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Fake Truths: Jetsünpa, Gorampa, and Sectarian Polemics in Tibet

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in Religious Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Fake Truths: Jetsünpa, Gorampa, and Sectarian Polemics in Tibet

By

Michael Ium

In this essay I explore a portion of a polemical text authored by the influential fifteenth to sixteenth century Geluk thinker Sera Jetsün Chöki Gyeltsen (Se ra rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan). Jetsünpa rose to prominence as a renowned teacher and abbot of Sera Jé (Se ra byes) college who authored college textbooks (*yig cha*) still in use to this day at Sera Jé, as well as Ganden Jangtsé colleges. The text is a polemical response to an attack by the Sakya thinker Gorampa against Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Geluk school. The portion I focus on concerns the central topic of the two truths in Madhyamaka philosophy. I seek to understand the way in which sectarian differentiation was articulated as differing modes of philosophical exegesis, as well as exploring what role the sociopolitical context in Tibet may have played in the formation of sectarian identity.

Introduction

For hundreds of years, one of the most striking features of Tibetan Buddhism, both in Tibet and as an export commodity, has been the persistence of sectarian divisions. These divisions have manifested in the religious sphere as competing lineages of philosophical exegesis and charismatic authority. The different sects have also competed with one another for students, patronage, and socioeconomic power. At times, sectarian affiliations have also played a role in the political sphere, as different sects have vied for political power by currying favor with Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan political and military leaders.

My own interest in this topic is in understanding the early formation of sectarian differentiation in Tibet in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A guiding principle of this work is that sectarian “identities are not descriptive, but polemical constructs,” and emerge in a dialectic with one another.¹ Primarily, I am interested in how sectarian differences were articulated philosophically as differing systems of philosophical exegesis. Secondly, in terms of the creation and growth of sectarian institutions, I am interested in exploring what role the sociopolitical context in Tibet may have played in their development. In this way, I hope to mirror the approach of Kevin Vose and balance what he terms “a doxographer’s impulse” with “a historian’s impulse,” keeping in mind, as he does, that the development of philosophical “schools” cannot be divorced from the development of “schools” in a more

¹ Nathan McGovern, “Buddhists, Brahmans, and Buddhist Brahmans: Negotiating Identity in Indian Antiquity” (Dissertation, UCSB, 2013), 56.

basic sense, that of the actual monasteries in which “particular texts and doctrinal interpretations were valorized and taught.”²

As a case study, I explore a polemical text composed by the Geluk thinker Sera Jetsün Chöki Gyeltsen (Se ra rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1469-1544), commonly known by the moniker Jetsünpa. Jetsünpa rose to prominence as an influential teacher and abbot of the monastic college of Sera Jé (Se ra byes), where he taught for almost thirty years and composed texts on a wide range of subjects.³ His college textbooks (*yig cha*) are still in use to this day at Sera Jé, as well as Ganden Jangtsé (Dga' ldan byang rtse) colleges. His disciple and biographer Delek Nyima (Bde legs nyi ma, fl. 16th century) portrays Jetsünpa as a master of oral debate, defeating opponents both within and outside the Geluk fold. And, in fact, Jetsünpa is arguably best known for his polemical rejoinders to three influential thinkers from rival traditions: the Sakya scholars Gorampa and Śākya Chokden (Śākya mchog ldan, 1428-1507), and the eighth Karmapa of the Karma Kagyü sect, Mikyö Dorjé (Mi bskyod rdo rje, 1507-1544).⁴ José Cabezón has described Jetsünpa as not only one of the Geluk tradition's chief apologists, but as “the greatest [Geluk] intellectual of his respective

² Kevin A. Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 13, 12.

³ His textual corpus comprises seven volumes, with emphases in *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Madhyamaka*, and doxographical literature.

⁴ Delek Nyima depicts Jetsünpa defeating Sakya opponents in debate on two separate occasions, as well as clarifying Tsongkhapa's doctrines for other Geluk monks. See Elijah S. Ary, *Authorized Lives: Biography and the Early Formation of Geluk Identity* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2015), 73, 75. The responses to Gorampa and Śākya Chokden comprise two parts of a single work, the details of which will be provided below. The response to the eighth Karmapa is the *Gsung lan klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*, a critique of the Karmapa's commentary on *Prajñāpāramitā*, his *Don gsal 'grel chen*.

generation.”⁵ Although often cited tangentially in studies of other figures, Jetsünpa’s philosophical works themselves have yet to receive sustained attention.

As one of the preeminent Geluk intellectuals of the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, Jetsünpa played a central role in the formation of a sectarian Geluk identity. Specifically, I argue that the early formation of central aspects of orthodox Geluk identity were heavily influenced by the writings of Jetsünpa and his students. Working within the genres of hagiography, textbooks, and polemics, Jetsünpa and his students articulated a model of Geluk identity that recognized Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) as the sole authoritative Tibetan interpreter of the Indian tradition, marginalized other sects, and inculcated doctrinal adherence through the medium of college textbooks. Rather than the work of Tsongkhapa himself, several core features of Geluk identity that persist to the current day are the result of the work of Tsongkhapa’s enterprising spiritual grandchildren. Finally, this development was given urgency by a fractious socio-political context in which Tibetan aristocrats and monastic institutions shared an interest in establishing themselves as centers of power, with the catholicity that marked earlier generations of religious study displaced by increasingly contentious sectarian differentiation.

In his illuminating study of Tibetan monastic education, Georges Dreyfus discusses the strong role of orthodoxy in the Geluk tradition, one that emphasizes doctrinal correctness as a principal rhetorical strategy, and affirms Tsongkhapa as the “sole inheritor of Indian

⁵ José Ignacio Cabezón and Geshe Lobsang Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes: Gorampa’s ‘Distinguishing the Views’ and the Polemics of Emptiness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 55-56.

Buddhism.”⁶ In studying the development of this facet of Geluk identity, Elijah Ary has demonstrated how the genre of hagiography (*rnam thar*) was used to elevate the stature of Tsongkhapa, his disciple Khedrub (Mkhas grug dge legs dpal bzang) (1385-1438) and Jetsünpa within the nascent Geluk lineage.⁷ In brief, he describes a historical development wherein the earliest biographies of Tsongkhapa depict him as a human, albeit intimate disciple of Mañjuśrī.⁸ It is only later that the Geluk tradition begins to depict Tsongkhapa himself as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī.⁹ Surprisingly, this shift in figuration does not occur in a biography of Tsongkhapa, but in one centred on Tsongkhapa’s disciple Khedrub. In a similarly deferred fashion, the earliest Geluk histories depict Tsongkhapa’s main disciples in a variety of ways (with Khedrub receiving little special attention), and it is not until the 16th century that Khedrub is depicted as one of Tsongkhapa’s main spiritual heirs, in the form of a

⁶ Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (USA: University of California Press, 2003), 321.

⁷ Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 2015.

⁸ Ibid., 11-38. Specifically, Ary portrays the relationship in this way: “He is a follower who pays homage to the deity as his *vidam*, or ‘tutelary deity,’ and who is blessed with visions and revelations from Mañjuśrī,” 15. In Tsongkhapa’s own *Realization Narrative* (*rtogs brjod*), he describes Mañjuśrī as a “Treasury of Wisdom” and his spiritual guide. In Khedrub’s own biography of Tsongkhapa, *The Entryway of Faith* (*dad pa’i ’jug ngogs*), Tsongkhapa communicates with Mañjuśrī through the medium of Lama Umapa. There are Mahāyāna antecedents to the practice of having direct encounters with buddhas within meditation, and receiving teachings from them, such as in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*. See Daniel Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahāyāna* (USA: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 9. Later Boucher notes the modern Thai master Acharn Mun (1870-1949) is also said to have had visions and received instructions from buddhas and famous arhats (75-76). In response to this form of ‘divine’ legitimation of Tsongkhapa’s teachings, Gorampa makes the bold claim that Tsongkhapa was in fact communing with a demon! See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 201.

⁹ Ary argues this shift occurred in the span of a few decades, illustrating how rapidly the formation of Geluk identity was taking place.

triumvirate with Tsongkhapa and Gyaltsab.¹⁰ Significantly, Khedrub is first depicted as one of Tsongkhapa's closest disciples in a biography authored by Jetsünpa, who considered himself a member of Khedrub's lineage.¹¹ Noting that the status of a disciple is intimately tied to those of his teachers and lineage, Ary concludes that these elevations of Tsongkhapa and Khedrub arose out of a twofold motivation on the part of Geluk hagiographers. In a broad sense, the elevation of Tsongkhapa to the level of a deity suggests his philosophical system has a divine origin, and is thus above reproach. More narrowly, by asserting Khedrub to be Tsongkhapa's preeminent disciple and exegete, Jetsünpa gained the authority needed to displace the textbooks of Sera Jé's founder, Lodrö Rinchen Sengé (Blo gros rin chen seng ge) (late 14th-late 15th centuries), whose teachings deviated from Khedrub's interpretation of Tsongkhapa.¹² Thus through the medium of hagiography, early Geluk writers like Jetsünpa

¹⁰ Ary, 47. Drawing on Lechen's (Las chen kun dga' rgyal mtshan) *Lamp Illuminating the History of the Kadam Tradition* (bka' gdams chos 'byung gsal ba'i sgron me) (composed circa 1494), Ary points out that Dulzin Drakpa Gyaltsen ('dul 'dzin grags pa rgyal mtshan) (1374-1434), and not Khedrub, was paired with Gyaltsab as Tsongkhapa's two chief spiritual heirs. This triumvirate is known as the "rje yab sras gsum," or "the three: father and sons."

¹¹ Specifically, Khedrub is described as one of Tsongkhapa's prophesized three chief disciples, as having been entreated in prior rebirths to take birth in Tibet to spread Tsongkhapa's doctrine, and as having received five special visions of Tsongkhapa after the latter's death. See Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 59-66.

¹² Ary locates the shift in Tsongkhapa's status from human to deity in a biography of Khedrub titled *Short Biography of the Omniscient Khedrup* (*Mkhas grub thams cad mkhyen pa'i rnam thar bsdu pa*), composed by an alleged disciple of Khedrub named Chöden Rapjor (Chos ldan rab 'byor) of which little is known. See Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 41. For a full translation see: pp. 107-120. In particular, Khedrub usurps the place of Dulzin Drakpa Gyaltsen ('dul 'dzin grags pa rgyal mtshan) (1374-1434) amongst Tsongkhapa's two closest disciples (*rje yab sras gsum*). There are also aspersions cast against the orthodoxy of Jamyang Chöje ('jam dbyangs chos rje bkra shis ldan) (1379-1449) and Gungru Gyaltsen Sangpo (gung ru rgyal mtshan bzang po) (1383-1440) for advocating the doctrine of extrinsic emptiness, see p. 101. Finally, the claim that Khedrub was Tsongkhapa's most important disciple is also made in Chöden Rapjor's biography of Khedrub, where it states: "It is clear

enhanced the stature and authority of religious figures within their own lineage, and articulated a vision of Geluk identity based upon strict adherence to the teachings of Tsongkhapa, the divine and singular interpreter of Indian Buddhism.

Ary also links this hagiographical project to machinations on the part of Jetsünpa and his students to acquire the authority necessary to displace the textbooks of Lodrö Rinchen Sengé at Sera Jé. In general, textbooks are central to both the education and socialization of Tibetan monks at the “three seats,” the preeminent monasteries of the Geluk tradition.¹³ In terms of pedagogy, Dreyfus has described the curriculum of Tibetan monastic scholasticism as a commentarial hierarchy of three layers. The first layer consists of canonical Indian works composed by authoritative figures such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, the second layer consists of Tibetan commentarial works authored by a sect’s authoritative figures, such as Tsongkhapa and Gorampa, and the third layer consists of college textbooks.¹⁴ Providing “easily digestible summaries” of the material contained in the other layers, textbooks function in such a way that their interpretations are “read back into the root text, which is

that Tsongkhapa appeared chiefly for the purpose of mentoring Khedrup exclusively, and the latter appeared for the sole purpose of upholding Tsongkhapa’s teachings” (trans. pp. 45-46).

¹³ The three seats comprise the monasteries of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. It should be noted that Cabezón estimates less than 25% of the monks at the three seats would focus on study, with the bulk of the remainder employed as workers. See José Cabezón, “An Introduction to Sera’s Colleges,” accessed on May 19th, https://mandala.shanti.virginia.edu/places/637/text_node/15988/nojs.

¹⁴ Dreyfus, *Two Hands Clapping*, 106-108. In a similar vein, Ary has described the three layers of text in Geluk education centers as concentric rings, with the outermost ring composed of Indian works, the middling ring composed of authoritative Geluk commentaries by Tsongkhapa as well as his chief disciples, and the third ring composed of textbooks. See Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 7-8.

assumed to implicitly contain them.”¹⁵ Implicit in this strategy is the marginalization of other sects, whose alternative interpretations of the root texts are either omitted, or merely presented in order to be refuted. Since the main motivation of textbook authors was to “confirm the fundamental coherence of Tsongkhapa’s system,” the education of Geluk scholastics is mediated by their textbooks in such a way that alternative viewpoints are marginalized, and one “ends up believing what [one] is supposed to [believe].”¹⁶ In this way, textbooks provided a means for the institutionalized and wide-scale indoctrination of orthodox Geluk teachings. Shaping Geluk education for hundreds of years, Geluk monastic colleges have tended to focus attention on the textbooks, displacing the canonical Indian works themselves.¹⁷

This indoctrination is enhanced by processes of socialization in monastic institutions. It would be an overstatement to assert that Geluk scholastic education is averse to critical thought, and Cabezon has argued that oral debate has largely replaced commentary in bringing intellectual vitality to the tradition.¹⁸ That said, the reliance of monks for their education, room and board on the corporate body of the monastic institution instills a sense of loyalty to one’s college, one that includes by extension the doctrines contained in one’s

¹⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹⁶ Ibid., 208, 323.

¹⁷ Guy Newland, “Debate Manuals (*Yig cha*) in dGe lugs Monastic Colleges,” in ed. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 203. José Cabezón makes a related point when he notes that from about the year 1700, and once the main textbooks had been authored, virtually no new Geluk commentarial literature is composed. See: José Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 84.

¹⁸ Ibid.

college textbooks. In the context of public oral examinations, a monk is expected to espouse the interpretations contained in the textbooks of one's own college, or be accused of disloyalty in the form of "letting go of his manuals," and "kicking the bowl [from which he is fed]." ¹⁹ Given the importance of lineage as a socio-religious marker, criticism of the textbooks of one's college was seen as "attacking the overall value of these institutions and their legitimacy." ²⁰ As Joseph Walser has observed in the context of the early development of the Mahāyāna, "What may serve as a *descriptive* statement from a philosophical point of view can simultaneously be understood as having an *injunctive* function from an institutional point of view." ²¹ In this way, the genre of textbooks provided a medium by which both the philosophical education and institutional socialization of Geluk monks took place within the sect's most influential monasteries.

To reiterate, Jetsünpa was an early Geluk authority who composed influential textbooks at one of the Geluk tradition's most influential monasteries. In addition, he contributed to the elevation of Khedrub as one of Tsongkhapa's preeminent disciples and exegetes through the medium of hagiography. Finally, as a member of Khedrub's lineage, Jetsünpa shared his preoccupation with doctrinal consistency and penchant for polemics. ²²

¹⁹ Dreyfus, *Two Hands Clapping*, 315-316. Although Dreyfus does cite the case of Geshe Palden Drakba openly defying the views contained in the textbooks of Loseling, he nonetheless faced public censure for doing so.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

²¹ Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 10.

²² Cabezón has described Khedrub's synthetic work on Madhyamaka, his *Stong thun chen mo* (*A Dose of Emptiness*), as a largely polemical work, and as bridging the gap between Tsongkhapa's works and the later textbooks. See José Cabezón, *A Dose of*

Elijah Ary has argued that Jetsünpa's move to displace Lodrö Rinchen Sengé's textbooks was part of a wider push to obviate ambiguities in early Geluk interpretations of Tsongkhapa's works. There are both textual and oral descriptions in which Khedrub is said to have upbraided other disciples of Tsongkhapa for teaching their students incorrect doctrines, such as the "other-emptiness" (*gzhan stong*) view often linked to the Jonang sect.²³ By refuting the interpretations of contemporaneous Geluk teachers, Khedrub and Jetsünpa forcefully articulated a vision of Geluk identity in which heterogenous interpretations of Tsongkhapa's works on Madhyamaka were rejected, a clear precursor to the orthodoxy that would come to define the tradition.²⁴

In a parallel fashion to that mode of intra-sectarian dispute, the genre of polemics was utilized by Jetsünpa to demonstrate the superiority of Tsongkhapa's tradition over against the false doctrines of *other sects*, a process Markus Viehbeck has termed 'boundary work.'²⁵ As

Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the sTong thun chen mo of mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1993), 4-6.

²³ According to Thu'u bkwan's *Crystal Mirror*, the disciple Gungruwa was refuted by Khedrub for teaching Tsongkhapa's "version of emptiness as an affirming negation." See: Thuken Losang Chokyi Nyima, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought*, trans. Geshe Lhundub Sopa with E. Ann Chavez and Roger Jackson, ed. Roger Jackson (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 273. Also in an oral communication with Elijah Ary, the abbot of Sera Mé asserted that Khedrub rebuked Jamyang Chöjé for espousing extrinsic emptiness, or "other-emptiness." See Ary, *Authorized Lives*, 94-95. Although the historicity of these events may be questioned, at a minimum they represent evidence for how the Geluk tradition came to understand its own doctrinal positions with regards to other sects.

²⁴ This is not to deny that there are still points of tension in the interpretation of Tsongkhapa's works amongst his immediate disciples and later generations of Geluk students, comprising points of disagreement amongst various textbooks. It is to say that those heterogeneous views that came to represent markers of sectarian identity, such as 'other-emptiness,' were repudiated.

a case study, I examine a portion of Jetsünpa's polemical response to a critique offered by the influential Sakya thinker Gorampa Sönam Sengé (Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge, 1429-1489) on the views of Tsongkhapa, the founder of Jetsünpa's Géluk tradition.²⁶ In describing the nature of sectarian disputes in Tibet in the fifteenth century, Yaroslav Komarovski has stated:

The strongest and most intricate disputes were going on between Geluk and Sakya thinkers. This was partly caused by the fact that they developed a more or less common technical language, focused on similar philosophical issues, but provided strikingly different interpretations of such key subjects as logic, epistemology, Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, and Tantra. The fact that Tsongkhapa and his two chief disciples, Gyeltsap Darma Rinchen and Khedrub Gelek Pelzang, studied with Sakya scholars further contributed to the sophistication and subtlety of debates between Sakya and Geluk.²⁷

Along with the shared philosophical context which will be elaborated upon below, it is striking that the most vociferous disputes occurred between two sects, the Geluk and Sakya, whose forebears had studied together mere decades earlier. In fact, Dreyfus notes that students at some institutions “seem to have examined [Sakya Paṇḍita's] and [Tsongkhapa's]

²⁵ Markus Viehbeck, *Polemics in Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism: A Late 19th-Century Debate Between 'Ju Mi Pham and Dpa' Ris Rab Gsal* (Wien: Arbeitskreis Für Tibetische Und Buddhistische Studien, 2014), 71. Specifically he defines boundary work as, “the delineation of the (perceived) correct view of his own tradition, placed in contrast to the false views of others.”

²⁶ Cabezón has described Gorampa as one of the great systematizers of the Sakya exoteric tradition, one whose texts hold a place in the Sakya curriculum to the present day. See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 41.

²⁷ Yaroslav Komarovski, *Visions of Unity: The Golden Paṇḍita Shākya Chokden's New Interpretation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 20. Influential Sakya critiques of Tsongkhapa were offered by Rong ston shes bya kun rig, Shākya mchog ldan, and Stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen, among others. Most notably, Tsongkhapa and his disciples were all pupils of the Sakya teacher, Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros (1349-1412).

systems without clearly differentiating between the two.”²⁸ This catholic atmosphere would vanish once Khedrub, who was active in enforcing orthodoxy to Tsongkhapa’s teachings, assumed leadership.²⁹

As a theoretical model for the development of sectarian differentiation, Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that “otherness” is a “matter of relative rather than absolute difference. Difference is not a matter of comparison between entities judged to be equivalent, rather difference most frequently entails a hierarchy of prestige and ranking.”³⁰ He suggests that this difference is drawn most sharply with “near neighbors,” or “proximate others,” whose “otherness” is necessarily an interactive, relational, and essentially political category.³¹ He writes:

A “theory of the other” rarely depends on the capacity “to see ourselves as others see us.” By and large, “we” remain indifferent to such refractions. Rather, it would appear to imply the reverse. A “theory of the other” requires those complex political and linguistic projects necessary to enable us to think, to situate, and to speak of “others” in relation to the way in which we think, situate, and speak about ourselves.³²

This way of thinking about the ‘other’ sheds light on the dialectical nature of the development of sectarian differentiation in Tibet. In this context, polemical texts in the

²⁸ Georges Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 36.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” in ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest Frerichs, *To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: Christians, Jews, “Others,” in Late Antiquity* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 15.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 48.

fifteenth century provided a medium whereby an “other” sect was conceived of in ways that also fertilized, and helped crystallize the conception of one’s own identity. In so doing, Geluk thinkers such as Khedrub and Jetsünpa established their sectarian identity in such a way that solid boundaries were drawn between the doctrinal systems of different sects, belying the diffuse and catholic nature of religious life mere decades earlier. In this way, the ‘near neighbors’ constituted by the Sakya and Geluk sects engaged in the complex philosophical and socio-political projects which enabled themselves to be placed in a hierarchy in relation to one another; through the medium of polemics, they spoke into existence the differences that came to define their respective sects.

As literary and philosophical projects based in monastic institutions, the establishment of an orthodox Geluk identity was one of cultural elites in Tibet. Tsongkhapa himself enjoyed the patronage of the Pakmodrupa leader Drakpa Gyeltsen in the founding of Ganden monastery, and in inaugurating the annual Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa.³³ The Pakmodrupas shared an interest in promoting clerical learning and proper legal and ethical conduct, and the pageantry of the Great Prayer Festival evoked a sense of Tibet’s Imperial history and conferred status upon its aristocratic patrons.³⁴ In this time period, the efforts of religious elites in formulating a sectarian identity was inextricably linked to a tumultuous socio-political context in which various factions in Tibet were competing for ascendancy. Far from Lhasa, and outside the circle of influence of the three seats, sectarian differences may

³³ Significantly, five of the most significant Geluk monasteries were founded in the region of Ü surrounding the capital of Lhasa, that is to say within the sphere of influence of the Pakmodrupa regime. These include Ganden, Sera, Drepung, and the two major tantric colleges Gyutö and Gyumé.

³⁴ Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 102, 121.

have been less vehement. Indeed, belying Jetsünpa's attempts to purify heterodoxies from a nascent Geluk identity, evidence for the commingled development of Tibetan religious history remains on the grounds of Sera Jé itself, where the central temple in the college is devoted to the deity Hayagrīva, whose transmission derives from the Nyingma sect.³⁵ This temple is a reminder of the catholic relations that once existed between religious sects in Tibet. In a similar vein, along with supporting Tsongkhapa the Pakmodrupas were also formal supporters of the Kagyu sect, and there are also contemporary textual accounts of cordial relations existing between Geluk and Sakya monks.³⁶

This irenic atmosphere was not long-lived, as Jetsünpa himself lived during a tumultuous period marked by religious and political conflict. The decline of the Pakmodrupas led to a fragmentation of political power, which had consequences for religious orders as well. The Rinpungpas rose to power in western Tsang region, and, upon assuming control of Lhasa in 1498, forbid Geluk monks from participating in the Great Prayer Festival, transferring control to Kagyu and Sakya monks. Although ostensibly a case of religious partisanship, Kapstein instead ascribes this suppression to political expedience, arguing that the Rinpungpas simply did not want to allow the assemblage of large crowds of men loyal to the Pakmodrupas.³⁷

³⁵ See José Cabezón, "An Introduction to Sera's Colleges."

³⁶ For instance, a biography of Khedrub contains an account in which, at the tender age of sixteen, he is called upon to defend the Sakya tradition from criticism, and the debate is said to have possessed "an air of open-mindedness... with neither party insistently holding onto his own views dogmatically." See Cabezón, 1993, 15. Elsewhere, Komarovski has noted that as late as 1439, Sangpu monastery hosted both Geluk and Sakya monks side by side. See Komarovski, *Visions of Unity*, 28.

³⁷ Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 130.

In stark contrast to earlier textual accounts which depict monks from multiple sects studying alongside one another, or engaging in open-minded debate, the increase in political tensions is mirrored by an increase in hostile rhetoric in a variety of textual sources. For instance, the aforementioned biography of Khedrub (authored by Jetsünpa) reports that Sakyapas such as Gorampa’s teacher Rongtön (Rong ston shes bya kun rig) “resorted to black magic” against Tsongkhapa and his disciples, and that Rongtön was fearful of engaging in debate with Khedrub and fled in disgrace.³⁸ Conversely, Komarovski reports a Sakya perspective in which Pakmodrupa leaders ordered Śākya Chokden to study with Geluk teachers at Sera against his will, an affront which angered his peers, who advised him to return to Nalendra monastery and study with Rongtön.³⁹ Although the historicity of these events may be questionable, they reflect the ethos of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century in Tibet, in which the socio-economic fortunes of different sects were increasingly linked to one’s success in philosophical disputation. Alongside the increasingly hostile rhetoric found in hagiographies and histories, this sectarian differentiation is most starkly apparent in the proliferation of polemics in this time-period.

The Polemical Context

I am interested in studying polemical texts as both philosophical and social documents. As a genre, polemics is well-suited for philosophical analysis. In describing the commentarial literature of the later Nyingma (*rnying ma*) philosopher Mipham (1846-1912), Viehbeck

³⁸ Cabezón, *Dose of Emptiness*, 17-18.

³⁹ Komarovski, *Visions of Unity*, 28-29. Komarovski draws on a hagiography of Śākya Chokden composed by Kunga Drolchok (*kun dga’ grol mchog*), entitled *Paṇḍita chen po shākya mchog ldan gyi rnam par thar pa zhib mo rnam ‘byed pa*.

describes Mipham’s project as one of “shaping the face of Rnying ma philosophy,” by “[distinguishing] its view from those of other traditions or scholars.”⁴⁰ In this way, polemical literature brings to the fore salient features and central doctrines of a tradition.⁴¹ In addition, as a social document polemical texts serve as roadmaps for what group identities were salient in a given social context, and how they defined themselves in relation to other groups.⁴² They function as “both the parent and the child of sectarian identity-formation,” giving birth to sectarian identity by articulating core principles of allegiance, and also receiving nourishment, that is to say institutional support and scholarly interest, from partisan groups.⁴³ When this institutional support is threatened, polemical texts may even become orphans, as was the case when Gorampa’s works were banned in Central Tibet by the government of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁴⁴ In sum, Jetsünpa’s polemical works contain evidence for how doctrinal differences were articulated within a nascent Geluk social identity, representing a historically contingent manifestation which was only possible in a social world in which Tsongkhapa’s tradition was on the rise, but had not yet solidified into orthodoxy.

Jetsünpa’s text is titled *Dispelling the Darkness of False Views: A Treatise which Refutes Misconceptions regarding the View of Emptiness, the Profound: a Response to the*

⁴⁰ Viehbeck, *Polemics in Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*, 71.

⁴¹ Cabezón has noted this is particularly the case due to the distinctively apophatic quality of polemical literature. See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 6.

⁴² This function continues to the present day, as the contemporary Tibetan scholar, President of Maitripa College, and alumni of Sera Jé college Yangsi Rinpoche indicated to me that most of the scholars at Sera Jé have read the polemical works of Jetsünpa.

⁴³ Cabezón, *Freedom From Extremes*, 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

Arguments of the Spiritual Friend, Gowō Rapjampa (henceforth *Response to Go*).⁴⁵ It comprises one half of a polemical work, with the other half aimed at another influential Sakya thinker, Śākya Chokden. According to the colophon, the majority of the text was composed by Jetsünpa, who then instructed his disciple Delek Nyima to study with other teachers and to complete it himself. I will return to this curious case of dual authorship below, as it represents a crucial element of how I interpret this text as a philosophical and social document. The date of completion is not recorded, but it was likely composed some time after Jetsünpa became Abbot (*mkhan po*) of Sera Jé in 1511.⁴⁶ It was composed at the hermitage of Phabongkha near Lhasa, a site itself emblematic of the vicissitudes of religion in Tibet.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Zab mo stong pa nyid kyi lta ba la log rtoḡ 'gog par byed pa'i bstan bcos lta ba ngan pa'i mun sel zhes bya ba las bshes gnyen go bo rab 'byams pa'i rtsod lan*

⁴⁶ The evidence is fragmentary, but this date is suggested by the following. First, Delek Nyima's profile on the *Buddhist Digital Resource Center* states that he travelled to Central Tibet and completed his studies there with Jetsünpa. Second, *The Treasury of Lives* entry for Sera Jé states that Jetsünpa became the fifth Abbot of the college in 1511, whereas before this date he was teaching in Tsang (as a correction, Cabezón has noted in a private communication that the term for the head of a college at that time was Master (*slob dpon*), and not Abbot (*mkhan po*)). Unfortunately, this still leaves a timespan of decades in which Jetsünpa was teaching at Sera, and Delek Nyima could have studied with him there.

⁴⁷ Originally the site was founded as a military fort for the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo (*srong btsan sgam po*) in 643. After this it served as a gathering site for tantrikas, before being converted to a monastery that housed the first seven ordained Tibetan monks in the time of King Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde'u btsan*, late 8th century). In the time of the Kadampas (11th century), Potowa (*po to ba rin chen gsal*) transmitted Kadam teachings there, and in the time of Sakya hegemony, it remained under Sakya control for about two hundred years (roughly 13th-14th centuries). Finally, in Delek Nyima's time it was converted into a Geluk institution (early 16th century). In serving historically as a military site, a site for unaffiliated tantrikas, and then as monastic sites under a succession of institutional auspices, this site suggestively mirrors the development of hegemonic socio-religious forces in central Tibet. See José Cabezón's "Pabongkha Hermitage," accessed on May 19th, 2017, http://www.thlib.org/places/monasteries/sera/hermitages/pdf/sera_herm_pabongkha.pdf.

In the opening to the work, Jetsünpa states that his motivation for writing a refutation of Gorampa's work is altruistic, designed to benefit those readers who have been led astray by Gorampa's errors.⁴⁸ In describing the structure of polemics in Tibet, Cabezón has observed they are often structured in a manner resembling the argument/response format of oral debate, and also that polemical elements are often found in texts that are either of mixed-genre (such as commentaries or Collected Topics) or non-polemical (such as epistles).⁴⁹ As indicated by the title and opening to the work, Jetsünpa's *Response to Go* considers its own function to be that of answering critiques made by Gorampa.

Gorampa's own text is an example of a mixed-genre polemical work. It is ostensibly a commentary on the "difficult points" contained in Candrakīrti's *Entrance to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*), entitled *Dispelling False Views: A General Synopsis of [Candrakīrti's] Entrance to the Middle Way and an Investigation of the Difficult Points of each of its Subjects* (henceforth *Investigation*).⁵⁰ It was composed at the monastery Tanak

⁴⁸ For a translation, see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Polemical Literature (*dGag lan*)," in *Tibetan Literature*, eds. José Ignacio Cabezón & Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996), 217. Cabezón and Lopez have both noted that Tibetan Buddhist polemics are often rhetorically formulated as arising from the author's compassion. Cabezón describes altruism as "the polemicists' ostensible motivation," whereas Lopez links the polemicists' motivation to write to the Buddha's "pondering whether or not to teach after his attainment of enlightenment." See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 15 and Lopez, "Polemical Literature," 219.

⁴⁹ See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 11-18.

⁵⁰ *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i dkyus kyi sa bcad pa dang gzhung so so'i dka' gnas la dpyad pa lta ba ngan sel*. The second half of the title is translated following the translation of Ven. Dr. Tashi Tsering and Jürgen Stöter-Tillmann. See Go bo Rab 'Byams pa Bsod nams Seng ge, *Removal of Wrong Views: A General Synopsis of the 'Introduction to the Middle' and Analysis of the Difficult Points of each of its Subjects*, trans. Tsering and Stöter-Tillmann (Kathmandu: International Buddhist Academy, 2005).

Thubten Namgyel (Rta nag thub bstan rnam rgyal), which must have occurred some time after its founding by Gorampa in 1473. Significantly, this monastery was financed by Rinpungpa leaders, and Cabezón suggests this was a period in which Gorampa was “trying to bring greater attention to himself as the great defender of the [Sakya] faith, and greater visibility to his new institution as a bastion of [Sakya] orthodoxy.”⁵¹ In the context of the commentarial hierarchy that marks scholastic philosophical study in Tibet, Gorampa’s text represents a second-level commentary on a first-level Indian root text. As such it also elucidates an orthodox Sakya presentation of Madhyamaka exegesis. However, Jetsünpa viewed this text as an attack on Tsongkhapa, objecting that the text was one “[in which] he denigrated the master Tsong kha pa without measure and offered many apparent refutations, citing for the most part [Tsongkhapa’s own] great commentary [on Candrakīrti’s text, entitled] *Illumination of the Intention (Dgongs pa rab gsal)*.”⁵² Indeed, both Gorampa and Tsongkhapa’s commentaries on Candrakīrti’s work contain critiques of other modes of exegesis, whether implicit or explicit. Thus, Gorampa also considered himself to be defending his own tradition from external critiques.

This discussion highlights two key features of the polemical context of these writers: 1) the hermeneutical nature of the dispute, and 2) their shared scholastic context. Reviewing polemical literature as a whole in Tibet, Viehbeck delineates three general sources of dispute: practices, texts, and doctrines.⁵³ Briefly, polemics over practices concern the suitability of certain practices (such as sexual rites, meditation, or human sacrifice), polemics over texts

⁵¹ Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 44-45.

⁵² Lopez, “Polemical Literature (*dGag lan*),” in *Tibetan Literature*, 217.

⁵³ Viehbeck, *Polemics in Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*, 43.

concern the authenticity of Buddhist texts (such as the Nyingma tantras), and polemics over doctrines concern the correct presentation of Buddhist doctrine (occurring both within and between sects).⁵⁴ However, Viehbeck’s strict separation between polemics over texts and doctrines occludes the defining feature of the polemical exchange that is the subject of this study, its strongly hermeneutical nature.⁵⁵ Rather than a debate over the authenticity of individual texts or the correctness of individual doctrines, our figures are engaged in a dispute over the correct interpretation of a shared canon. Specifically, in our context this dispute centers on the correct interpretation of Candrakīrti’s *Entrance to the Middle Way*, and the assessment and implications of its Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view. The dispute over the correct interpretation is a hermeneutical one, and the dispute over the assessment and implication of its doctrines is more strictly philosophical. In emic terms, the dispute centers on the interpretation of scripture (*lung*) and on what constitutes correct logic or reasoning (*rigs pa*).⁵⁶ In shifting the focus from a dispute over texts and doctrine to one of interpretation, this approach foregrounds the way in which the crystallization of sectarian traditions of interpretation led to “the invention of two traditions of exegesis that share little overlap.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43-47.

⁵⁵ Cabezon states as much with regard to another of Gorampa’s works, saying it is “as much a polemic over the interpretation of texts as it is a polemic over tenets.” See *Freedom From Extremes*, 50.

⁵⁶ In his *Auto-Commentary to the Entrance*, Candrakīrti writes concerning stanza 6.3: “Holy Nāgārjuna, having mastered the scriptural texts, in his “Treatise of the Center,” with great perspicuity demonstrates, through reasonings and [scriptural] references, the nature of things as it really is.” Translation found in: Chandrakīrti, *Autocommentary on the ‘Introduction to the Centre,’* trans. Jürgen Stöter-Tilmann and Dr. Tashi Tsering (Sarnath: Sattanam Printers, 2012), 62.

⁵⁷ Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti*, 83.

That said, Gorampa and his opponents also have a great deal in common with regards to doctrinal and methodological presuppositions, and these presuppositions can be broadly characterized under the heading “scholasticism”.⁵⁸ There appears to be a consensus among Western scholars on the characterization of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual tradition as “scholastic.”⁵⁹ In arguing for the usefulness of “scholasticism” as a cross-cultural analytic category, Cabezón highlighted several features of scholasticism, two of which are essential in the context of our dispute: 1) a concern with language (scripture), and 2) rationalism.⁶⁰

With regards to scripture, in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual context a strong sense of tradition manifests in a reverence for canonical texts, the meanings of which must be elucidated and transmitted by authoritative religious figures. To this point, Dreyfus has argued that one of the characteristics of scholasticism is “text-centeredness: that is, it structures its knowledge, under the guidance of commentaries, around the appropriation of key texts.”⁶¹ These texts are so essential to the scholastic process that they are “not merely

⁵⁸ Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes*, 50.

⁵⁹ For instance, Ruegg describes the period following the Classical period as a Scholastic period (16th century onwards) marked by: “a period of philosophical consolidation and elaboration...comprising continued textual-exegetical and systematic-hermeneutical activity, largely within the bounds of the various established *chos lugs*. See David Seyfort Ruegg, *Three Studies in the History of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka* philosophy (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische Und Buddhistische Studien Universität, 2000), 6. Elsewhere, Georges Dreyfus applies the term to the scholarly dimensions of the Tibetan monastic experience; see Dreyfus, *Two Hands Clapping*, 160.

⁶⁰ The complete list comprises eight elements: 1) a strong sense of tradition, 2) a concern with language, 3) proliferativity, 4) completeness and compactness, 5) the epistemological accessibility of the world, 6) systematicity, 7) rationalism, and 8) self-reflexivity. See: José Cabezón, *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 4-6.

⁶¹ Dreyfus, *Two Hands Clapping*, 99.

important to the field...but constitutive of it. For example, for Tibetan scholars Madhyamaka philosophy is unthinkable without Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* and Candrakīrti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*.⁶² We see this text-centredness at play in our dispute, as Candrakīrti's text provides the locus for Tsongkhapa, Gorampa, and Jetsünpa's respective hermeneutical and philosophical exegeses.

Contrasting rationalism in this context with a modern scientific rationalism, which is always willing to discard prior theories, Dreyfus defines rationalism here as one embedded in the textual tradition. Thus, although rationalism indicates that a “reasonable person bases his or her judgments on the assessment of the reasoning that supports it,” in this scholastic context the validity of reasoning “necessarily remains within the parameters determined by the basic texts.”⁶³ So in the context of our dispute, it is most reasonable for our authors to cite relevant passages from works by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti and offer reasons for how to best interpret them; in fact it would be unreasonable for them to argue in any other fashion. In these ways, the scholastic and commentarial tradition informs our study as one of tradition-minded, text-centred, and rational exegesis.

In this vein, Jonathan Z. Smith has argued for a redefinition of canon as the product of dual cultural processes: “limitation and of overcoming that limitation through ingenuity.”⁶⁴ Using the analogy of foodstuffs, he suggests different cultures adopt an arbitrary foodstuff

⁶² Ibid., 100.

⁶³ Ibid., 296, 305.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 52.

(such as the potato in Ireland) and thus limit the ‘canon’ of their diet, but are also able to overcome this limitation through the ingenuity of cuisine, adopting a multitude of techniques and modes of preparation.⁶⁵ His approach is an anthropological one, and critiques earlier historians of religion such as Mircea Eliade who sought to define religious phenomena in terms of an ‘irreducible, sui generis’ nature, and thus robbed human cultures of agency in the choosing of their canons.⁶⁶ Although a valid criticism of prior historians of religion, Smith’s depiction of canonization as an arbitrary process itself robs culturally-situated historical actors of agency in eliding the historical processes that lead to limitation. For instance, the canonicity of Candrakīrti’s texts in Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophy may seem arbitrary at first glance, owing to the widespread lack of attention paid to his works in the Indian context.⁶⁷ However Kevin Vose has recently linked Candrakīrti’s popularity in Tibet to a long series of historically contingent, and thus not arbitrary processes. These include the popularity of tantric authors bearing the names Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in the eleventh century, and the efforts of the Tibetan translator Patsab Nyima Drak in establishing an intellectual community in Tibet centred around Candrakīrti’s texts.⁶⁸

That said, Smith’s secondary argument concerning the role of ingenuity in canonization is relevant to this study: to what degree did commentators in Tibet engage in creative exegesis? I will argue that as polemical works concerned with delineating the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁷ Beginning in the seventh century, Kevin Vose argues Candrakīrti’s works were “largely ignored in his day and for some three hundred years in both India and Tibet.” See Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti*, 17.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Chapters 1-2.

boundaries of their traditions, Gorampa and Jetsünpa's works are more concerned with *eisegesis* than with *exegesis*, reading into the Indian root texts the modes of interpretation that would come to define their sects for hundreds of years, and thereby crystallizing their respective sectarian identities. In his essay on the cult of the goddess Kubjikā in Nepal, Mark Dyczkowski describes the worship of *digu* stones in Newari religion. Functioning as the aniconic site of lineage deities, and placed in locations to mark tribal boundaries, a *digu* stone can be connected to a specific lineage, moved to different locations, and even serve as the locus for the invocation of multiple deities, "even when the stone is already 'occupied' by another deity."⁶⁹ In a similar vein, the root texts of the Indian tradition were transmuted by the philosopher's stone of the scholastic imagination in Tibet, and used to mark the boundaries of sectarian groups who invoked their own lineage authorities in their contest over these loci of religious authority.

The Response to Gorampa

Serving as the battleground for our polemical dispute, Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātara* (*Entrance to the Middle Way*) is a commentary on the meaning of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, as well as the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. Next, as second-order commentaries on Candrakīrti's text, both Tsongkhapa and Gorampa's works follow its general structure, with each author providing an explanation of the import of Candrakīrti's work.⁷⁰ Finally, as a direct refutation of Gorampa's commentary, Jetsünpa's *Response to Go*

⁶⁹ Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, *A Journey in the World of the Tantras* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004), 208-213.

⁷⁰ The general format of Candrakīrti's work is a division into ten chapters that each represent one of the ten bodhisattva stages. As a philosophical text, the longest chapter is chapter six, concerning the teachings on Wisdom.

also follows Gorampa's arguments in a linear fashion, and attempts to refute them by demonstrating ways in which his arguments contradict authoritative scriptures, and contain faulty reasoning.

In line with my interest in Jetsünpa's text as both a philosophical and social document, I am interested first in understanding the hermeneutical and philosophical issues that are at play in his refutation. Secondly, I examine whether his arguments are openminded or dogmatic, using as a criterion whether it is "necessary to accept certain doctrines or principles *without question*"?⁷¹ As I will demonstrate, Gorampa could certainly take issue with several of Jetsünpa's arguments, as they contain dogmatic claims that would only be authoritative within a Geluk hermeneutical framework. If correct, this raises important questions regarding the social context of Jetsünpa's work; if not Gorampa, who was the intended audience? Who was the author, and what was the purpose of its composition?

As alluded to earlier, I believe the dual authorship of the *Response to Go* provides a key insight into its dual role as both a philosophical and pedagogical work, one composed in the service of sectarian identity formation. The colophon states that the majority of the text was composed by Jetsünpa, who then instructed his student Delek Nyima to study with other

⁷¹ This definition of dogmatism is taken from Sara McClintock's study on rationality in the Indian context of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, Indian forebears whose commitment to reasoned exegesis of scripture is a forebear to that of our Tibetan figures. See Sara L. McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla on Rationality, Argumentation, & Religious Authority* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 114. With regards to these Indian forebears, Cabezón describes Kamalaśīla as a quintessential "defender of the faith," whose polemical argumentation in his *Bhāvanākramas* "became for later Tibetan polemicists a model of what a sophisticated doctrinal/philosophical polemical text should look like." See Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 21.

teachers and to complete it himself.⁷² If it was the case that the main purpose of the *Response to Go* was philosophical, and directed towards a Sakya audience, the presence of dogmatic forms of argumentation would vitiate the effectiveness of its arguments for any neutral, or non-Geluk arbiter. Since its social context was a fractious one in which multiple sects were competing for the support of wider religious and aristocratic populations, it would seem ineffective to utilize dogmatic arguments in doing so.

If, however, the main purpose of the *Response to Go* was pedagogical, serving to indoctrinate Geluk students such as Delek Nyima, and to define Geluk identity in such a way that its hermeneutical and doctrinal features were starkly delineated, then dogmatic forms of argumentation would be highly effective. This interpretation of the text's purpose is bolstered by the testimony of the contemporary Geluk scholar and graduate of Sera Jé, Yangsi Rinpoche, who has said that most students at Sera Jé study the *Response to Go*, but very few would read Gorampa's works themselves.⁷³ This indicates that Geluk students serve as the

⁷² The complete colophon reads as follows:

The glorious and holy lama Jetsün Chöki Gyeltsen, who is inseparable from Mañjuśrī, composed the majority of the text. However, there was a small portion to be completed, and since leaving that would be inelegant, he told me “you should finish the remainder.” This king and lord of men had vast knowledge in all sciences, and by the power of his great merit, this great king of dharma held dominion over the vast earth, and possessed the moniker ‘Auspicious One.’ He assiduously bestowed oral transmission upon me, and said I should go and study similarly with many teachers of the *pitakas*, so I earnestly applied myself to this. I, the *bhikṣu* of Śākyamuni Delek Nyima, studied the scriptural tradition of the Madhyamaka at length, and, due to the blessings of the holy lamas, gained expertise in the Noble Father and Son's (i.e. Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva's) good system. I prepared the text at Phabongkha, the abode of Lokeśvara. Due to this, may the great and precious teachings flourish, and may there be immense benefit for all beings!

⁷³ Oral communication, Spring 2014. Yangsi Rinpoche trained in the monastic system for over twenty-five years and completed the degree of Geshe Lharampa in 1995.

core audience of the work, with few concerned with familiarizing themselves with Gorampa's divergent positions. Serving in this way as both a philosophical and pedagogical text, the *Response to Go* also demonstrates the indefinite nature of textual genres in Tibet; both polemics and college textbooks operate as pedagogical tools for Geluk students, and inculcate sectarian identity by elucidating the correct way of interpreting canonical texts, and by marginalizing alternative commentarial approaches.

With regards to the philosophical dispute itself, Candrakīrti explains in the sixth chapter of his work that in order to attain wisdom, one needs to rely on the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who have eliminated for themselves the cataract of nescience.⁷⁴ Secondly, since the teachings that are contained in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Daśabhūmika Sūtras* are difficult to understand, one must rely on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, which demonstrates the nature of reality through flawless reasoning and scriptural references. Finally, Candrakīrti asserts that he himself must express it in accordance with Nāgārjuna's tradition.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, the second-order commentaries of Tsongkhapa and Gorampa consider themselves to be authoritative upholders of Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka tradition, one inaugurated by Nāgārjuna and his disciple Āryadeva.⁷⁶ However, there are

Recognized as the reincarnation of Geshe Ngawang Gendun, he is currently the President and Professor of Buddhist Studies at Maitripa College.

⁷⁴ Chandrakīrti, *Autocommentary*, 61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁶ Tsongkhapa states both his fidelity to these teachers, and the need to correct mistaken interpreters in the opening to his *Illumination*, writing:

Homage to the honourable Chandrakirti and Shantideva, Who completely and perfectly revealed the path / Of the great sage [Buddha], subtle and hard to realize, The extraordinary essentials of Nagarjuna's system... In order to

fundamental philosophical and hermeneutical differences in how they interpret Candrakīrti's work.

Delving deeper, the context of Candrakīrti's exegesis of the 'two truths' is one in which the non-arising of phenomena is being delineated. Specifically, Candrakīrti is seeking to explain how things arise in the world, and the range of epistemic authority held by ordinary people, whose senses naively inform them that one thing arises from another (like a tree arises from a seed). Therefore, Candrakīrti seeks to explain the ontological status and epistemological accessibility of all phenomena in the world, by way of the doctrine of two truths.

Before delving into Jetsünpa's specific arguments, it would be useful to provide a general background for the differences in Tsongkhapa and Gorampa's presentations of the two truths.⁷⁷ Sonam Thakchoe has provided a detailed study of the philosophical and

remove the corruptions by the pollutions / Of interpretations by most who sought to teach this system / And because others have requested it I will explain at length".

Translation found in Tsong-ka-pa, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (London: Rider Books, 1980), 95-96. In a similar vein, Gorampa writes in the opening to his *Removal of Wrong Views* (trans. Tsering and Stöter-Tillmann, p.10):

I prostrate before Candrakirti, whose fame, since he illuminated the garland of the water-lilies of Nagarjuna's presentations with the moon rays of his excellent elucidations, pervades the three realms of existence. Fearing the garland of the words of his tradition, the blue colour of the middle of the ocean, millions of pretentious scholars have failed to gain access to the fathomless. But one whose intellect firmly holds to reference and reasoning, like a captain to his boat, and is then well moved by the superior intention, like a boat by the wind, is bound to obtain the jewel of the profound meaning.

⁷⁷ Sonam Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007).

hermeneutical differences that divide Tsongkhapa and Gorampa's systems. Put most simply, their modes of exegesis of the two truths oppose one another directly. On the one hand, Tsongkhapa's presentation of conventional and ultimate truth seeks to harmonize their ontological status and soteriological importance, and preserve the ontological and epistemological validity of the conventional world. For Tsongkhapa, the two truths represent two empirically retrievable components of a single ontological entity, and as such are present in every single phenomenon in the world. In grounding the two truths within two natures—themselves present in every phenomenon—Tsongkhapa asserts the usefulness of both conventional and ultimate forms of cognition, with both the conventional perceptions of ordinary beings, and the analytic reasoning that leads to ultimate knowledge, preserved as useful forms of knowing in the world.

Conversely, Gorampa repudiates the conventional world as a non-existent illusion fabricated by deluded minds, the repudiation of which leads to an enlightened state that is completely unconditioned. For Gorampa, there is only one truth, an ultimate truth that is the inexpressible subjectivity of an *ārya* cognizing emptiness; what is called conventional truth is utterly false. Whereas Tsongkhapa asserts that the two truths are empirically grounded in the two natures, Gorampa asserts that the two truths represent purely subjective ways of knowing; Gorampa rejects the objective status of the conventional world by asserting that it is a pure delusion created by ignorance.

The differences between the two are also hermeneutical, with the first disagreement concerning Candrakīrti's definition of the two truths in verse 6.23: “[The Buddha] said that all things have two natures—Those found by perceivers of reality and [those found by

perceivers] of falsities. Objects of perceivers of reality are things as they are; Objects of perceivers of falsities are conventional truths.”⁷⁸ Thakchoe demonstrates how Gorampa interprets this verse by reading ‘perceivers of falsities’ as a synonym for subjective ignorance (*gti mug*), meaning that he defines conventional truth as the (non-existent) object of perception by a subjective and falsifying ignorance.⁷⁹ Conversely, Tsongkhapa reads ‘falsity’ as the object of perception, rather than as an adjective modifying the subject, yielding a definition of conventional truth that is grounded in an object qua conventional nature, and not solely the result of falsifying ignorance. This hermeneutical dispute reflects their overall projects, with Tsongkhapa’s seeking to preserve the status of conventional truth, and Gorampa seeking to repudiate it.⁸⁰

This dispute also provides the locus for Jetsünpa’s first criticism of Gorampa. Jetsünpa begins by citing the two logical fallacies that Gorampa accuses Tsongkhapa of possessing, when the latter asserts that the two truths represent ‘a single ontological entity with different conceptual identities.’⁸¹ First, Gorampa argues that this would absurdly entail that there would be no way to distinguish between the conventional nature and the ultimate nature of the sprout, because they are one entity.⁸² This would entail the fallacy that the same

⁷⁸ Trans. Thakchoe, *Two Truths Debate*, 65-66.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁸¹ This is Thakchoe’s tentative translation of the Tibetan phrase *ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*. Ibid., 8.

⁸² This argument seems to mirror one made by Candrakīrti in verse 6.11 of the *Autocommentary*: “When for you seed and sprout are not different here, this so-called sprout will just be inapprehensible as the seed, or, due to their oneness, that (seed) will be just as

object is found by both deluded and authentic perception. Secondly, Gorampa argues that if a single entity possesses two natures, then it follows that since there are two designations present within a single object, you should be able to find them both in the object by some conventional means. This entails the fallacy that an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise perceives the same base as a deluded perception, and conversely that a deluded perception "causes the establishment of the very [base] found by an authentic perception, because the two referents are of a single nature."⁸³ These critiques attack Tsongkhapa's assertion of the two truths qua single ontological entity from different angles. The earlier qualm highlights a logical absurdity, arguing it is senseless for the two truths to comprise a single ontological entity as they would then become indistinguishable. The latter qualm is a procedural one, questioning how one could attain wisdom if both an *ārya*'s authentic perception, and an ordinary person's deluded perception, are both perceiving the same entity.

In response to these criticisms, Jetsünpa argues that Gorampa is contradicting his own writings, and that his argument contradicts other authoritative scriptures and valid reasoning. Regarding the charge of inconsistency, Jetsünpa cites a statement in which Gorampa writes, "When the Buddha, the Blessed One taught his disciples the way things exist from the perspective of conventionalities, for all things he proclaimed their twofold nature—conventional and ultimate." This statement, in which Gorampa appears to assert a twofold nature (as Tsongkhapa does), is nonetheless not decisive when one considers that Gorampa defines those natures in a distinctive manner. For Gorampa, the Buddha only taught the two

apprehensible as this sprout. Hence this should not be professed." Translated by Stöter-Tillmann and Tsering, *Autocommentary*, 69.

⁸³ *Removal*, 165.

natures for purely pedagogical reasons. The Buddha wished to reach his deluded disciples, who were engrossed in the false conventional objects of the world, and thus taught to them the two truths “from the perspective of conventionalities,” in order to gradually bring them to the truth.⁸⁴ In this way, conventional truth is “fabricated (*sgro brtags pa*) as an instructional device for disciples,” and the two natures do not accurately represent Gorampa or the Buddha’s intended teaching, meaning that the two natures do not represent the way things actually exist. Thus, Jetsünpa’s argument fails if one simply attempts to understand Gorampa’s statement on his own terms.

Next, Jetsünpa argues that Gorampa is contradicting other authoritative scriptures and valid reasoning. As evidence, he cites one *pāda* from verse 6.23 in Candrakīrti’s *Entrance*, which states that “things found are apprehended as the two natures.” He then cites Candrakīrti’s *Auto-Commentary*, which states, “the two natures of all things were precisely delineated, and they are the conventional and the ultimate. The ultimate is the own nature of just that distinctive object found within the gnosis of those who see accurately. However, the ultimate is not established in and of itself. This is one of the natures.” With these citations, Jetsünpa attempts to demonstrate that Candrakīrti himself asserts the existence of two natures qua two truths, just as Tsongkhapa does. However, as just discussed this assertion fails to address Gorampa’s divergent way of understanding what the Buddha intended when he taught the existence of two natures, which is that they were taught as part of a pedagogical program designed for misguided students. By not addressing Gorampa’s criticisms on their own terms, Jetsünpa again engages in a dogmatic form of argumentation that reinforces

⁸⁴ Thakchoe, *Two Truths Debate*, 13-14.

Tsongkhapa's own interpretation of Candrakīrti, as if self-evident in Candrakīrti's words themselves.

If Jetsünpa wished to be less dogmatic, and more philosophically rigorous in his argumentation, there are forms of argumentation within his tradition he could have drawn upon. For instance, in addressing a similar criticism as that made by Gorampa, Khedrub argues that the opponent is making the mistake of thinking that “[two things] that are of the same nature must be the same” in all respects, and not understanding the way in which the two truths are both the same, in possessing a single ontological entity, and different, in possessing two distinct conceptual identities.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, Tsongkhapa also addresses this point in his *Middle-Length Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, stating that it would be illogical if the two truths did *not* comprise one entity, since: “if the two truths were not one entity, then since it would also be very unreasonable for them to be different entities, the two truths would have to be entityless, whereby they would not exist, for whatever exists necessarily exists as one entity or many entities.”⁸⁶ Both of these arguments are less dogmatic than the ones offered by Jetsünpa, containing reasoned arguments that can be assessed on their own merits. They raise interesting points for philosophical discussion, such as whether forms of argumentation such as the neither-one-nor-many argument should be taken literally or qualified, and whether it is reasonable for the two truths to be non-existent. It being the case that the *Response to Go* neglects to provide this type of reasoned argumentation, and instead repeatedly cites Candrakīrti's work as if its interpretation is self-

⁸⁵ Cabezón, *Dose of Emptiness*, 364.

⁸⁶ Translation found in: Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tsong-kha-pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*, ed. Kevin Vose (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2008), 106.

evident, this suggests that Jetsünpa's task in this section was pedagogical, providing Geluk students with insight into the textual sources and modes of reasoning that support Tsongkhapa's definition of the two truths in terms of two natures.

The next topic in the *Response to Go* revolves around the scope of emptiness; what is empty of what, and to what degree is it empty? Committed to the utter non-existence of the conventional world, Gorampa opines that it is wrong to overapply the qualifier 'ultimately' when describing the emptiness of phenomena, a move he makes since "contra Tsong kha pa, existence *itself* is an object of negation for him, there being no need to add the qualifier 'ultimate' (as in 'ultimate existence') to make this negation palatable."⁸⁷ Gorampa's motivation in making this argument is to paint the Geluks into a corner in which they are forced to admit the belabored nature of their interpretations, such as Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the *tetralemma* such that the qualifiers 'ultimately' and 'conventionally' are inserted, when he asserts that things are neither *ultimately* existent, nor *conventionally* non-existent, nor both, nor neither.⁸⁸ In response, Jetsünpa clarifies the context in which a qualifier is needed, stating that in using the expression 'conventional truth which does not exist from its own side,' one does not need to apply the qualifier 'ultimately' to this statement, but when using the expression 'conventional truth that is empty of being the nature of a conventional truth,' this would require the qualifier 'ultimately.' Again, the crux of his argument is a reassertion of Tsongkhapa's position on the ontological status of the two truths, a position which relates to how Tsongkhapa describes the subtle philosophical

⁸⁷ Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 50.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

differences that separate Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka thinkers, and again a system of thought on which Gorampa holds an opposed view.⁸⁹

The next issue also revolves around what Gorampa considers Tsongkhapa's idiosyncratic definition of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. Gorampa's qualm is a doxographical one, taking issue with Tsongkhapa's definition of Svātantrikas as those who assert that there are true conventionalities and false conventionalities.⁹⁰ According to Gorampa, one should follow the tradition of great Prāsaṅgikas such as Atīśa and Zhang thang sag pa, who differ from Tsongkhapa in not drawing a "distinction in terms of a right and wrong designation between {conventionalities within} the [Prāsaṅgika] school and the [Svātantra] school."⁹¹ Interestingly, in his response Jetsünpa elides the question of lineage, responding only to the preface of Gorampa's argument, and not the substance of the matter. Gorampa's preface centers on whether Tsongkhapa is justified in asserting the existence of 'conventional truths,' if he does not also accept that 'true conventionalities' are part of his Prāsaṅgika system. In response, Jetsünpa argues that Gorampa is misunderstanding what it means to be a 'true conventionality,' since Candrakīrti states that this distinction is solely a pragmatic one drawn "from the perspective of the world." That being the case, there is a stark

⁸⁹ For more on this distinction, see José Cabezón, "Two Views on the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction in Fourteenth-Century Tibet," in *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference does a Difference Make?*, ed. Georges B.J. Dreyfus & Sara L. McClintock (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 289-315. The crux of the issue is whether this distinction is a 'hard' or 'soft' one, with Tsongkhapa asserting hard, philosophical differences, and Gorampa asserting that it is a minor, methodological difference.

⁹⁰ For instance, elsewhere Gorampa writes: "There is no distinguishing between the Prāsaṅgikas and the Svātantrikas on the basis of the [way in which they] posit the conventional." Translation found in Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom From Extremes*, 193.

⁹¹ *Removal*, 169.

difference between how Tsongkhapa defines the status of conventional truths for a Prāsaṅgika, and that of ‘true conventionalities’ for a Svātantrika.⁹² Once again, Jetsünpa’s rebuttal of Gorampa’s criticism involves a restatement of Tsongkhapa’s own system, and he concludes with a final sally against Gorampa’s scholarship, stating that a division into true and false conventional truths is not found in any valid text.

In making this move, Jetsünpa has constructed a strawman that fails to contextualize Gorampa’s argument for his audience. By eliding Gorampa’s invocation of Atīśa as part of his own lineage, and as a philosopher who did not assert Tsongkhapa’s idiosyncratic doxographical distinction between Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas, Jetsünpa simply avoids the criticism, rather than addressing it. Again, this move would be unreasonable if its goal was to address Gorampa’s critique in an honest and critical manner. However it would be perfectly reasonable in a text whose purpose was the training and indoctrination of Geluk students, who consider Atīśa a predecessor to their own ‘New Kadampa’ tradition.⁹³ Rather than allowing Atīśa’s lineage affiliation to become contested, Jetsünpa instead denigrates the status of Gorampa’s lineage, when Jetsünpa alleges that he is inventing categories.

The final dispute directly addresses the status of unreal conventionalities, and again the arguments follow dogmatic lines. Gorampa is committed to an equal ontological status, or rather lack of status, for both real and unreal conventionalities, since he asserts the

⁹² Put simply, conventional truths are objects of knowledge found by conventional valid cognitions that are nonetheless deceptive in the sense that they appear to exist inherently, but are actually empty of such inherent existence. Thus, Tsongkhapa would assert that there are indeed conventional truths existent in the world, but they are nonetheless not true conventionalities because they are deceptive, in the sense that they do not exist the way they appear.

⁹³ On Tsongkhapa’s adherence to the Kadampa teachings, see note 29.

fundamental non-existence of all conventionalities qua proliferations of ignorance. That being the case, he is compelled to explain citations from Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti which assert that certain conventionalities perform important soteriological functions.⁹⁴ In doing so, Gorampa draws a distinction between conventional truths qua *saṃvṛti* and nominal truths qua *vyāvahara*, asserting that all manifestations of *saṃvṛti* arise due to ignorance, but that nominal truths, such as the authoritative works of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, perform an instrumental soteriological function, and are “fabricated as an instructional device for disciples.”⁹⁵ Although Gorampa is committed to the unreality of all conventionalities, as a scholastic philosopher he cannot simply negate the utility of Buddhist scriptures, leading him to this compromise.

Jetsūnpa responds harshly to this presentation of conventionalities, arguing that the scriptures themselves do not draw any distinction between conventional truths and nominal truths, and posit them to be synonymous. Furthermore, he draws out the implication that if one fails to draw a distinction between real and unreal conventionalities, this leads to the absurd consequence that impossible things ‘exist conventionally,’ there being no objective standard for existence between real and unreal conventionalities. One is made to assert that impossible things ‘exist.’ Conversely, one is forced to make the dubious claim that things that ‘exist conventionally’ do not exist. What follows from this according to Jetsūnpa is that there are no verifiable standards for existence, leading to the outrageous consequence that foundational doctrinal elements such as afflictive ignorance, the two types of obscurations, and, by implication, the Four Noble Truths and Three Jewels also do not exist.

⁹⁴ See notes 115-117.

⁹⁵ Thakchoe, *Two Truths Debate*, 14.

Jetsünpa's argument is compelling, and it is striking that Gorampa would seem to have no choice but to accede to the consequence that in his system, the Four Noble Truths and Three Jewels do not exist. Nonetheless, Gorampa's own system does provide an explanation for this, such that the teachings of the Buddha represent pedagogically useful and conventionally existent phenomena that only exist for the sake of his disciples. Just as one knows there is water in a cup because water appears to the eye consciousness of a human being, or blood and pus in a cup because it appears to the eye consciousness of a *preta*, in the same way Gorampa would assert that the Buddhist teachings can be said to exist because they appear to the eyes and ears of disciples. For Gorampa, it is a mistake to search for a level of existence beyond this mere appearance to one's senses, making philosophical arguments that attempt to parse levels of conventional existence irrelevant.

Conclusion

My aim in this paper has not been to accuse certain philosophers of engaging in bad philosophy. It has been to suggest that the formation of dogmas along sectarian lines was a historical process instantiated in a fractious social context in Tibet, and that this sectarian identity formation was vitalized by the writings of influential figures such as Jetsünpa and Gorampa. Their writings laid the foundation for sectarian philosophical disputes that have followed familiar fault-lines for hundreds of years.⁹⁶ As a prolific writer in this time-period, Jetsünpa vocalized a nascent Geluk identity using a variety of textual genres, suggesting both

⁹⁶ For instance, in the context of the late 19th century polemical exchanges between Mipham and Pari Rabsel, Viehbeck describes the overall tenor as one where "both parties stuck to their original positions without modifying those in any substantial way." See Viehbeck, *Polemics in Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*, 209.

his creative agency in articulating a vision of an orthodox Geluk identity, and the fluidity of textual genres in Tibet itself.

In particular, I argue that the *Response to Go* should be read less as a polemical work concerned with philosophical exegesis, and more as a pedagogical work that presents Geluk students such as Delek Nyima an orthodox Geluk understanding of Candrakīrti's thought. In its usage of dogmatic forms of argumentation, the *Response to Go* seems more concerned with inculcating a prototypical Geluk understanding of Indian Madhyamaka texts, and less concerned with addressing Gorampa's arguments on their own merits. In this way, Gorampa's heterogeneous form of interpretation is marginalized, and its 'refutation' consists of being silenced. As an outworking of this, Gorampa's writings were silenced even more directly in later years when they were banned by the Geluk leadership of the Ganden Phodrang.

Perhaps the biggest weakness of my argument is my attempt to infer conclusions about the functions of the *Response to Go* from a single section of the work. Although the sixth chapter of Candrakīrti's text is the most lengthy, and its interpretation the most hotly contested, the section on the two truths is but one small section of that chapter. In fact, the contentious subject matter may have influenced Jetsünpa's argumentation towards dogmatism, whereas other topics may contain more agreement, or at least more reasoned forms of disagreement. Unfortunately it was beyond the scope of this paper to study the text in more depth.

A further criticism could be made that my insight into the text as largely a pedagogical work is merely an outworking of my own culturally formed assumptions and

genre expectations of what a ‘polemic’ should be. It may be the case that students immersed in the text at Sera Jé would not be troubled by my assertion that it utilizes dogmatic and sectarian forms of argumentation. As a genre that mirrors the give and take of oral debate, polemics in Tibet may represent an adversarial mode of dialogue in which the goal is nonetheless the production of greater understanding. At a minimum, it must be recognized that my own interpretation of the text has been influenced by my expectations for what constitutes reasoned philosophical discourse, and that the historicity and limitations of my understanding may differ from those of the authors.⁹⁷

Finally, in understanding how a contentious socio-political context nudged the development of Buddhism in Tibet toward the growth of strong sectarian divides, I also hope to stimulate reflection concerning the continuing presence of sectarian divisions within Tibetan Buddhism, even as Tibetan culture struggles to survive both within, and without its native borders. Writing as a theologian, John Makransky has argued that ahistorical modes of understanding Buddhist texts have granted sectarian views an “aura of unique and absolute authority,” which lent support in the competition for social and institutional support.⁹⁸ As a theologian, Makransky is concerned with the question of absolute truth, and of how the historical conditions of the dharma constrains and shapes its present and future possibilities. My own concern is with the economic and institutional conditions of Tibetan Buddhism,

⁹⁷ This general point was made by Vesna Wallace in the context of postmodern interpretation. See: Vesna A. Wallace, “The Methodological Relevance of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship to the Study of Buddhism,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger R. Jackson & John J. Makransky (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 85.

⁹⁸ John J. Makransky, “Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Trans-Historical Buddha,” in *Buddhist Theology*, 122.

conditions which themselves shape the forms of Tibetan Buddhism which are propagated today and into the future.

In many ways, the study and institutional structure of Tibetan Buddhism continues to follow sectarian lines as it becomes an object of study and religious practice outside of Tibet. On an institutional level, a number of sectarian Tibetan institutions were re-established in India following the exodus of large numbers of Tibetan refugees in 1959, including the ‘three seats’ of the Geluk tradition. Similarly, as increasing numbers of Westerners became interested in Tibetan Buddhism, religious organizations developed which largely considered themselves adherents to specific sects or subsets of Tibetan Buddhism. Obscuring the greater commonalities present within Tibetan Buddhism, these derivative groups largely operated independently, leading to a situation in which a single city may contain several Buddhist centers devoted to Tibetan Buddhism, with each devoted to a single sect or subset, and with most struggling to maintain the manpower and economic support needed to thrive. It is this state of affairs which was addressed recently by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, in a wide-ranging and somewhat controversial social media post responding to the recent scandal involving Sogyal Rinpoche. In this post, Khyentse writes that the main obstacle to the survival of Buddhism is not scandal or controversy, but internal sectarian divisions.⁹⁹

As such, this raises the question of the degree to which the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism along sectarian lines is a useful phenomenon in the West, and the degree to which it represents a historically contingent, but somewhat harmful practice.

Pedagogically speaking, it is certainly useful to use sectarian viewpoints as an entry point

⁹⁹ Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, “Guru and Student in the Vajrayana,” Facebook post, August 14, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/djkhentse/posts/2007833325908805>.

into doctrinal positions and historical events, but what is being transmitted with these forms of knowledge? If it is the case that the study of Tibetan Buddhism along sectarian lines grants these sects a certain legitimacy, and bolsters their individual cases for authority, what is the proper way for a member of the Academy, or for a devotee of Tibetan Buddhism to respond?

If nothing else, it seems to me that being a devotee of a single sect is a zero-sum game, in which the degree to which one is devoted to the survival and success of one's own sect mirrors the degree to which one is unconcerned with the survival and success of other sects. Although I would not go so far as to argue against the utility of studying Tibetan Buddhism along sectarian lines, I would argue that the reproduction of sectarian institutions in the West is harmful to the economic viability of Tibetan Buddhism. As such, I would argue that forms of knowing that uncritically rehearse or bolster the authority of individual sects, and institutional structures that follow sectarian lines, are outdated and inappropriate.

In conclusion, it is a truism that all the Tibetan sects consider themselves heirs to Indian Buddhism, and most commonly with regards to philosophical positions linkages are drawn with the illustrious teachers of Nālandā. Most recently, the 14th Dalai Lama has stated that Tibetan Buddhism itself “derives from the pure lineage of the tradition of Nalanda Monastery in India,” and has “basically followed the Nalanda tradition up to [the] present day.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, the ideals underlying this statement bely the contested nature of the Nālandā tradition, with the Geluk and Sakya figures we have examined in complete

¹⁰⁰ Tenzin Gyatso: The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, José Ignacio Cabezón, & 'Khon-ston Dpal-'byor Lhun-grub, *Meditation on the Nature of Mind* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), 15, 16.

disagreement over how one should interpret the works of Candrakīrti. It is my own theological stance that the most beneficial way to invoke the spirit of Nālandā is not to invoke images of its authoritative teachers, but a more humble one, a vision of a communal institutional setting in which inmates are free to study a wide range of subjects, yet are united by a common economic and institutional purpose.¹⁰¹ In this way, Western Buddhists may be free to imagine new forms of Tibetan Buddhism stimulated by the challenges of intellectual disagreement, yet nourished by the fraternity and stability of a shared socio-economic institution.

¹⁰¹ For instance, Hui Li, the biographer of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang reports that inmates would study the eighteen Buddhist schools, and also non-Buddhist subjects such as the Vedas, logic, grammar, and so forth. The pilgrim Yijing also reports that inmates would be united by strict adherence to rules concerning when to eat, bathe, and so forth, as well as a common distribution of labor. See: Hui-li, *The life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, trans. Samuel Beal (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1914), 112. And: Yijing, *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia: A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas*, trans. Li Rongxi (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000), pp. 103, 131-132.

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Appendix: English Translation

Dispelling the Darkness of False Views: the Treatise which Refutes Misconceptions regarding the View of Emptiness, the Profound; a Response to the Arguments of the Spiritual Friend Gowō Rabjampa (go bo rab 'byams pa)

Sera Jetsun Chöki Gyaltzen (se ra rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan)

Also, Gorampa wrote: “a certain someone [Tsongkhapa] taught that if the nature of a sprout, for instance, is divided, there are two: the nature which is conventional, and the nature which is ultimate.”¹⁰² So, it having been set forth in this way in his great commentary [Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of the Thought*], Gorampa's refutation of that point is that “it absurdly follows that the conventional nature which serves as the nature of the sprout is [also] the ultimate nature which serves as the nature of the sprout, since the two [the conventional nature of the sprout and the ultimate nature of the sprout] are of one nature.”¹⁰³

¹⁰²LNS (f.578): According to the translation by Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering: In this regard, somebody has written: ‘What is demonstrated by this is that even in the nature of one (entity) such as a sprout, when classified, both that which is superficial and the nature of the ultimate sense exist.’ Translation found in: Chandrakīrti, *Autocommentary on the ‘Introduction to the Centre,’* trans. Jürgen Stöter-Tilmann and Dr. Tashi Tsering (Sarnath: Sattanam Printers, 2012), 164. Cf. Thakchoe translates Tsongkhapa's passage in *The Two Truths Debate*: the two truths “indicate that if the characteristics of even one ontological structure—the sprout, for example—are divided, it has two natures, namely, conventional and ultimate.” See Sonam Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 66.

¹⁰³LNS, f.579. Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering translate this passage (165), “This is not correct, because it follows that the superficial nature of the sprout, being its nature, is its ultimate nature, and that this is (also) its nature.” Thakchoe translates as follows (69): “The conventional nature of the sprout would absurdly become its ultimate nature, for the two [natures] have only one [phenomenal] characteristic.”

With regards to Gorampa's refutation, it is a mass of contradictions, contradicting what he himself accepts and contradicting authoritative scriptures and valid reasoning. This is demonstrable because he himself has asserted the natures of the two truths as existent, and this has also been proven by authoritative scriptures and valid reasoning as well.

First, to prove that his own writings are internally contradictory: in his own *Commentary on the Difficult Points*¹⁰⁴ Gorampa wrote: “When the Buddha, the Blessed One, taught his disciples the way things exist from the viewpoint of conventions, for all things he proclaimed their two-fold nature—conventional and ultimate.”¹⁰⁵ Since he has [also] written this, he has contradicted himself; the three spheres!¹⁰⁶

Secondly, to establish that Gorampa's refutation contradicts authoritative texts and valid reasoning, Candrakīrti's *Entrance to the Middle Way* states: “things found are apprehended as having two natures.”¹⁰⁷ And then in [Candrakīrti's] auto-commentary,

¹⁰⁴ LNS, ff.577-578.

¹⁰⁵ Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering translate this passage (163): “When Buddha, the Transcendent Possessor and Destroyer, teaches his candidates the true state by means of conventions, He shows all entities in terms of two natures: a superficial one and an ultimate one.” Thakchoe translates it (67): “When the Bhagavan Buddha disclosed reality as it is to his disciples from the empirical standpoint, he demonstrated that all phenomena are constitutive of the two natures—conventional and ultimate.”

¹⁰⁷ This is one line from a central verse in Madhyamakā philosophy, from Candrakīrti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*. Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, dbu ma la 'jug pa, Toh: 3861, Dbu Ma, 'A, 205a. In *Moonshadows*, Thakchoe renders the verse: “All things

he states: “the two natures of all things were precisely delineated, and they are the conventional and the ultimate.¹⁰⁸ The ultimate is the own nature of just that¹⁰⁹ distinctive object found within the gnosis of those who see accurately. However, the ultimate is not established in and of itself. This is one of the natures.” This and other such passages represent the arguments based on authoritative texts and reasoning.

Gorampa also wrote¹¹⁰: “by naming the two truths for only a single object like a sprout, then it follows that these designated objects should be findable conventionally. This would follow because there are the natures of the two truths which are the entity of the sprout.”¹¹¹

bear two natures found by correct and false views. The object of those who see correctly is said to be 'reality' and the object of those who see falsely is said to be 'conventional existence’” (p.45). Cf. C.W. Huntington, Jr. with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 160. “23) [*Response*] All entities bear a dual nature, which corresponds to the entity as apprehended through either a correct or an incorrect perception. The object revealed through correct perception is real [in the highest, soteriological sense], while that revealed through incorrect perception is referred to as 'the truth of the screen.’”

¹⁰⁸ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya (Auto-Commentary to Entrance to the Middle Way)*, dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa, Toh: 3862, Dbu ma, 'A, 253a. Also see Garfield, *Moonshadows*, 24: “It has been shown that each phenomenon has its own two natures—a conventional and an ultimate nature.”

¹⁰⁹ The nature of the ‘two special objects’ is unclear; Cabezón suggests it may refer to the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. The translation of the *Auto-Commentary* by Stöter-Tillmann and Tsering seems to suggest a preferred reading of *nyid* rather than *gnyis*.

¹¹⁰ LNS, f.579

¹¹¹ Stöter-Tillmann and Tsering translate as follows (165): “Further, it follows that in what is just one, for example a sprout, a designative basis designated by the name of the two truths is conventionally found, for there exist the two natures of the two truths as the nature of the sprout.” Thakchoe translates this (68): “[If it were true that each phenomenon has two natures], it would absurdly follow that even one particular phenomenon, such as a sprout,

This argument too is incorrect because in [Candrakīrti's auto-commentary it states]: “The Buddhas, the Blessed Ones perfectly taught all internal and external things—such as conditioned things, a sprout, and so forth—as the two respective types of nature.”¹¹² Thus, [Gorampa's argument is incorrect] because Candrakīrti taught internal and external things—such as a sprout and so forth—to possess a two-fold nature: a conventional nature and an ultimate nature.

Gorampa also wrote: “It is absurd (to maintain, as you do) that when proving something to be empty of the nature that it possesses, one must add the qualifier ‘ultimate’ to the object of negation. Why? Because conventionally, (according to you,) the two truths are not empty of their own natures. You accept both the reason and the predicate.”¹¹³ Gorampa has argued in this way.

[Jetsünpa’s reply:] We believe that when one takes the conventional truth to be empty of being of the nature of a conventional truth, this requires adding the qualifier ‘ultimately’ to the object of negation—[that is, to the word ‘nature,’ making it ‘ultimate nature’]. But when one takes the conventional truth to not be established from the conventional truth’s own natural side, we would say “*takmadrup*”—(i.e. this

must possess [two] empirically retrievable imputed objects [or natures] merely by designating the two truths. This must follow, for the sprout would have two natures, which would be the bases of the two truths.”

¹¹² Candrakīrti's *Auto-Commentary to Entrance to the Middle Way* (253a.6)

¹¹³ LNS (f.579) Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering translate as follows (165-166): “It further follows that in order to establish the emptiness of an intrinsic essence, it is necessary that one add the qualification ‘in the ultimate sense’ to the negatee, because as conventions the two truths are not empty of an intrinsic essence, and he has accepted the reason and the probandum of both the former and the latter” (which the translators suggest may refer to ‘impermanent’ and ‘produced’).

does not require the addition of the qualifier). So [in this case] we do not accept the reason and predicate.

Gorampa also wrote: “In this regard, some later [scholars, i.e., Tsongkhapa and his followers] claim that the terms ‘true conventionality’ and ‘false conventionality’ are [only] found in the Svātantrika system; the Prāsaṅgikas, [Gelukpas claim], accept conventional things that are true in dependence on the world, and conventional things that are false in dependence on the world. [The Prāsaṅgikas] do not accept the former [i.e., true conventionalities], because if something is true, then it contradicts its being a conventionality. But if [what the Gelukpas says] is true, then it would be incorrect for them to even use the term ‘conventional truth’ because if something is a conventionality, then it contradicts its being a truth [or true].”¹¹⁴

[Jetsunpa’s Jetsünpa’s response:] These two cases are not similar. Why? For two reasons: (1) Candrapāda states that it is from the perspective of the world’s experience that mistaken objects are true or false, which implies that in general there is no distinguishing the conventional into true and false. (2) Such a distinction of the conventional truth [into true and false] is not explained in any valid text.

Gorampa also wrote: “in sum, although all unreal conventionalities are obscurational truths, they are not conventionally existent, and are not the

¹¹⁴ LNS (f.581) Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering translate as follows (168-169): “Later (scholars) say: ‘The terms ‘authentic superficial’ and ‘false superficial’ are the tradition of the Own-Continuum school whereas the Consequentialist school accepts a ‘superficial that is true for the world alone’ and a ‘superficial that is false for the world alone.’ The Consequentialist school does not accept the former terms, because when (something) is authentic, it is a contradiction (to say) that it is superficial.’ [Gorampa:] Then not even the term ‘true superficial’ would be appropriate, because when (something is superficial, it is a contradiction (to say) that it is true.”

obscurational truth or nominal truth indicated by the following quotations: “without relying on the conventional, the ultimate truth cannot be taught”¹¹⁵, or “nominal truth which serves as the method”¹¹⁶, or “mundane obscurational truth”¹¹⁷. The subject matter of all the scriptures is said to be subsumed within the two truths, and out of the two truths, these quotations are referring to “obscurational truth” specifically. Therefore, *unreal* obscurational truths are not [what are indicated by quotations] such as those, and are not feasible to be the method for realizing ultimate truth.”¹¹⁸

And Gorampa continues, “Also, if something exists conventionally, it does not entail that it exists. However, if something exists nominally, it does entail that it exists.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ This quotation is from Nāgārjuna's *Root Wisdom of the Middle Way*. *Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab*, Toh: 3824, Dbu Ma, Tsa, 15a. Gorampa's version ends quite differently: “the realization of the highest object will not come” (*dam pa'i don ni rtogs mi 'gyur*)

¹¹⁶ Candrakīrti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*, 208a.

¹¹⁷ Nāgārjuna's *Root Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 15a.

¹¹⁸ Stöter-Tilmann and Tsering translate as follows (170-171): “In brief, even though the whole false superficial is superficial truth, it is not that it exists as convention in the way (those) worldly superficial and conventional truths do which are spelled out in: ‘Without relying upon convention, the ultimate sense is not realized,’ and ‘conventional truth is the medium,’ and ‘truth relating to the worldly superficial and...’. After all these, represent the superficial truth, among the two truths, which is declared to assemble all scriptural subjects. The false superficial, however, is not like this because it cannot function as a medium for the realization of the truth of the highest sense.”

¹¹⁹ LNS (f.583)

And again, Gorampa states, “Moreover, the fact that something exists conventionally does not imply that it exists. But the fact that something exists in terms of conventions [or nominally] implies that it exists.”

The end result of Gorampa's writing is that his many personal fabrications contradict the texts of the Noble Father and Son [Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva]!

Gorampa also wrote: “If the texts of the Middle Way school were arranged from beginning to end, you should carefully examine whether or not there is a different method of exposition in this entire collection!”¹²⁰

Well, since Gorampa has only pretended to study and contemplate the texts of the Middle Way, he advocates nothing but the incorrect meaning of the texts, and not finding any way to say anything else, he responds to the second Buddha, the majestic [Tsongkhapa] Lozang drakpa (*blo bzang grags pa*), with disrespect and hostility. For this reason, he should be earnestly striving to confess and vowing to refrain from such behavior in the future.

If Gorampa's above theses are stated as fallacies, then [it would look like this]: If [something] is an unreal conventionality, it follows that it must be non-existent. If that is the case, then it follows that it cannot be either of the two truths. You accept the reason. If [the predicate] is accepted, [then take] an example of a false cognition, it follows that it must be non-existent, because that is what you have accepted. If you accept [that false cognition does not exist], it follows that afflictive ignorance is non-existent because that is what you have accepted. If this is accepted, it follows that the

¹²⁰ LNS (f.583)

two obscurations are non-existent because that is what you have accepted. If this is accepted, it follows that the origin [of suffering] is non-existent because this is what you have accepted. If this is accepted, it follows that the Four Truths are non-existent because that is what you have accepted. And the Three Jewels would also have to be non-existent because that is what you accept.

And yet, it follows that the subject, distorted sense consciousnesses, *are* suitable to be subsumed within the framework of the two truths, because of being either a conventional truth or an ultimate truth. This follows because truth is posited as twofold in all the scriptures which posit the two truths. The former reason is established [i.e., those consciousnesses are either conventional or ultimate truths] because they are conventional truths. You accept [this latter] reason.

Furthermore, if something is an unreal conventionality, it follows that it exists conventionally, because [Gorampa asserts that] for something to exist conventionally, it does not have to exist. If this is accepted, then for instance the real, permanent self which is imputed by Tīrthikas should exist conventionally, because it is an unreal conventionality. This you cannot accept, because *Entrance to the Middle Way* states: “However, such a self is nonexistent [because it is unproduced, like the son of a barren woman]. Nor can it even be the basis for the [innate] apprehension of I. Even conventionally it cannot be asserted to exist.”¹²¹ And then later it states: “A soul—in the way it is considered by the non-Buddhist Tīrthikas, who are entirely motivated by

¹²¹ Candrakīrti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*, 210a. Translation of passage from Geshe Rabten, *Echoes of Voidness*, ed. and trans. Stephen Batchelor (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1983), p.75).

the sleep of nescience—is utterly non-existent, even in terms of the world. So too are such things as magician's illusions [horses created by casting spells using sticks and stones] and mirages [considered to be water].”¹²²

Furthermore, it follows that all sentient beings will attain liberation effortlessly, because of the non-existence of afflictive ignorance in their mental continuums, since afflictive ignorance is a non-existent. If [you claim that] this [reason] is not established, it is because that [afflictive ignorance] does not exist, because it is a false cognition! The three spheres of self-contradiction! Although there might be more things I could say about the limitless fallacies proliferating from that [thesis], since they are self-evident I will not elaborate more than this.

Gorampa also wrote: “In Tsongkhapa's *Great Commentary* it states: “however, the positing of something as existent simply when it exists for one single mistaken awareness has been refuted.”¹²³ Regarding this passage, Gorampa says: “regarding [passage shows that Tsongkhapa], does not distinguish between mundane conventions and conventional truth.”

This claim is a joke! Like it was said in the texts of the Noble Father and Son, 'the conventional truths of the world', 'nominal truths [or the truths of conventions]', and 'what is true for a conventional [mind/agent]' were taught to be coterminous and synonymous. Since all authentic scriptural traditions assert this, there is no [way] to distinguish them, and thus his made-up difference is a faulty distinction.

¹²² Ibid., 205b. Translation from Rabten, *Echoes Of Voidness*, p.58.

¹²³ I have been unable to locate the source of this quote thus far.

