic essence, it would need to exist in one of seven ways¹³. If such a self cannot be found it follows that it does not exist in that way i.e. inherently or intrinsically¹⁴.

Let us now turn to the first of the seven-fold analysis. The first of these is: (1) *the chariot does not exist as one with its parts*. Tsong khapa says: the chariot is not intrinsically one with its parts, such as the axle, wheels, nails and so forth. If it were it would follow, that just as there are many parts to a chariot so too would there be many chariots. Another consequence if the chariot existed as one with its parts would be just as there is only one chariot there would be only one part of the chariot¹⁵. Let's now apply this reasoning to our current analysis of persons.

If a self existed as one with its parts, it would follow that just as there are many parts to a person such as the head, arms, thoughts and feelings, there would be many selves or persons. However, we don't naturally apprehend more than one self. Therefore, if there is only one person that is one with its parts, there must be only one part of that person. This would render such statements as "I hurt my toe" meaningless, as the toe would be the self and the self would be the toe. One could argue however, that when we stub our toe, we naturally think we have hurt ourselves, as if our toe is one with the self. We naturally think, "I hurt myself" even if we shout, "I hurt my toe!" while grasping our toe in our hands. At these times we don't naturally think of the toe as being something separate from ourselves. While this may be true, it doesn't follow from this that the self is one with its parts, for if it were, the feeling of pain in the toe, the toe, the conventional cognitive process apprehending pain and the self would be one. Moreover, if someone were to enquire as to what the problem was, pointing to our toe and saying, "*I stubbed my toe and it hurts!*" would be unnatural for we would in fact be pointing at a self not a toe.

Also, if the self were intrinsically one with its parts, we could isolate each part to analyse that particular part to see if it is in fact the self. We could isolate our head

to analyse its ontology, however, upon doing so, it is clear that the head is not a self or a person; it is a head. The arms are not a self or a person; they are arms. So it follows when we isolate each part separately, if the self existed it would be found during this analytic process. However, such a self is not found and is therefore refuted as being one with its parts. We can see from this analysis that the psychophysical elements, which are the basis of imputation for a self, are not a self.

The next premise of the seven-fold analysis is: (2) *the chariot does not exist separate from its parts*. For Tsong khapa, if a chariot and its parts were intrinsically separate like pot and cloth, just as a pot and a cloth can be apprehended separately, so too could the chariot and its parts¹⁶.

If the self were intrinsically separate from its parts, Tsong khapa asserts, it would be possible to use a conventional analytic process to apprehend the self. This is because the self and its parts would be two distinct phenomena, intrinsically separate. They would be two distinct entities with two distinct ontologies, observable and findable. Using a similar process as before, we could isolate each part of the psychophysical elements to search for this self existing somewhere among its parts, just waiting for us to find it. Yet such a process according to Tsong khapa does not result in the apprehension of a self and thus no self is found. Therefore, the self or person does not exist intrinsically separate from the parts. Moreover, if the self and its parts were intrinsically separate, there would be no logical reason to impute self in relation to its parts. For Tsong khapa, a self that existed separate from its parts, being a separate entity would be unrelated to its parts. If the self and its parts were intrinsically separate entities and therefore unrelated, the following consequences would follow. It would be impossible to make such statements as "I hurt myself" or "I hurt my tongue" when drinking hot tea. This is because the person doing the drinking and the parts, such as the lips, mouth, or tongue are unrelated because of being intrinsically different entities. It would not be the self that is feeling pain, but rather the lips or tongue. Therefore

statements such as "I burnt myself" would be meaningless at best. It follows that the self does not exist separate from its parts because there needs to be a functioning relationship between the self and its parts in order for these statements to be meaningful.

Let us now move onto the third of the seven-fold analysis: (3) *the chariot does not possess its parts*. For Tsong khapa the possibility of intrinsic possession is also untenable. He asserts:¹⁷

If you hold that a chariot possesses its parts like Devadatta possesses oxen i.e., as objects other than himself – then just as oxen and Devadatta are seen separately, a chariot and its parts should likewise be seen separately, yet they are not.

According to Tsong khapa, if there were a self that intrinsically possessed its parts it would be by way of either a separate entity, like a person and his car or as the same entity, as in a person and his ear. If there were a real and findable self that is the possessor of its parts, this would entail that the possessor was either one with that possessed and this would entail sameness of entity, or separate from that possessed and this would entail difference of entity. From sameness of entity, it follows that the self could be found by simply isolating each part to investigate whether *it* is in fact a self or a person. From otherness of entity follows the possibility of the apprehension of the self without the need of its parts. If this were the case, it would be possible for others to apprehend "Loden Jinpa" without the apprehension of some part of my body or the sounds of my voice. Clearly this is not possible.

Someone could raise an objection here: if I do not possess my parts, how can I speak of them? How can I say, "I burnt my lip on this hot cup of tea" if the self does not possess its parts? However, the arguer is conflating mere possession and the possession of parts by an intrinsically existent self. Tsong khapa is arguing for the

nonexistence of an intrinsically existent self, not whether a person *has* lips, nor whether a statement such as “I burnt my lip” has functionality.

We will cover the next two together: (4) *the chariot is not the basis for its parts* and (5) *the chariot is not dependent on its parts*. Tsong khapa says in *Lam rim chen mo*:¹⁸

A chariot is not the basis for its parts, like a bowl holding yogurt, nor does it rest in its parts, like Devadatta in a tent... because such relationships could be demonstrated only if a chariot and its parts were essentially separate.

Mere mutual existence is not being refuted here. For Tsong khapa, what is being refuted is the misconception that an inherently existent self or a self with essence, exists as either the basis for its parts or depends on its parts for its existence. For Tsong khapa the assertion that the self is either the basis for its parts or is dependent on its parts for existence would entail inherent otherness and therefore a difference of entity. Moreover, if the self were the basis for its parts, at what point in time did the self and its parts begin this relationship, during conception or perhaps during the gestation period? Also, how could a self that is either the basis for its parts or is dependent on its parts for existence, be the basis for both physical and non-physical properties¹⁹? If the self were the basis for its parts or dependent on its parts, it would follow that organ replacement would either be impossible or would result in one set of the body-mind complex having two selves. This is because the self of one person would be dependent on the parts of another person for its existence. Therefore the self post-organ transplant would either be an entirely new person or there would be two people existing within one mind-body configuration.

The sixth of the seven-fold analysis is: (6) *the chariot is not the collection of its parts*. At this point the mere collection of the parts of a chariot are posited to be the chariot. However, this is also untenable for Tsong khapa because if this were the

case, it follows that the collection of the parts of the chariot aggregated in a different order or even lying in a heap on the ground would be the chariot²⁰.

There are Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical systems that posit the self to be the mere collection of the body-mind complex²¹. However, if the self were the mere collection of the psychophysical elements, just as the body and mind are constantly changing, the self would also be in a state of constant change. From this it would follow: the self of one moment would be entirely different from the self of the next moment, because if an intrinsically existent self that is changing each moment and exists under its own power, would be unrelated to the self of the next moment because of being an entirely different self from the previous moment. Therefore, statements such as "I remember a time when..." would be impossible, for the self doing the remembering would be remembering an event related to a different self.

Someone might raise an objection at this point by saying: it is not the mere collection of the parts, but rather a particular configuration of parts that make the mere collection, the self. Yet from this position the following would occur. Let's say you had a dog called, Lucky. Lucky is a healthy dog with four legs, a tail and all the right parts in the correct order and therefore according to you a dog called Lucky. One day Lucky gets hit by a car and has one leg removed, yet survives and becomes, Lucky - the three-legged dog. Although Lucky was not so lucky that day, he is still Lucky the dog, the same dog as before, albeit minus a leg. But according to the position of the above objector, Lucky was the mere collection of his parts prior to the accident, that is, according the objector: Lucky was the mere collection of four legs, a tail and so forth. It follows from this that the mere collection of parts in a certain configuration cannot be the self, otherwise pre-accident Lucky would either no longer exist or post-accident Lucky would be an entirely new dog.

The last of the seven-fold analysis is: (7) *the chariot is not the shape of its parts*. If the chariot were the shape of its parts, one could ask as Tsong khapa does, "...is the chariot the shape of the individual parts or the shape of the collection?" If it is the former, it follows that the chariot is the shape of both an axle and a wheel at once²². If it is the latter, then the "Lucky dog" argument ensues, because it would be possible to remove certain parts of the chariot, while leaving the chariot functional.

Turning the last of the seven-fold analysis to our current investigation of persons: if the self were the shape of its parts, would the self be the shape of the individual parts or the shape of their aggregation? If it is the former, it follows that the self is the shape of both the arms and legs at once. If it is the latter, then the "Lucky dog" argument ensues, because it would not be possible to remove certain parts of the person, thereby changing the shape of the collection, without killing that person or creating an entirely new person.

Someone could argue that, although the parts of the self have their own shape prior to their assembly, once assembled correctly, a self appears as the shape of its parts. However from this position it follows: the shape of the parts would be something other than the parts, because the shape has come into being after the assembly of the parts in a particular configuration. That is, the assembly was the preceding cause for the generation of the shape. If that were the case, it would be possible to find this self, which would be a shape when searched for. Simply put, the self is not the shape of its parts because the shape of its parts is a shape not a self. Moreover, what shape is there that can think, "I am hungry"? Clearly a self that is the shape of its parts doesn't even exist conventionally.

After completing the seven-fold analysis some conclude that because one searches for a self but cannot find a self, no self exists. Because for them the self would be utterly non-existent, statements such as "this is *my* chariot!" or "I remember such and such a time" would be utterly meaningless. They fail to see how

a self, person or self-identity can exist and function, if there is not some part or a collection of parts that is the agent or a kind of proxy for a so-called *real* self. For this reason they feel it is necessary to reduce the self to either a single constituent of the psychophysical elements such as the mind or their collection. They claim that if there is nothing with intrinsic, inherent, or natural essence that can act as an agent for a self, then nihilism would follow and this is something that all Buddhists tenet systems wish to avoid.

However the above analytic process searching for an intrinsic self does not affirm the utter non-existence of a self; rather it affirms the non-existence of a particular kind of self, one that for Tsong khapa has never existed, that is, an intrinsically existent self. For Tsong khapa, a self or person possessing intrinsic essence has never existed and will never exist, at either the ultimate or conventional levels²³. Moreover, for Tsong khapa not only is an intrinsic self a nonexistent, so too are its parts. For instance, if we were to take a part that is the basis of imputation of the self, such as the head or thoughts, and submit it to the same seven-fold analysis, it too could not be found existing as one with its parts or separate from them. Accordingly Tsong khapa asserts: persons and phenomena are equally empty of intrinsic existence.

For Tsong khapa the above misconceptions are examples of not correctly identifying the object of negation in Madhyamaka dialectics. What is being negated, under the ultimate cognitive process, is not a conventionally existent self but rather an intrinsic, inherent or naturally existent self, that exists under its own power (*rang dbang du grub pa*) or is established by way of its own entity (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*). It is the referent of the conception that thinks there is or needs to be a truly existent self in order for memories and so forth to function. It is this cognitive process reifying the conventionally existent I that binds one to cyclic existence (*samsara*, 'khor ba). Therefore according to Tsong khapa, its opposite, the cognitive process negation an intrinsically existent self, a self with intrinsic essence, that is

soteriologically efficacious, because it is this authoritative ultimate cognitive process negation an intrinsically existent self, that is the mechanism of the extirpation of primal ignorance, the ignorance that grasps essence in things and is the root cause of existential suffering.

Therefore, the importance of correctly identifying the object of negation is vital in Tsong khapa's dialectic. If one under negates, subtle psychological misconceptions grasping at an intrinsically existent "I" or "mine" will remain within one's mental continuum, and it is these misconceptions that obstruct enlightenment. While if one over negates by thinking "*if a self of persons cannot be found when searched for in the above seven-fold analysis, it follows a self is utterly nonexistent*" will according to Tsong khapa, lead to dysfunctional actions. The misconception that a self of persons is utterly nonexistent further obscures enlightenment as ones thorough misunderstanding of the illusory-like nature of persons is reinforced. Moreover, by thinking that the seven-fold analysis entails the nonexistence of a self, according to Tsong khapa, renders both the path that leads to and the goal of practice, non-existent.

By using the seven-fold analysis, Tsong khapa asserts it is easy to understand how a person exists as a dependent arising (pratityasamutpada, rten 'byung), merely imputed in dependence on its parts. Mere imputation leaves intact conventional functionality without the need of affirming an intrinsic agent. Thus, according to Tsong khapa, to speak of a self, person or I existing as either one with the psychophysical elements or separate to them, not only contravenes conventional usage but, also steps outside of the scope of conventional logic.

Establishing the Unreal

So far we have established that, according to Tsong khapa, if a self along with its constituent parts were to exist outside the domain of mere worldly conventions, such a self could be found existing in one of the above seven ways. We have also

seen the importance of the conventional in Tsong khapa's dialectics. If things were utterly non-existent both the ultimate and conventional cognitive processes that lead a practitioner along the path to enlightenment, being conventionalities would also be non-existent. Given this claim, let us now turn our attention to Tsong khapa's theory of conventional persons and phenomena. How does Tsong khapa delineate conventional truth (*samvrti*, *kun rdzob bden pa*) and how does he reconcile his position with Candrakirti's claim that conventional truths are in fact false and deceptive.

Tsong khapa, in his discussions on conventionalities in *Lam rim chen mo*, cites Candrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara* saying:²⁴

The chariot is not established in the seven ways, either in reality or for the world. Yet without analysis, just for the world, it is imputed in dependence upon its parts.

For Tsong khapa this verse has the following meaning: when the chariot is searched for using the seven-fold analysis the chariot is not established at either the ultimate or conventional levels of reality. This is because under reasoned analysis at both the ultimate and conventional levels such a chariot cannot be found. Most importantly however, when reason fails to establish the chariot as one with its parts, separate from them and so on, this does not refute the chariot's mere existence. As Tsong khapa goes on to say:²⁵

Reasoning that analyses whether things intrinsically exist does not establish the assertion of the chariot; rather, leaving reasoned analysis aside, it is established by a mere, unimpaired, ordinary, conventional i.e., worldly – consciousness.

For Tsong khapa, the chariot's mere existence is established by means of a conventional cognitive process imputing 'chariot' in dependence on what worldly

conventions constitute as being the parts of a chariot. The purpose for the phrase '*in dependence on what worldly conventions constitute as being the parts of a chariot*' is to rule out the possibility of mere subjective imputation. Mere subjective imputation would allow the imputation of horse to the parts of a donkey. Tsong khapa is not asserting mere subjective imputation. In pan-Mahayana parlance the imputational existence of a chariot and the a chariot's lack of intrinsic essence or inherent existence is laid out as the doctrine of the two truths - an ultimate truth (paramarthasatya, dom dam bden pa) and a conventional truth (samvrti, kun rdzob bden pa).

Tsong khapa, closely following Candrakirti, articulates the ontology of phenomena by positing the two truths as two natures (svabhava, ngo bo) of one and the same entity. The claim that the two truths are two natures plays a large role in Tsong khapa's theory of how conventional truths can be false, deceptive and yet a truth. Moreover, his claim that ultimate truth is both a non-affirming negation and is itself also empty of intrinsic essence relies on the two truths being two natures of the same entity.

In *Ocean of Reasoning* Tsong khapa quotes Candrakirti:²⁶

Through seeing all phenomena both as real and as unreal, the two natures of the objects that are found are grasped. The object of the perception of reality is the way things really are. That which is seen falsely is called the conventional truth.

For Tsong khapa, the ultimate reality of the chariot is its 'essence'; therefore it is called its 'nature'. He claims that since things such as the shape and color of the chariot are also called its 'identity', they are also called its 'nature'. Accordingly each phenomenon has two distinct natures: a conventional nature that is apprehended by a conventional cognitive process apprehending a phenomena's false and deceptive appearance, and an ultimate nature that is apprehended by an ultimate

cognitive process apprehending phenomena the way they exist in reality, that is, their lack of intrinsic existence²⁷.

Although direct cognition of emptiness (stong pa nyid) is the sole domain of Superiors ('phags pa), Tsong khapa rejects any suggestion that phenomena such as a chariot or persons are ultimately true for Superiors, while being deceptively true for ordinary beings (so skye). According to Tsong khapa, phenomena such as a chariot or the self are conventionally true for both Superiors and ordinary beings. A person's emptiness of intrinsic existence or lack of intrinsic essence is its ultimate reality, its ultimate nature and hence its ultimate truth, while a person's imputational nature is its conventional reality or conventional nature, and hence it is its conventional truth. Thus for Tsong khapa, ultimate truth and conventional truth are not only apprehended by two distinct cognitive processes, they are two distinct dimensions of one and the same world²⁸.

So that raises the question, if a phenomena's conventional reality is its 'nature' and therefore in a sense true, how can it be false and deceptive? Tsong khapa following Candrakirti puts forward three distinct senses of the term conventional (samvrti, kun rdzob). (1) Samvrti as *worldly conventions* ('jig rten gyi tha snyad), (2) samvrti as *mutually interdependent or mutually supporting* (paraparasambhavana, phan tshun brten pa) and (3) samvrti as *obstructing suchness* (de kho na nyid la sgrib pa). Thupten Jinpa lays out the first and third of these best when he says: samvrti as a worldly convention is "... *the valid framework within which language, concepts, logic, and how the conventions of the world operate*", while the third meaning is "... *that which obscures the ultimately empty nature of things*"²⁹. Perhaps the second meaning, samvrti as *mutually interdependent*, could be rendered as: *a groundless matrix of conventional cognitions that are co-created and mutually supporting within the scope of that which accords with the conventions of the world*. They are 'groundless' in the sense that there is no intrinsic essence or nature within which phenomena are 'held up' and established as valid. It

is the conventions themselves, which setup the framework within which they operate and it is this same framework, which governs their validity. Worldly conventions are what hold the framework together allowing it to remain functional without the need for some kind of intrinsic substratum from within which they can be established as valid or invalid. They are co-created because the imputed phenomena, its basis of imputation and the cognizing consciousness arise simultaneously. They are mutually supporting and interdependent because without one the other cannot exist.

Let us now take a look at the first of these senses of samvrti, that is “*a valid framework within which language, concepts, logic and the conventions of the world operate*”. Tsong khapa citing Candrakirti says: “*worldly conventions have the character of the object of expression and means of expression, knower and the object known*”³⁰. For Tsong khapa, worldly conventions should not be understood simply as subjective conventions. This is because worldly conventions include the terms we give things, the six corresponding consciousnesses³¹ and their referent objects³². Tsong khapa argues this sense of samvrti as worldly conventions should not be taken merely as subjective conventionalities, for if everything were subjective, it would be possible to label a donkey, ‘horse’. Moreover, as Thomas Nagel eloquently says:³³

“The claim ‘everything is subjective’ must be nonsense, for it would itself have to be either subjective or objective. But it can’t be objective, since in that case it would be false if true. And it can’t be subjective, because then it would not rule out any objective claim, including the claim that it is objectively false.”

Therefore, the cognitive resources³⁴ that arise from the mutual contact between the six senses and the six objects are included in this sense of samvrti³⁵. Therefore, the second sense of samvrti as *mutually interdependent* is also included

within the first, *samvrti* as *worldly conventions*. For Tsong khapa it therefore follows, because nothing exists ultimately, yet for the world things function, existence equals conventional existence³⁶.

However if existence equals conventional existence one could ask: how can we establish valid conventional phenomena, if phenomenon cannot be found to exist when searched for either as one with or separate from its basis of imputation i.e. its parts? Put another way, how can a conventional cognitive process, be it direct perception or inference, establish an unfindable nonexistent entity? Although a self cannot be found among its parts or separate from them, for Tsong khapa a self or person's mere existence (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*) is nonetheless established by the certification of an unimpaired conventional cognitive process apprehending that phenomenon³⁷. Although the conventional cognitive process which acts as the certifier of worldly conventions does not exist ultimately, there is no need for a certifier of the certifier because the conventional cognitive process and that which it apprehends are co-created and mutually supporting (*phan tshun brten pa*).

The apprehension of a coiled piece of rope in dim light as a snake can be said to be in accordance with worldly perspectives. Tsong khapa calls such perceptions that which is known to the conventions of the world. For Tsong khapa the meaning of worldly conventions is therefore equivalent to things that are experienced or arise as intentional objects (*dmigs yul*) of consciousness. Because cognitive illusions such as rope-snake are commonplace in the world, they form an integral part of our everyday interactions with the world³⁸. Therefore, Tsong khapa has a broad understanding of what is meant by conventionality (*tha snyad*).

Given this rather inclusive presentation of conventionalities, Tsong khapa needs to delineate some distinction between accurate and inaccurate conventional cognitions, otherwise there will be no method to determine what exists and what does not. Tsong khapa does so by using the conventions of the world to do just that.

While it is clear that a rope-snake is an object that is experienced, how can the conventions of the world determine whether a rope-snake is an existent (yod pa) or a non-existent (med pa)? Though a snake imputed to an actual snake's body and a snake imputed to a rope are both empty of intrinsic existence, without any special analysis the common worldly intellect can easily apprehend which one is an imputedly existent phenomena and thus established as an existent (yod pa), and which one is merely an imputation and thus a non-existent (med pa). By simply approaching phenomena to see if the coordination between the basis of imputation and the imputed object are valid, one can determine based on the conventions of the world whether in fact this imputation is correct or not.

As the former can perform the intended worldly functions of a snake while the latter cannot, the conventions of the world are what establish what exists for the world. However, to exist does not mean to exist for thought alone as coordination between the basis of imputation (snake's body) and the imputed object (snake) is required³⁹. For Tsong khapa, it is both a conventional cognitive process that imputes snake, and a conventional cognitive process that referees the coordination of the imputed object (btags chos) - the snake, with its basis of imputation (gdags gzhi) - the mind and body of an actual snake. Therefore, that which is able to perform its intended worldly function and is not repudiated by another conventional cognitive process is a valid conventional phenomenon for Tsong khapa. Although a rope-snake may perform the function of generating fear it cannot actually bite a person. The conventional cognitive process that apprehends rope-snake is therefore considered to be an inaccurate conventional cognition or wrong consciousness (log shes) and the imputed phenomena, the snake, is a non-existent. By seeing the distinction between these two - snake and rope-snake - one can begin to get a sense by what Tsong khapa holds to be the "truth" of the conventional.

Tsong khapa adds yet another criterion for the validity of conventional phenomena. The assertion is as follows: for conventional phenomena to be valid

conventional phenomena, they must not be invalidated (gnod pa) by a cognitive process pertaining to the ultimate ontological status of phenomena. However, Tsong khapa himself claims that nothing can withstand ultimate analysis, so how is this third criterion meant to be understood? The inclusion of this third criterion is for the purpose of refuting the claims by Buddhist and non-Buddhist realists who posit, as he puts it:

A partless subject and object, a self, a primal essence, a divine creator – such things are imaginary constructs put forward in the unique assertions of Buddhist and non-Buddhist essentialists. When they posit such, they do so after rational analysis of whether such things essentially exist; they think that this sort of rational analysis will discover these things.

Tsong khapa uses the claims of these realists as a means to determine whether they in fact exist. The realists themselves claim that things such as a self, essence or mind-basis-of-all (kun gzhi nam shes) can withstand rational analysis, they must therefore agree that others using rational analysis could find these phenomena. For Tsong khapa when analysed in this way, such things cannot withstand such analysis. Therefore the claims of the Realists are refuted. Although Tsong khapa establishes persons and phenomena in dependence on their basis of imputation, as they are not posited as part of a system in which an analysis of whether they are mere conventions or instead have intrinsic, natural or objective existence, his system is not refuted by this third criterion.

While there are things that are so called “known to the world” yet do not exist even conventionally, examples of these according to Tsong khapa are the above misconceptions of intrinsic existence, soul, primal essence, substantially existent “I” and “mine” conceived by the reifying concept of the perishing aggregates, and the referent object (zhen yul) that yesterday's persons is today's person, Tsong khapa does not accept everything that is known to the world⁴⁰. Moreover for Tsong khapa

and his followers such as Jamyang shaypa (1648-1722), while existence equals conventional existence and are therefore objects of knowledge (shes bya), not all objects of knowledge are necessarily conventional truths⁴¹. Emptiness (stong pa nyid), for example, while being an object of knowledge is not a conventional truth, because it is that which appears to the ultimate cognitive process analysing to find a phenomenon's ultimate ontology. While conventional truth is necessarily (1) samvrti as worldly conventions ('jig rten gyi tha snyad), samvrti as mutually interdependent (phan tshun brten pa), and (3) samvrti as obstructing suchness (de kho na nyid la sgrub pa). Emptiness is not a separate entity from its conventional nature. This is because the ultimate truth is the ultimate mode of being of a person's conventional nature, and the conventional truth is the person's ontological framework within which its ultimate truth is established. Nor is emptiness an absolute truth in the sense of being intrinsically real, for it too cannot withstand ultimate analysis. Thus, ultimate and conventional truths are two natures of the same phenomenon, are coextensive and ontologically mutually entailing⁴².

However, it is not that conventional truth is empty of ultimate truth or that ultimate truth is empty of conventional truth. They are simply different isolates of the same phenomena. This then raises the problem of the 'emptiness of emptiness'. Emptiness of emptiness is the claim that while being the ultimate nature of all phenomena, emptiness itself is not ultimately real in the sense of being an absolute. Perhaps the misconceptions related to the emptiness of emptiness arise because of the infinite regression that this claim entails, or perhaps it is our inability to distinguish the two truths from within their separate cognitive domains simultaneously⁴³ that leads scholars such as Mark Siderits to provocatively state "*the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth*"⁴⁴.

If Siderits is asserting: ultimately, all phenomena including ultimate truth are *conventionalities*, then I agree with his assertion. However, if he is saying that ultimate truth is merely another *conventional truth* simply because it cannot be

found under analysis, this is highly problematic, as it seems to be conflating the epistemic domains of a phenomena's two natures. Nagarjuna's great insight was in fact that there are two truths, not one. Let us unpack this a little.

If ultimate truth was merely another conventional truth, its nature would necessarily operate within the domain of conventional cognitions because as Siderits himself is perhaps claiming; all that exists, are conventional truths. As we have seen, conventional truths have three distinct senses, one of which is that it obscures conventional phenomenon's imputational nature. Ultimate truth does not have this sense. If it were the case that ultimate truth was merely another conventional truth in disguise, then ordinary people without any philosophical training could apprehend a chariot's lack of intrinsic existence. Clearly this does not occur. Secondly, although conventional and ultimate truths in one sense are identical, it doesn't follow that ultimate and conventional truths are similar in every aspect. They differ greatly in some very major ways. By definition conventional truths are conventions and as such they lack stability with regards to their mode of subsistence (*yod tshul*). For example, a conventional truth exists within the domain of that which accords with the world's conventions, and thus their meaning can change. For example, a government may decide to change the rules governing traffic lights. Once this new law takes effect the convention that red means stop and green means go is no longer valid. On the other hand, the non-finding of an intrinsic green traffic light is stable in regards to its mode of subsistence. This is because an analytic process investigating to find a green traffic light as either one with its parts, separate from them, the collection or shape of its parts and so forth, will not find a green traffic light. What is found is the 'non-finding' of the green traffic light and this is its emptiness. It is how the green traffic light ultimately exists, it is its ultimate reality, ultimate nature and hence it is its ultimate truth.

Because the analytic process was not searching for the green traffic light's ultimate truth but rather a green traffic light, it does not follow that the green traffic

light's ultimate truth is ultimately real. If we were to then turn to find the ultimate truth of the green traffic light this too could not be found. What would be found is the emptiness of the emptiness of the green traffic light. While emptiness is itself qualified by emptiness and therefore an infinite regression entails, no fallacy follows because the direct cognition of the emptiness of one phenomenon entails the direct cognition of all emptinesses⁴⁵. Thus ultimately, this is how all phenomena exist including emptiness, and hence this non-finding is their ultimate nature and thus an ultimate truth. In this regard, the 'non-finding' of a green traffic light when placed under ultimate analysis and a green traffic light as a convenient designation are different in more ways than they are similar. Being objects of different kinds of cognition, ultimate and conventional truths reflect different aspects of green traffic lights. The two truths are therefore very different from one another. But it is true that despite their difference in one sense, they are, in an equally important sense, identical. Emptiness, as we know, is an ultimate truth for Tsong khapa. However, emptiness is the emptiness of intrinsic essence or existence, not existence per se. To exist conventionally means to be empty of intrinsic existence. Ontologically, therefore, the two truths are identical. However the point here is: to know phenomena conventionally is not to know them ultimately, because they are objects of different kinds of knowledge, despite a single identity at a deeper level⁴⁶. Therefore, ultimate truth does not entail there is no ultimate truth but rather, there is no ultimately existent essence in things either ultimately or conventionally, and this is their ultimate truth.

So although illusory forms, mirages, reflections, rope-snakes are alike in appearing to the conventional cognitive process apprehending them, and they are alike in being empty of intrinsic existence, because they can be repudiated by another conventional cognition they are not posited as conventional truths. Although real snakes and such are false and deceptive because they do not exist as they appear, a worldly consciousness cannot understand them as false and

deceptive. Because they fall within the scope of the valid framework within which language, concepts, logic, and how the conventions of the world operate, Tsong khapa posits them as truths for the world⁴⁷. Therefore, within the domain of the conventional, it is the epistemic authority of conventional cognitions that governs the distinction between truth and falsehood. While within the domain of the ultimate, it is the epistemic authority of ultimate cognitions that governs the truth *about* the conventional⁴⁸.

Now we move onto the third sense of samvrti - *that which obscures the ultimately empty nature of things*. For Tsong khapa, forms, sounds, smells and tangible things appear to sensory consciousness as though they exist by way of their own intrinsic essence, but the intrinsic essence that appears, does not exist even conventionally. If it did, it would be real and therefore findable either as one with its parts or separate from them. Because this appearance is false Tsong khapa asserts that sensory consciousnesses are mistaken, even conventionally. It is in this sense that conventional phenomena are deceptive, for the appearance of true existence obscures the real nature of phenomena, that is, their lack of intrinsic essence or existence.

Although sensory appearances are false and deceptive, Tsong khapa maintains, it is possible for sensory consciousness to be valid cognitions that posit false objects such as forms, sounds and so forth as mere conventional phenomena. However, all sensory consciousness is mistaken because what appears to a sensory consciousness appears as if it existed from its own side and by way of its own character (rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa), yet no such phenomena exists. The nonexistence of a truly existent object (ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa) is established by the cognitive process analysing phenomena to see whether they exist as they appear. As objects are not established as existing the way they appear, they are mistaken with respect to the appearing object (snang yul)⁴⁹. However the engaged-object ('jug yul) does exist.

Given Tsong khapa's characterisation of the two truths as two dimensions of one and the same phenomenon, if there were no way of establishing the engaged object as a valid conventional existent, it would follow that all conventional phenomena would be utterly nonexistent. This would include the conventional cognitive process apprehending these utterly false appearances. This is because, if phenomena such as persons or chariots are established as nonexistent, because they cannot be found when searched for, it follows that the cognitive process that is performing the analysis is also a nonexistent, for it too cannot be found when placed under the same analytic process. It then follows: all conventional phenomena are nonexistent. However, if all conventional phenomena are nonexistent, and because, as we have already seen, ultimate truth does not exist ultimately, this would entail nihilism. But for the claim that nothing exists to be true, it requires at a minimum, something to exist; that is, it requires the truth of the claim that "nothing exists" to exist. However, for Tsong khapa conventional phenomena do exist even though their appearance to ordinary beings is an appearance of a nonexistent essence and thus false. This false appearance in turn obscures the apprehension of phenomena's actual nature, that is, their lack of intrinsic essence, and so it is also deceptive.

So although Tsong khapa posits sensory consciousness as mistaken, it is not a contradiction that sensory consciousness is valid yet posits false objects. The example often used to illustrate this is the mirage or the magician's illusion. The mirage appears as water to an inexperienced traveler, yet it doesn't exist in the way that it appears. Many Madhyamikas have used this example to illustrate the falsity of conventional truths, and philosophers such as Garfield⁵⁰ have used the mirage example to illustrate the validity of conventional truths. As Tsong khapa in *lam rim chen mo* using the magician's illusion says:⁵¹

Conventionally, we assert all phenomena are like a magician's illusion and are, therefore, false in conventional terms. Still, it is not contradictory to posit them as conventional truths (kun rdzob bden pa, samvrti-satya).

[Candrakirti] Because ignorance obscures the nature of phenomena, we call it the concealer (kun rdzob, samvrti). Hence there is no contradiction in something being true for the concealer, that is, ignorance, and false for the conventional consciousness (kun rdzob, samvrti) with which we refute the intrinsic existence in phenomena.

If we are to take these examples as a method to illustrate how it is possible for a false object to also be a truth, albeit conventional, then the following problem would arise. As Garfield says: “*A mirage appears to be water, but is in fact empty of water – it is deceptive, and in that sense, a false appearance. On the other hand, a mirage is not nothing; it is a real mirage, just not water*”⁵². How are we to understand the example of a mirage put forward to explain how a conventional truth is both a false appearance yet a “truth”? For according to Tsong khapa himself one of the criteria of a valid conventional phenomenon is that it must not be repudiated by another conventional cognition. However, it is clear that both a mirage and a magician's illusion can be, thus rendering them inaccurate cognitions. According to Tsong khapa's own criteria they are therefore like a rope-snake, not conventional truths. A real rope, while not possessing intrinsic essence can nonetheless perform the worldly function of rope. On the other hand, rope-snakes cannot bite, mirages cannot quench thirst and illusory elephants cannot trample crops. Thus, they are not valid conventional phenomena and so cannot be posited as such.

If one compares a mirage or a magical illusion to conventional truth, and cites such as an example of conventional truth, this leaves the relationship between the false appearance of intrinsic essence and the underlying phenomenon's conventional functionality, broken. If we are to take the mirage example literally, then Candrakirti, Tsong khapa and Garfield are suggesting that just like a mirage or a magician's illusion, conventional truths are without conventional functionality and hence they are not true, but rather completely false. This is because while the appearance of intrinsic water is a nonexistent and so cannot perform the function of

water, conventionally existent water that is related to that appearance, does. However, the false appearance of a mirage is unrelated to the conventional functionality of its appearance as water, that is, the relationship between the false appearance of water and its conventional function to quench thirst is broken. As Garfield himself says: "...a mirage is not nothing; it is a real mirage, just not water"⁵³. A mirage does not perform the function of quenching thirst rather; it functions to deceive inexperienced desert travelers. Thus, the relationship between the false appearance of a mirage as water, and water's conventional functionality to quench thirst, is broken. Surely Candrakirti, Tsong khapa and Garfield would be aware of this fact. So why posit such examples? Perhaps the answer lies in the pedagogical domain rather than the epistemic or ontological nature of conventional phenomena. Perhaps what we are being shown here is not that conventional truths are *like* a mirage, but rather like a mirage we can become thoroughly engaged in false appearances, believing them to be as they appear, intrinsically real, and then generating fear or desire and acting accordingly.

Despite the fact that for ordinary beings the apprehended phenomena of conventional cognitions are false appearances and thus mistaken and deceptive, Tsong khapa asserts that the conventional cognitive process nonetheless certifies the basic entity of their objects of knowledge. If it did not, it would follow that the objects of the world would be nonexistent and this would undermine the soteriological efficacy of Tsong khapa's philosophical enterprise, as the two truths are two natures of one and the same phenomena. Still, how can the certification of the basic entity of conventional phenomena such as the person, occur if the person cannot be found when searched for among its parts? One may ask: what is it that is being certified? The answer lies in the conceptual framework of the world's conventions of what it means to be a person and all this entails, such as the ability to think and function *as a person*. It is the worldly conventions themselves that setup this framework and it is the same framework that delineates what a person is, how a

person functions, what it means to be a person and what constituents are required for a certification to be valid. Even the validity of the certification is nothing other than a worldly convention. Thus, the conventional cognitive process is both the certifier and the referee of the certification.

So in a sense the conventional cognitive process, that both sets up and engages in this framework, operates without analysis. It operates only within the context of how given phenomena appear to it. The conventional cognitive process does not analyse to see if phenomena exist as they appear i.e. intrinsically. Tsong khapa calls these conventional cognitions, non-analytical consciousness. Yet as he says "*it is not the case that it is utterly non-inquisitive*"⁵⁴. This is because the conventional cognitive process operates within the context of how things appear or how they are known to a conventional consciousness. It does not operate via analysis of how things actually exist. Therefore, it is called worldly knowledge⁵⁵. Because persons and phenomena posited by the conventional cognitive process are able to perform their intended worldly functions within the scope of that which accords with the conventions of the world, yet do not possess one shred of intrinsic essence, for Tsong khapa, the conventional world is the domain of the illusory.

Conclusion

Tsong khapa's Madhyamaka dialectics are effective in rendering liberation because of the epistemic authority of conventional cognitions within the domain of the conventional, and the epistemic authority of ultimate cognitions within the domain of the ultimate. In other words, by understanding clearly the two-fold nature of persons and phenomena, we begin to eliminate the various levels of deeply engrained misconceptions about ourselves, thereby moving progressively from an unenlightened to an enlightened perspective. These insights into the two-fold illusory-like nature of persons particularly the non-affirming negation of the

ultimate - emptiness, according to Tsong khapa, is what leads to awakening from the slumber of ignorance.

Tsong khapa has shown us that if the self, person or I were to possess real essence, it would follow that an analytic cognitive process could in fact establish a self with essence existing among the psychophysical elements. We have also seen how the seven-fold analysis is an exhaustive presentation of the possible relationship between a self with essence and the psychophysical elements. By following the consequences of the seven-fold analysis, not one with its parts, not separate from its parts and so on, we have seen how such a self possessing essence does not exist in any of these seven ways, and thus is nonexistent.

Yet, although no self can be found, it is clear that for ordinary people the appearance of a self with intrinsic essence does occur. However this appearance is false and deceptive. It is false because persons appear to possess essence, yet do not. It is deceptive because this false appearance obscures persons' real nature, that is, their imputational nature. Moreover, because persons possess conventional functionality they can be said to exist truly, albeit, merely conventionally, for without truth in conventionalities, snakes could not bite, water could not quench thirst, elephants could not trample crops and persons could not read essays.

Bibliography

- Arnold, D. 2006. "On Semantics and Samketa: Thoughts on a Neglected Problem with Buddhism Apoha Doctrine". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34: 415-478.
- _____. 2001. "How to do things with Candrakirti - A Comparative Study in Anti-Skepticism" *Philosophy of East & West* Vol. 51, No. 2, 247-279.
- Blumenthal, J. 2004. *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Santaraksita*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Broido, M. M. 1988. "Verdical and Delusive Cognition: Tsong-kha-pa on the Two Satyas" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16: 29-63.
- Burton, D. 2001. "Is Madhyamaka Buddhism really the middle way? Emptiness and the problem of nihilism" *Contemporary Buddhism*, 2:2, 177 – 190.
- _____. 2000. "Wisdom beyond words? Ineffability in Yogcra and Madhyamaka Buddhism" *Contemporary Buddhism*, 1:1, 53-76.
- Cabezon, J. I. 1988. "The Prasangikas Views on Logic: Tibetan dge lugs pa Exegesis on the Question of Svatantras" *Journal of Indian philosophy* 16: 217-224.
- Candrakirti 1994. *Madhyamakavatara* (Ven. T. Tsultrim trans). Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong khapa Institute.
- _____. 1994. *Madhyamakavatara Bhashyam* (T. Tsultrim trans). Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong khapa Institute.
- Cozort, D. 1998. *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Collins, S. 1982. *Selfless Persons*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Crittenden, C. 1981. "Everyday Reality as Fiction – A Madhyamika Interpretation". *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 9: 323-333.
- Dalia Lama, HH. 1995. *The World Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- _____. 2001. *Stages of Meditation*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____. 2005. *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*. New York: Morgan Road Books.

- Dreyfus, G. 2003. *The Sounds of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Buddhist Monk*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- _____. 2003. *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction: What Difference does a difference make?* Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- _____. 1997. *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakirti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretation*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Duerlinger, J. 1993. "Reductionist and Non-Reductionist Theories of Persons in Indian Buddhist Philosophy" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21: 79-101.
- Fenner, P. 1984. "A Study of the Relationship Between Analysis (Vicara) and Insight (Prajna) Based on the Madhyamakavatara" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12: 139-197.
- Flagagan, O. 2007. *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ganeri, J. 1999. "Self Intimation, Memory and Personal Identity" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27: 469-483.
- Garfield, L. J. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2002. *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2008. "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality". Upcoming publication *Philosophy of East & West*.
- Gyamtsso, T. 2000. *Buddha Nature: The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Gyatso, L. 1992. *The Harmony of Emptiness and Dependent-Arising*. Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Gyatso, J. 2000 *Commentary to Madhyamakavatara Supplement to the Middle Way Volume 1*. Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong khapa Institute.
- _____. 2001 *Commentary to Madhyamakavatara Supplement to the Middle Way Volume 2*. Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong khapa Institute.
- _____. 2002 *Commentary to Madhyamakavatara Supplement to the Middle Way Volume 3*. Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong khapa Institute.

- Hopkins, J. 1983. *Meditation on Emptiness*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- _____ 2008. *Tsong-Kha-Pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 2003. *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism: Dynamic Responses to Dzong-ka-ba's The Essence of Eloquence 1*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- _____ 1987. *Emptiness Yoga: The Tibetan Middle Way*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 2003. *Maps of the Profound: Jam-yang-shay-ba's Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 1995. *Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment Practiced by Persons of Three Capacities*. (unpublished trans).
- Huntington, C. W. 1983. "A 'Nonreferential' View of Language and Conceptual Thought in the Work of Tsong-kha-pa" *Philosophy of East & West* Vol. 33, No. 4, pp 325-339.
- Jinpa, T. 2002. *Self, Reality and Reasons in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsong khapa's Quest for the Middle Way*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- _____ 1998. "Delineating Reason's Scope for Negation: Tsong khapa's Contribution to Madhyamaka's Dialectical Method". *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 26: 275-308.
- Jackson, R. R. 1993. *Is Enlightenment Possible? Dharmakirti and rGyal tshab rjr.* Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Kapstein, M. T. 2001. *Reason's and Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- _____ 1989. "Santaraksita in the Fallacies of Personalistic Vitalism" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 17: 43-59.
- Klein, A. 1986. *Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology in Support of Transformative Religious Experience*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Lamrimpa, G. 1999. *Realizing Emptiness: Madhyamaka Insight Meditation*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

- Lati, R. 1980. *Mind in Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 1997. *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston Wisdom Publications.
- _____ 1985. *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Loden, T. 1996. *The Fundamental Potential for Fundamental*. Melbourne: Tushita Publications.
- Lopez, D. 1988. *Buddhist Hermeneutics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- _____ 1987. *A Study of Svatantrika*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Magee, W. 1999. *The Nature of Things: Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Nagel, T. 1998. "Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem" *Philosophy* Vol. 73 No. 285 p.337-352.
- Napper, E. 1989. *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Newland, G. 1992. *The Two Truths*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 1999. *Appearance and Reality: The Two Truths in the Four Buddhist Tenets Systems*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____ 1984. *Compassion: A Tibetan Analysis. A Buddhist Monastic Textbook*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Parfit, D. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Perdue, D. 1992. *Debate in Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Perret, R. 2002. "Personal Identity, Minimalism and Madhyamaka" *Philosophy of East & West* 52: 373-385.
- _____ 2003. "Future Generations and the Metaphysics of the Self: Western and Indian philosophical perspectives" *Asian Philosophy* 13:1 29-37.
- _____ 1999. "Is Whatever Exists Knowable and Nameable" *Philosophy of East & West*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 401-414.

- _____. 1998. "Truth, relativism and western conceptions of Indian philosophy" *Asian Philosophy*, 8:1, 19 -29.
- Powers, J. 1995. *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Rabten, G. 1992. *The Mind and its Functions*. Le Mont-Pelerin: Edition Rabten Choeling.
- Ruegg, D. 2004. "The Indian and Indic in Tibetan cultural history, and Tsong khapa achievements as a scholar and thinker: An essay on the concepts of Buddhism in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32: 321-343.
- Shaw, J. L. 1978. "Negation and the Buddhist Theory of Meaning". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6: 59-77.
- Siderits, M. 2003. *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- _____. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy an Introduction*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- _____. 2003. "On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness". *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 4 No. 1, 2003.
- _____. 2003. "Deductive, Inductive, Both or Neither?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31: 303-321.
- _____. 1988. "Nagarjuna as Anti-Realist" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16: 311-325.
- _____. 1985. "Word Meaning, Sentence Meaning, and 'Apoha'" *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 13: 133-151.
- Sparham, G. 1994. *Ocean of Eloquence: Tsong khapa's Commentary on the Yogacara Doctrine of Mind*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Sopa, L. 1989. *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Stokhof, M. 2007. "Hand or Hammer? On Formal and Natural Languages in Semantics" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35: 597-626.
- Thakchoe, S. 2007. *The Two Truths Debate: Tsong khapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

- _____. 2003. "The Relationship between the two truths': a comparative analysis of two Tibetan Accounts." *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 4, No 2, 111-126.
- _____. 2007. "Status of Conventional Truth in Tsong khapa's Madhyamika Philosophy" *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 8, No.1, 31-47.
- Tillemans, T & Lopez, D. 1998. "What can one reasonably say about nonexistence? A Tibetan work on the problem of Asrayasiddha" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 26: 99-129.
- Tsong khapa. 2006. *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nagarjuna's Mulamadhamakakarika*. (N Samten and J Garfield, trans.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2005. *Middle Lam rim lam rim 'bring ba. With additional outlines by Trijang Rinpoche* (Philip Quarcoo trans). Pomaia, Italy: Lama Tsong Khapa Institute.
- _____. 2000. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.1 (J Cutler, trans). Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____. 2004. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.2 (J Cutler, trans). Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____. 2002. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 (J Cutler, trans). Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Wallace, A. 2003. *Choosing Reality: A Buddhist View of Physics and the Mind*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- _____. 2007. *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- _____. 2007. *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Williams, P. 1980. "Some aspects of language and construction in the Madhyamaka". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 8: 1-45.
- _____. 1983. "A note on some aspects of mi bskyod rdo rje's critique of dge lugs pa Madhyamaka." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11: 125-145.
- Woo, J. 2000. "Oneness and Manyness: Vacaspatimisra and Ratnakirti on an aspect of causality". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28: 225-231.

Westerhoff, J. 2007. "*The Madhyamaka Concept of Svabhva: Ontological and Cognitive Aspects*" *Asian Philosophy*, 17:1, 17 -45.

NOTES

1 Tsong khapa is the founder of the Gelugpa (dGe lugs) school of Tibetan Buddhism and was born in 1357 in the Tsongkha valley of Amdo province in northeast Tibet. Tsong khapa is arguably Tibet's greatest philosopher with his writing extending into eighteen volumes. He was also a poet, monastic reformer and a meditator. Spending many years meditating in caves throughout Tibet. His early life was filled with study and meditation practice. He received the ordination of a novice monk at the age of eight and was given the name, Losang Drakpa (blo bzang grags pa). At sixteen, Tsong khapa left Amdo to pursue his studies in central and southern Tibet. Initially concentrating on the Perfection of Wisdom sutras and the five treatises of Maitreya, he gained rigorous intellectual training and a wide knowledge of both sutra and tantra during this period. From his twenty-second year he began to study the works on valid cognition (pramana, tshad ma) by Dignaga (5th CE) and Dharmakirti (7th CE). He was deeply impressed by the efficacy of Dharmakirti's system. During Tsong khapa's later years he devoted much of his energy to giving extensive teachings before he passed away in 1419. Tsong khapa made a significant impact on the development of Buddhism. His influence spread throughout Tibet and extended to Mongolia, China and now to the west. He wrote prolifically on both sutra and tantra and his writing style is known for its clarity and elegance. Many of his best known works have been translated into English and remain illuminating, relevant and accessible to this day. Tsong khapa's legacy is profound. He established the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa in 1409, a tradition that continues today. The revitalization of the monastic tradition in Tibet is largely due to his efforts and he was instrumental in establishing many of Tibet's greatest monastic universities including, the three great monasteries of Ganden, Drepung and Sera. But perhaps his largest legacy and one that is most relevant to this essay, culminated during a retreat in the late spring of 1398. Late one night, Tsong khapa dreamt he was present at a gathering of famous Indian masters who were discussing the subtleties of the Madhyamika view. Those present included Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka and Candrakirti. Buddhapalita rose and holding his commentary of Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika in his hands, approached Tsong khapa blessing him by touching his head with the text. The following morning Tsong khapa woke at dawn. Immediately remembering the dream, he proceeded to open his own Tibetan translation of Buddhapalita's commentary, at the page he had been reading the previous day. When Tsong khapa reread the same passage he experienced a deep insight into the nature of reality. He saw for the first time, the nature of the two truths and how persons and phenomena although lacking intrinsic essence, nonetheless exist.

2 Superior being (Arya, 'phags pa) is a technical Buddhist term. It has also been translated as 'Noble being' and is an epithet for anyone who has the direct realization of emptiness. That is, anyone that has developed the direct perception of emptiness is called a 'superior being'.

3 The Four school of Tibetan Buddhism are (1) Nyingma, The Ancient Ones. This is the oldest, the original order founded by Padmasambhava. (2) Kagyu, Lineage of the Buddha's Word. This contains one major subsect and one minor subsect. The first, the Dagpo Kagyu, encompasses those Kagyu schools that trace back to Gampopa. In turn, the Dagpo Kagyu consists of four major sub-sects: the Karma Kagyu, headed by the Karmapa, the Tsalpa Kagyu, the Barom Kagyu, and Pagtru Kagyu. There are further eight minor subsects, all of which trace their root to Pagtru Kagyu. Among the eight subsects the most notable of are the Drikung Kagyu and the Drukpa Kagyu. The once obscure Shangpa Kagyu, which was famously represented by the 20th century teacher Kalu Rinpoche, traces its history back to the Indian master Niguma, sister of Kagyu lineage holder Naropa. This is an oral tradition which is very much concerned with the experiential dimension of meditation. Its most famous exponent was Milarepa, an eleventh century mystic. (3) Sakya, Grey Earth, headed by the Sakya Trizin, founded by Khon Konchog Gyalpo, a disciple of the great translator Drokmi Lotsawa. Sakya Pandita 1182–1251CE was the great grandson of Khon Konchog Gyalpo. This school very much represents the scholarly tradition. (4) Gelug, Way of Virtue, whose spiritual

head is the Ganden Tripa and whose temporal head is the Dalai Lama. Successive Dalai Lamas ruled Tibet from the mid-17th to mid-20th centuries. This order was founded in the 14th to 15th century by Je Tsong khapa, based on the foundations of the Kadampa tradition. Tsong khapa was renowned for both his scholasticism and his virtue. The Dalai Lama belongs to the Gelugpa school, and is regarded as the embodiment of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. For more on the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism see *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, Powers 1995.

4 Six main scriptures by Tsong khapa are the prime source for the studies of the Gelug tradition, are as follows: The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo), The Great Exposition of Tantras (sNgag-rim chenmo), The Essence of Eloquence on the Interpretive and Definitive Teachings (Drnng-nges legs-bshad snying-po), The Praise of Relativity (rTen-'brel bstodpa), The Clear Exposition of the Five Stages of Guhyasamaja (gSang-'dus rim-linga gsal-sgron) and The Golden Rosary (gSer-phreng). Each Gelug monastery uses its own set of commentarial texts by different authors, known as monastic manuals (yigcha). The teachings of Tsong khapa are seen as a protection against misconceptions in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. Gelugpas take *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* as their heart teaching. For more see *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, Powers 1995 p.467.

5 According to Dr. Sonam Thakchoe the following philosophers are all monists and held the view that conventional truth was in fact completely false and that ultimate truth is an absolute truth that exists intrinsically. These philosophers include; Longchen Rabjam, Shakya Chogden, Taktsang Lotsawa, Mipham Rinpoche, Karmapa Mikyo Dorje and Gedun Chopel. While modern scholars holding similar views include; Lindtner, Singh, Stecherbatsky and Mutri. See Thakchoe, S. 2007. *The Two Truths Debate: Tsong khapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way*. p.42

6 Garfield, L. J. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. P.48.

7 Tsong khapa. 2006. *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. (N Samten and J Garfield, trans.). New York: Oxford University Press. P.372

8 Ibid. p. 373.

9 Hopkins, J. (1983). *Meditation on Emptiness*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. P.175

10 There are up to possible twelve different meanings of the term 'essence' or 'nature' found within Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical literature of India and Tibet. (1) nature that is the underlying principal of the universe; (2) nature that is one of the five principals that are involved in the workings of causality; (3) fundamental nature of the universe; an aspect of the god Krsna; (4) nature that is a person's uncommon character within their caste and qualities; (5) nature that allows things to arise causelessly; (6) a nature that is the basic principal of the universe, that is unmanifest and present in all phenomena; (7) nature in the context of the three-natures (ngo bo nyid gsum) of the Mind-Only school of Buddhism; (8) Fabricated nature; (9) A non-existent object-to-be-negated nature; (10) emptiness; a final nature that all phenomena possess; (11) a conventional nature; (12) an independent nature (rang bzhin gyi sku). For more on nature see Magee, W. 1999. *The Nature of Things: Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World*. P.25-27.

11 Lam rim chen mo (byang chub lam gyi rim pa chen mo) translates as *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* and was composed in the year 1402. Tsong khapa composed this encyclopedic treatise as a means of presenting the entire path to enlightenment, from a spiritual aspirant's initial engagement through to Buddhahood. It has remained as relevant today as then, spawning hundreds of commentaries both in Tibetan and English. For a translation of this text see Tsong khapa 2000-2004.

12 Tsong khapa. (2002). *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 (J Cutler, trans). Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications. P.279

13 (1) The chariot does not exist as one with its parts; (2) the chariot does not exist separate from its parts; (3) the chariot does not possess its parts;(4) the chariot is not the basis for its parts and (5) the chariot is not dependent on its parts;(6) the chariot is not the collection of its parts; (7) the chariot is not the shape of its parts.

14 Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* p.175

15 Tsong khapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.279

16 Ibid p.279

17 Ibid p.279

18 Ibid p.279

19 "I believe that there is a necessary connection in both directions between the physical and the mental, but that it cannot be discovered a priori. Opinion is strongly divided on the credibility of some kind of functionalist reductionism, and I won't go through my reasons for being on the antireductionist side of that debate. Despite significant attempts by a number of philosophers to describe the functional manifestations of conscious mental states, I continue to believe that no purely functionalist characterization of a system entails—simply in virtue of our mental concepts—that the system is conscious". Nagel, "Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem" (1998), p. 337. Nagel's view clearly shows that even in the Western philosophical tradition there is still much debate over the nature of consciousness.

20 Tsong khapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.280

21 According to Jetsun Chogyi Gyeltsen the textbook author of Sera Je monastic university in his *Presentation of Tenets* treatise: Most of the eighteen sub-schools of the Great Exposition School (Vaibhashika) assert the mere collection of the psychophysical elements to be the person. However proponents from the Western region of the Great Exposition School (Vaibhashika) assert and mental consciousness to be the person, and the Kashmiris proponents of the Great Exposition School assert it is the continuum of the psychophysical elements. In the Sutra tenet system (Sautrantika) some assert the mental consciousness and others the continuum of the psychophysical elements to be the person. The Mind-Only school (Chittamantra) False aspectarians assert the person to be the mere mental consciousness. While the True Aspectarians assert a foundational-consciousness or the Mind-basis-of-all (Alaya-vijana, kun gzhi nam shes) to be the person. For the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka the person is the mental consciousness, and for Prasangika, as we have been shown in this essay, the person is the mere "I" imputed in dependence on the psychophysical elements.

22 Tsong khapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.280

23 Ibid p.283

24 Ibid p.283

25 Ibid p.283-284

26 Tsong khapa. 2006. *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. P.483

27 Ibid p.483

- 28 Jinpa, T. 2002. *Self, Reality and Reasons in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsong Khapa's Quest for the Middle Way*. New York: Routledge Curzon p.151
- 29 Ibid p.152
- 30 Hopkins. 2008. *Tsong-Kha-Pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications p.109
- 31 Eye consciousness (mig gi rnam shes); ear consciousness (rna ba'I rnam par she's pa); nose consciousness (sna'I rnam shes); tongue consciousness (lce'I rnam par she's pa); body consciousness (lus kyi rnam par she's pa); mental consciousness (yid kyi rnam shes);
- 32 Forms (gzugs), sounds (sgra), tastes (ro), aromas (dri), tactile objects (reg bya), ideas (chos kyi skye mched).
- 33 Nagel, T 1997. *The Last Word*. New York: Oxford University Press 1997, p.15.
- 34 The six senses – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and intellect – their six corresponding objects – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects and ideas – and the six consciousnesses – visual, auditory, olfactory.
- 35 Thakchoe, S. 2007. *The Two Truths Debate: Tsong khapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way*. Boston: Wisdom Publications p.55-56.
- 36 Jinpa. *Self, Reality and Reasoning in Tibetan Philosophy* p. 156
- 37 Hopkins. *Meditation on Emptiness* p.540
- 38 Jinpa. *Self, Reality and Reasoning in Tibetan Philosophy* p. 156
- 39 Hopkins. *Meditation on Emptiness* p.542
- 40 Tsong khapa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.180
- 41 For on this see Hopkins 2003. *Maps of the Profound: Jam-yang-shay-ba's Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications. P.896
- 42 Thakchoe S 2007 *Status of Conventional Truth in Tsong khapa's Madhyamika Philosophy*, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 8:1 p.31
- 43 This is something that enlightened beings are capable of doing but for non Buddhas, it is one or the other.
- 44 Siderits, M. 2003. "On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness". *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 4 No. 1, 2003. P.11
- 45 Hopkins. *Meditation on Emptiness* p.406
- 46 Garfield. 2008. "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality". p.14-15
- 47 Tsong khapa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.174
- 48 Garfield. 2008. "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality". p.4
- 49 Tsong khapa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.172-173
- 50 Garfield. 2008. "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality".
- 51 Tsong khapa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol.3 p.175

52 Garfield. 2008. "*Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality*". p.3

53 Ibid p.3

54 Tsong khapa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment. Vol.3* p.178-179

55 Ibid p.178-179