

GROUNDING TANTRIC PRAXIS IN THE MAHĀYĀNA MEANING AND MODES:

AN EXOTERIC DOXOGRAPHY CONTAINED IN THE TANGUT WORK *NOTES ON THE KEYPOINTS OF MAHĀMUDRĀ AS THE ULTIMATE*¹

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This paper explores a sūtra-based doxography contained in the 12th-century Tangut Mahāmudrā work *Notes on the Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate*. It employs the doctrinal complex of the doxography to demonstrate the common Mahāyāna discursive framework within which the tantra-originated Mahāmudrā has grounded its meaning. It further argues that the doxography integrates the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and Buddha-nature currents of thought as the philosophical ground for Mahāmudrā.

Key words: Tangut Buddhist literature, Tibetan Buddhism, Mahāmudrā, Mahāyāna scholasticism, tantric Buddhism, Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, Buddha-nature.

Xixia Buddhist literature² concerning Tibetan Buddhist subjects contains a variety of tantric and yogic teachings³ in combination with a range of doctrinal composi-

¹ I owe my gratitude to a number of individuals who contributed in different ways to bringing this paper to its present form. I am grateful to Professor Kirill Solonin (Renmin University of China) for assisting me in translating the Tangut texts relevant to my research. I also owe my thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions. In addition, I should thank Mr. Andrew Taylor (University of Virginia) for proofreading the English of this paper. My thanks also go to the Khyentse Foundation for providing me with the financial support to cover the research and writing for this paper.

² I use ‘Xixia literature’ or ‘Xixia texts’ to refer to both Tangut- and Chinese-language texts pertaining to the Xixia regime. I follow most Tangutologists’ practice of using Chinese graphs to present the Tangut content through a semantic rendering. These reconstructions (e.g. ‘釋迦’ as the Chinese equivalent of ‘藏藏’) will be marked with an asterisk (*). Phonetic reconstruction (in Gong Hwang-cherng’s system) will be provided for the Tangut term (e.g. *śji kja* 藏藏). I rely on Nevskij (1960) and Li (2012) as for my translation tools.

³ The term ‘tantric Buddhism’ as part of the standard vocabulary of religious studies is heavily invested with the dialectics between traditional self-expression and modern scholarly constructs. It is commonly acknowledged that what distinguishes tantric Buddhism from non-tantric

tions.⁴ It provides a window into the 12th-century Tibetan attempts to assimilate and systematise the yogic, ritual, and philosophical currents that represent the latest developments of Indian Buddhism. Nikolai Nevskij (1892–1937) was the first to identify two major constituents of Tangut Buddhism, the Sinitic and the Tibetan.⁵ This line of work was later followed by Nishida Tatsuo 西田龍雄 (1928–2012) and Evgenij Kychanov (1932–2013). Based on their initial cataloguing of Tangut Buddhist literature, the two scholars identified important aspects of Tibetan Buddhism present within the corpus.⁶ In the 21st century, scholarly knowledge of various Indo-Tibetan Buddhist yogic transmissions which ended up in Xixia has advanced thanks to the discovery of the importance of the *Dasheng yaodao miji* 大乘要道密集 (*The secret collection of works on the essential path of Mahāyāna*; ‘*DYM*’). This collection of Tibetan tantric Buddhist works in Chinese translation was compiled throughout the 13th and 14th centuries.⁷

The paper investigates a doxographical fragment⁸ which serves as the philosophical ground for a Mahāmudrā system that embraces both the sūtric and tantric paths to ultimacy. The doxography is found in the Khara Khoto Tangut work *Notes on the*

Mahāyāna lies in the former’s predominant claim to ritual and yogic implementations as a means towards the ultimate goal of awakening. Here ‘yogic’ is used to reference one manipulating his/her own psycho-physiological processes so as to reveal a divine *subtle body* form and a blissful, luminous, and non-conceptual gnosis.

⁴ See Solonin 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016.

⁵ See Nevskij 1960.

⁶ Nishida and Kychanov have identified the titles and authors of a good number of Khara Khoto Tangut Buddhist works; see Nishida 1977 and 1999; Kychanov 1999.

⁷ Attributed to the Sa skya patriarch ’Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) as the compiler, the *DYM* contains a substantial number of works affiliated with Tibetan Buddhist traditions other than the Sa skya sect. For instance, approximately one third of the collection concerns the Mahāmudrā teaching transmitted through bKa’ brgyud teachers. Back in the early 20th century, Lü Cheng 呂澄 (1896–1989) was the first one to apply an academic historical-philological approach to studying the *DYM*; see Lü 1942. Christopher Beckwith introduced the collection to the English academic world; see Beckwith 1984. Chen Qingying 陳慶英 first noted an intimate connection with the Tangut Xixia in the *DYM*; see Chen 2003. Shen Weirong 沈衛榮 further builds a textual connection between the *DYM* and Chinese translations of Tibetan tantric texts from the Khara Khoto collection and ascribes most of the *DYM* titles to translations completed under the Xixia and Yuan; see Shen 2007. For more detailed examinations of the transmission history of these Tibetan tantric teachings from Tibet to Xixia based on both the Khara Khoto Buddhist texts pertaining to Tibetan subjects and the *DYM* Chinese translations, see Dunnell 2011, Sun 2014 and Solonin 2015.

⁸ The term ‘doxography’ as it was applied in its original context referred to the collected summaries of different Greek philosophical views. Wilhelm Halbfass’s (1988: 263–286, 349–368) usage follows the sense of ‘the collection of philosophical views’ and explores the roots of Indian doxographic thinking. Recently, quite a few Buddhist studies scholars have found the term useful, using it to label the Buddhist genre of doctrinal classification literature. Jacob Dalton (2005) applies ‘doxography’ to the tantric Buddhist classification schemes which mainly concern the difference in ritual and yogic practices. In this paper, I use ‘doxography’ to describe a particular type or genre of Buddhist writing characterised by the *siddhānta* (*grub mtha’*) paradigm. The Buddhist *siddhānta* work sets forth the philosophical views of various schools—Buddhist and non-Buddhist—in a systematic fashion, usually with an agenda of demonstrating the superiority of the author’s own philosophical position.

Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (*ljij tjiŋ nji dźjwa tshji śio la* 鞞鞞熾熾鞞鞞 * 大印究竟要集記; ‘Notes’), a commentary on the *Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate* (*ljij tjiŋ nji dźjwa tshji śio* 鞞鞞熾熾鞞鞞 * 大印究竟要集; ‘Keypoints’). This paper demonstrates how the *Notes* doxography integrates the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and Buddha-nature currents to reveal and account for the common Mahāyāna philosophical framework in which the tantra-originated Mahāmudrā has grounded its meaning.

The *Keypoints-Notes* cluster survives only in Tangut versions in the Khara Khoto collection. Tang. 345 contains the *Keypoints* in xylography (Inv. 2526) and manuscript (Inv. 824), and the first (Inv. 2858 and Inv. 7163) and final (Inv. 2851) volumes of the *Notes* in manuscript. A separate copy of the *Keypoints* is found in Inv. 2876, and the *Notes* in Tang.#inv. 427#3817 (Vols. 1&2). Discussions here will be based on the *Keypoints* (Tang.#inv. 345#2526) and the *Notes* (Tang.#inv. 345#2858).

Solonin (2011) provides a preliminary study of the *Keypoints*—on the basis of Tang.#inv. 345#2526—in terms of its textual form, transmission lineage, formulaic framework for a philosophical narrative, and doctrinal connections with other Tangut Mahāmudrā texts. The work presents a twofold paradigm of Causal and Resultant Vehicles (i.e., sūtric and tantric)⁹—each in nine stages—converging in their respective eighth stages of non-conceptuality (*ljir tsiow* 鞞鞞 * 無念; Skt. *nirvikalpa*) and culminating in the ninth, the Mahāmudrā.¹⁰

The *Keypoints* not only reveals the Tangut interpretive agency in mapping the path of recognising the nature of reality and the mind, but also unpacks in contextually nuanced ways the multi-layered and diversely constituted topography of Indian Buddhist Tantra and scholasticism. The work represents one of the first attempts at a Mahāmudrā architecture which organises Buddhist thoughts and practices in a progressive ‘path stage’ (*lam rim*) structure. Initially a gnostic index of ultimacy derived from Buddhist Tantra, the term *mahāmudrā* gradually rose to act as an overarching rubric beyond both sūtra and tantra, a paradigm traceable in both Indian and Tibetan works (e.g. Maitrīpa’s and sGam-po-pa’s) as early as the 11th or 12th century.¹¹ It was

⁹ The *Keypoints* explains that the distinction between the resultant and causal vehicles is only a matter of whether the practitioner disengages (via the causal vehicle) or engages (via the resultant vehicle) with sensual desires (*ŋwə kieŋ nu dźjiŋ* 鞞鞞收報 * 離合五欲) to align him-/herself with suchness (*lew yiej śjwi* 鞞鞞 * 合一真), that is, non-conceptuality; see the *Keypoints* (15b7–16a3): 鞞鞞收報鞞鞞鞞鞞, 鞞鞞收報鞞鞞鞞鞞。。。維終鞞鞞收報鞞鞞, 鞞鞞收報鞞鞞鞞鞞 (彼樂信因乘者, 離五欲而和順一真。。。此樂信果乘者, 合五欲而隨順一真; ‘those of the causal vehicle disengage themselves from the five sensual desires to align with suchness ... these of the resultant vehicle engage themselves with the five sensual desires to align with suchness’). This is the typical parameter adopted to distinguish between the sūtric and tantric modes of praxis. It is also found in the *DYM*. For instance, it is stated in the *Guangming ding xuanyi* 光明定玄義 (*GDX*) that ‘one who practices through abandoning *kleśa* practices the sūtric path, while one who practices without abandoning *kleśa* practices the tantric path’ (若棄捨煩惱而修道者是顯教道, 不捨煩惱而修道者是密教道); c.f. Shen 2017: 208. In terms of the Tibetan attitude towards the sūtra–tantra distinction, see Germano and Waldron 2006: 51–52; Almogi 2009: 76–77, Note 103.

¹⁰ See Solonin 2011: 288–295.

¹¹ Roger Jackson (2005 and 2011) traces the semantic evolution of *mahāmudrā* along the development of Indian Buddhist Tantra. According to Jackson, *mahāmudrā* has undergone semantic

not until the 16th century that Tibetan bKa' brgyud teachers (e.g. Dwags po bKra shis rnam rgyal and Padma dkar po) started to present this paradigm in such systematic and structured ways. Nonetheless, we find an early Tangut instance in our *Keypoints* which dates to the mid-12th century.

Furthermore, the *Notes* doxography which serves as a commentary on the *Keypoints*' opening verses allows deeper insights into how Mahāmudrā was accorded a traditional Mahāyāna philosophical ground. In the later phase of Indian Buddhism, as there were mutual processes of appropriation between *tāntrikas* seeking theoretical grounds for practices and monastics appropriating yogic ritualism,¹² traditional Mahāyāna scholastic models and hermeneutics were adopted to engage the philosophical questions of tantra. It was in this context that tantric theorists read Mahāyāna sūtric philosophy and exoteric scholasticism into Mahāmudrā—a discourse highly charged with tantric connotations—on the basis of shared experiential grounds on non-conceptual realisation of the nature of the mind.¹³ The *Notes* doxography represents a 12th-century Tangut continuation of this Indo-Tibetan process of philosophising Mahāmudrā. Its systematic and structured presentation of philosophical threads drawn from the Buddhist scholastic pool again reflects the Tangut interpretative agency in deploying the discursive sources at their disposal for a philosophy for and of Mahāmudrā.

1. The Lineage of the *Keypoints-Notes* Cluster

The Xixia Mahāmudrā corpus consists of Tangut texts and fragments scattered across approximately 15 inventory numbers of the Khara Khoto collection (kept in the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), and Chinese ones—most of which have Tangut equivalents—included in the *DYM*.¹⁴ The entire corpus can be divided into two major clusters in terms of transmission lineage. The *Keypoints-Notes*

shifts from a ritual gesture in earlier Buddhist tantras, through one 'sealing' process of spiritual attainments in the more inward-oriented Mahāyoga- and Yoginī-tantras, to an index of ultimacy featured by the luminous and empty nature of the mind in the more gnostic siddha writings. Towards the final phase of Indian Buddhist Tantra, the usage of *mahāmudrā* became evocative of philosophical themes resonant with Mahāyāna scholasticism.

¹² One remarkable phenomenon concomitant to this process was the tendency among Mahāyāna teachers to lay dual claims to both Vajrayānist and scholarly identities. For a sketch of the Vajrayānist appropriation of the Mādhyamaka philosophy, see Ruegg 1981: 104–108. Worthy of note is the tendency of name appropriation Ruegg (1981: 105–106) has observed inside Vajrayāna Buddhist circles, that is, the retroactive projection of the identities of tantric masters onto earlier Mādhyamika teachers.

¹³ See, for instance, Mathes 2006, 2007 and 2009.

¹⁴ Solonin (2011) gives a detailed overview of the Tangut Mahāmudrā textual tradition and devotes lengthy discussions to the transmission and doctrine of the *Keypoints*. Shen (2007: 280–289) makes a descriptive catalogue of the *DYM* Chinese Mahāmudrā texts. Sun (2014) makes a comparative study of several Mahāmudrā texts between Tangut and Chinese recensions. For a recent publication containing the transliteration, translation and *DYM* Chinese equivalent (if available) of the Tangut Mahāmudrā texts, see Sun and Nie 2018.

cluster presents a line starting from the Buddha, continuing through the Indian patriarchs Vimalakīrti (*wji mo* 禪賊 * 維摩), Saraha (*sja rjar xa* 禪禪叢), Nāgārjuna (*we phu* 龍舟 * 龍樹), Śavaripa (*ṅar la* 山墓 * 山墓, Tib. Ri khrod pa), Maitrīpa (*ṅwej dzjij* 禪師 * 慈師), Jñānakīrti (*sjij dzjwow* 智稱 * 智稱), and Vāgīśvara (*ṅwu dzju* 語主 * 語主), down to a Tibetan teacher named *brTson 'grus (*khu dju* 精進 * 精進).¹⁵ The Tangut *śramaṇa* Dehui (*tshja źjir* 德慧 * 德慧) compiled *brTson-'grus's teachings into the text *Keypoints* after his encounter with the master probably during the mid-12th century.¹⁶ Without a direct mention of its authorship, the *Notes* was probably produced by Dehui's circle (if not directly by Dehui himself), as the work contains Dehui's own accounts of his learning experiences with *brTson 'grus.¹⁷ Those having Chinese translated titles in the *DYM*—no matter whether the corresponding Tangut edition is extant or not—emerged somewhat later, and were transmitted by State Preceptor Xuanzhao 玄照 at the turn of the 13th century. The lineage goes through Saraha, Śavaripa, and Maitrīpa in its Indian component, then proceeds to the Tibetan bKa' brgyud patriarchs Mar pa (1012–1097) and Mi la ras pa (1028/40–1111/23), and finally reaches Xuanzhao.¹⁸

Alongside the classical Saraha-Maitrīpa line, the presence of Vimalakīrti, Jñānakīrti, and Vāgīśvara in the *Keypoint-Notes* lineage is not typical of a Mahāmudrā transmission. The curious placement of the mythological figure Vimalakīrti as the first patriarch adds to the sūtric tone of the lineage presentation.¹⁹ Jñānakīrti who succeeds Maitrīpa, despite the two Mahāmudrā-related works he left in the Tibetan bsTan-'gyur (canonical collection of translated treatises),²⁰ is barely seen in Indo-Tibetan Mahāmudrā lineage accounts. The last Indian personality Vāgīśvara—attributed by the *Keypoints* as a Nepalese expert in the sixty-two deities Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* praxis—can almost certainly be identified with the 11th-century Nepalese Thang chung pa who

¹⁵ See the *Keypoints* (1b1–4b1). For a survey of these figures, see Solonin 2011: 285–288; 2012: 248–262.

¹⁶ According to the *Notes* (I: 4a5–6), the *Keypoints* was composed in a *renshen* 壬申 year, either 1152 or 1212. Based on the years of Dehui's career, which ranged through the reign of Renzong 仁宗 (1139–1193), Solonin (2015: 428) dates the work to 1152. For Dehui's identity and career, see Dunnell 2009: 47–49; Solonin 2015: 439–440, Note 29.

¹⁷ The *Notes* (X: 26a1–27b4) adopts a first person perspective to describe Dehui's experience studying with *brTson 'grus in Tsong kha (*tsow ka* 禪禪), the northeastern area of Tibet bordering the Tangut Xixia. For the translation of the relevant passage, see Solonin 2012: 245–246.

¹⁸ See Solonin 2011: 283.

¹⁹ Vimalakīrti did not gain as wide popularity in Tibetan Buddhism as in the Sinitic Buddhist milieu. In Xixia, however, the figure seems to have gained a certain degree of importance in the Tibetan environment. Solonin (2012: 251) notes another Tangut case of Vimalakīrti's presence: the composite *Instructions on Dhyāna Meditation* (禪修要論 * *bSam gtan gyi gdams ngag*; Tang.#inv. 291#4824), which consists of several short titles, is attributed to the collective composition of Vimalakīrti (*wji-mo-khjij* 禪賊叢 * 維摩詰) and Avalokiteśvara (龍觀 * 觀音). For a detailed study of this *Instructions on Dhyāna Meditation*, see Yuan 2016 which further confirms that the work was transmitted by Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas.

²⁰ The two works Jñānakīrti left in the bsTan 'gyur are the **Tattvāvatāra* (*De kho na nyid la 'jug pa*, P 4532) and the **Pāramitāyānabhāvanākramopadeśa* (*Pha rol tu phyin pa 'i theg pa bsgom pa 'i rim pa 'i man ngag*, P 5317=5456).

later acquired the name ‘Vāgīśvara’ and played an instrumental role in the Cakra-samvara transmission from India to Tibet.²¹

As such, unlike Xuanzhao’s lineage, whose Indo-Tibetan section is attested in Tibetan historiographical accounts, the *Keypoints-Notes* lineage is more of an ahistorical linking of diverse selected lineal segments into a structured totality through a distinctively Xixia mode of recognition and imagination. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the succession from Śākyamuni through the eight patriarchs traces a descending arc of spiritual accomplishments, possibly intent on a Buddhist eschatology.²²

2. The Notes Doxography: A Fourfold Presentation of Stages

Before consecutively presenting the biographies of eight patriarchs, the *Keypoints* opens with a versified account of Śākyamuni’s teaching career wherein he is shown teaching that ‘both object and consciousness exist’ (*mji sjij zji dju* 訖騰騰飛 * 境識二有), ‘both object and consciousness are empty’ (*mji sjij lo ɳa* 訖騰騰飛 * 境識雙空), ‘object dissolves and consciousness remains’ (*mji jjiɳ sjij tji* 訖騰騰飛 * 境泯識留), and ‘one returns to the source [of the mind]’ (*mər lhji ɳjow lhjwo* 禱頌禱頌 * 歸本還源).²³

The root teacher Śākyamuni (1) illuminated the world of the five-evil eon, dispelling the darkness of six *gatis*; (2) purified those possessed of three poisons, filling [the world] with the perfume water of eight qualities; (3) taught the Dharma according to his disciples’ capacities, in full accord with the way of the three capacities; and (4) demonstrated reality through the mind, sealing his single mind with non-conceptuality.

As such, he explained that both object and consciousness exist, then uttered that both are empty, elucidated that object dissolves and consciousness remains, and concluded by pointing to the moment when one returns to the source [of the mind].

In his great *samādhi*, he passed on this quintessential teaching (*upadeśa*) to the Great Being Vimalakīrti.

²¹ For a detailed survey of Vāgīśvara’s religious activities as well as the relevant Tibetan historical records, see Wei 2013: 69–84.

²² The spiritual hierarchy goes from the tenth *bhūmi* of the first patriarch, consecutively through the eighth, sixth, fourth, second and first *bhūmis* of the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth patriarchs respectively, up to the *prayoga* and *sambhāra* stages of the seventh and eighth patriarchs. See the *Keypoints* (inv. 2526: 1b1–4b8).

²³ *Keypoints* (1a1–6): 訖騰騰飛：脫並飛騰，修羶羶嫩嫩禱；散訖類類，夙羶羶嫩嫩；訖騰騰飛，散訖羶羶嫩嫩；禱散禱禱，列禱禱禱禱禱。羶羶，禱散訖騰騰飛，嫩嫩訖騰騰飛，嫩嫩訖騰騰飛，嫩嫩禱禱禱禱。散訖禱禱禱禱，禱散散禱禱禱禱禱禱。 (夫本師釋迦：照五濁世，除遣六趣黑暗；洗三毒器，盈滿八功香水；依根說法，隨順於三根道；以心指真，以無念印一心。如是，先解境識二有，次說境識雙空，後顯境泯識留乃至歸本還源。入於大禪定時傳真要於維摩大者。)

The *Notes* commentary on this paragraph takes the form of a doxography based on the doctrinal hierarchy of the four teachings, with the order of the second and third teachings reversed.²⁴

The first three teachings in the *Notes* explication correspond respectively to the Hinayāna (*‘u tsaj* 羸緒 * 小乘), Vijñānavāda (*lew sjij* 微牒 * 唯識) and Madhyamaka (*gu tsja* 解譏 * 中道) systems, each building upon and transcending the prior system all the way to the non-conceptual realisation characterised by the fourth level where ‘one returns to the source [of the mind]’. Table 1 briefly presents the doctrinal architecture of the four progressively advancing stages of teaching structured by a syncretic Mahāyāna hermeneutics which combines classical Madhyamaka and Yogācāra models—that is, the three natures (*so tsjir* 該規 * 三性; Skt. *trisvabhāva*), the two truths (*njī khā* 稱廡 * 二諦; Skt. *satyadvaya*) and the middle way free from reification and over-negation (*dju mjij rjir ka gu tsja* 窟循茲彘解譏 * 離有無中道):

Table 1. Four progressive teachings as charted out by the *Notes* doxography

1. Both object and consciousness exist

Parikalpita	Samvṛti-satya	non-Buddhist substantialist view of a self within the collection of five aggregates (廡苻爾玆規循繼繼韞 * 五蘊無我體上我執)
Paratantra	Paramārtha-satya	[sub]atom (纒祗姪 * 極微塵) and conscious continuum (牒徭徭 * 識相續)
Pariniṣpanna		selflessness in the person (駭繼循 * 人無我)
Middle way	Transcend reification	both the subatom and the conscious continuum are cognitive objects of saints (須彥循祇徭 * 聖者境界), but not of ordinary beings
	Transcend over-negation	the subatom enables phenomena to arise (纒祗姪玆徭徭禱禱禱 * 依極微能生一切法) and the conscious continuum lasts unbroken through numerous <i>kalpas</i> (牒繼循純禱, 巖巖徭徭慨玆, * 識無始生, 劫劫相續不斷)

²⁴ *Notes* I: 9a1–12b5. As explained in the *Notes* (I: 9b4–10a7), the Buddha taught ‘object and consciousness are empty’ in order to counter the substantialist adherence to both object and consciousness, an ill-conceived position potentially argued by his disciples leaning on his first teaching that ‘both object and consciousness exist’. As ‘object and consciousness are empty’ would again lead to an attachment to emptiness, the notion that ‘consciousness is real’ is used in the formulation ‘object dissolves and consciousness remains’ to counter that fallacy. This is the order in which the Buddha taught. However, according to the Indian tradition of canonical arrangement, both ‘object and consciousness exist’ and ‘object dissolves and consciousness remains’ are provisional teachings, whereas ‘object and consciousness are empty’ is the root which counts as Madhyamaka established through *pramāṇas*. As such, ‘object and consciousness are empty’ is explicated right after ‘object dissolves and consciousness remains’.

2. Object dissolves and consciousness remains

Parikalpita	Samvṛti-satya	non-Buddhist and Hīnayānist substantialist views
Paratantra	Paramārtha-satya	objective transformation in dependence on consciousness (轉識成境 * 依識化境, i.e., 境隨識轉 <i>jing suisi zhuan</i>)
Pariniṣpanna		embodiment of 'self-luminous reflexive gnosis' (體自證覺 * 明照自證覺體, i.e., <i>svasamvedana</i>)
Middle way	Transcend reification	<i>dharmas</i> arise not in dependence upon atoms (不依微塵生 * 非從微塵生)
	Transcend over-negation	the 'self-luminous reflexive awareness' exists (體自證識有 * 明照自證識有)

3. Both object and consciousness are empty

Parikalpita	Samvṛti-satya	[non-Buddhist,] Hīnayānist and Vijñāpti-mātrin substantialist views
Paratantra	Paramārtha-satya	conditioned origination (緣起 * 依因緣生, i.e., <i>pratītya-samutpāda</i>)
Pariniṣpanna		reality of true emptiness free from four extremes (離四邊真空義 * 離四邊真空義)
Middle way	Transcend reification	unattainability of the intrinsic nature of true emptiness (真空自性不可得 * 真空自性不可得)
	Transcend over-negation	assertion through <i>prajñāpti</i> on the miraculous manifestation at the level of conventional truth (依世俗諦如幻化稍許假分 * 依世俗諦如幻化稍許假分)

4. One returns to the source [of the mind]

the source which is the non-conceptual *dharmadhātu* (離念法界 * 本源無念法界)

The doctrinal complex presented above maps out a path whereby one (1) first establishes the existence of object and consciousness upon subatoms and realises selflessness in the person, (2) then eliminates conceptuality toward object and abides in the status of consciousness-only, (3) then dissolves the attachment to consciousness and abides in Madhyamaka, and (4) finally returns to the source of the mind, or *dharmadhātu*. These hermeneutical devices provide scaffolding for the entire doctrinal architecture through progressive levels of negation and affirmation, that is, to establish each level's ultimate truth upon the negation of the one posited on the previous level.

3. Mahāyāna Philosophical Formulae: to Map out a Cognitive Modality

The *Notes*' presentation of the first three levels of teachings—those of Hīnayāna, Vajñānavāda, and Madhyamaka, respectively—is echoed in the 8th- or 9th-century Tibetan doxographical tradition informed by Śāntarakṣita's (725–788) Yogācāra-Madhyamaka current. The fourth level shows new doctrinal developments within the Mahāyāna scholastic milieu, namely the rise of the Buddha-nature doctrine now occupying the position of ultimacy in the traditional Madhyamaka and Yogācāra frameworks.

The Buddhist doxographical practice of exegetical identification and classification of intellectual currents along a hierarchy took place within syncretistic traditions such as Bhavya's (c. 500–570) and Śāntarakṣita's lines of Madhyamaka,²⁵ and was continued by a long line of Tibetan scholars starting from Ye shes sde and dPal brtsegs (both *fl.* late 8th or early 9th century). More than a polemical presentation of philosophical schools, Buddhist doxography instead presents progressive practical stages leading up to an ultimate end. As indicated by its emic expression *siddhānta*—or *grub mtha* ' in Tibetan—the doctrinal hierarchy sketches different layers of accomplishment (*siddha*, *grub pa*), the end or limit (*anta*, *mtha* ') of each to be surpassed by its succeeding stage.²⁶

The fundamental point of dissent between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra was how the view of the phenomenal world as illusory can be accounted for in multiple layers. An early syncretic attempt can be found in Bhavya's works. To balance an overly transcendent Madhyamaka metaphysics with concerns about immanence, Bhavya assimilated all Buddhist scholastic schools (including Yogācāra) into Madhyamaka.²⁷ Accepting the relative reality of external objects while still rejecting the Vajñānavādin reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*), he understood *cittamātra* (mind-only) in the nominalist sense of *svacittamayamātra*—that is, the external world originated from the mind (*citta*) which is in itself insubstantial (*adravyasat*).²⁸

Continuing Bhavya's inclusive Madhyamaka line, Śāntarakṣita in his *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* admitted the mind-only (*sems tsam*) notion at the *samvṛti* level.²⁹ Like

²⁵ Bhavya's *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* can be understood as the Indian precedents of the Buddhist doxographical tradition; see Tam and Shiu 2012: 10–11. For a brief introduction of these two works, see Ruegg 1981: 62–63, 89–90.

²⁶ See Tam and Shiu 2012: 47–56. For more discussions on the *grub mtha* ' genre of Tibetan literature, see Mimaki 1982: 1–12.

²⁷ Lindtner (1997: 199) notes: 'Bhavya is the first, for all we know, to attempt to reduce *svabhāvātaya* to *satyadvaya* on a grand scale. He picks up the old distinction of *samvṛti-satya* into the correct and wrong types, mainly to enable himself to reduce *parikalpita*- and *paratantra*- to those two forms of *samvṛti-satya*.' This, however, has inflicted on Bhavya criticisms from the Vajñānavādin camp.

²⁸ See Lindtner 1997: 187–189.

²⁹ See the *MA* (verses 92–93); *sems tsam la ni brten nas su | phyi rol dngos med shes par bya | tshul 'dir brten nas de la yang | shin tu bdag med shes par bya || tshul gnyis shing rta zhon*

Bhavya, Śāntarakṣita assigned the Yogācāra *parikalpita*- and *paratantra-svabhāvas* to wrong and correct conventional truths (*mithyā-saṃvṛtisatya* and *tathya-saṃvṛtisatya*), respectively. Unlike Bhavya, he accepted the self-luminous *svasaṃvedane* (*rang rig rang gsal*) as a true conventional truth leading to the Madhyamaka goal of establishing non-origination (*anutpāda*) free from the four extremes (*catuskoṭi*).³⁰

As shown in both Ye shes sde's *lTa ba'i khyad par* and dPal brtsegs's *lTa ba'i rim pa bshad pa*, Tibetans first perceived Śāntarakṣita's and Bhavya's Madhyamaka traditions as superior to Hīnayāna and Vijñānavāda, labelling each as 'Yogācāra-Madhyamaka' (*rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma*) and 'Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka' (*mdo sde spyod pa'i dbu ma*), respectively. Whereas both Sautrāntika- and Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas share in common the *paramārtha* postulation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-origination (*anutpāda*), they differ in their conventional-truth descriptions about *cittamātra*—that is, while the former frames its understanding within a *pratīyasamutpāda* (conditioned origination) ontology, the latter subscribes to a mental idealism of *svasaṃvedana* in achieving the same end.³¹ However, it seems Ye shes sde has accorded Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka a superior status at the *saṃvṛti* level.³²

However, while the presence of Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka in Tibetan scholarly exegesis seems to be only doxographical, Yogācāra-Madhyamaka came to prominence in Tibet as a scholastic tradition thanks to the proselytising activities of Śāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla (c. 740–795).³³ Thus, we have reason to believe that it was in reality Śāntarakṣita's doctrinal system that informed the early Tibetan doxographical practice, and the presence of Bhavya's stemmed largely from the intellectual continuity between these two Madhyamaka currents which, however, were only doxographically distinguished in retrospect.

Let us now return to our *Notes* doxography. The first three levels of teaching envision a progressive model philosophically informed by Ye shes sde's doxography whereby one ascends the spiritual ladder consecutively through *svasaṃvedana* idealism and *pratīyasamutpāda* ontology.³⁴ The *Notes* doxography progresses from the

nas su | rigs pa'i sgrab skyogs 'ju byed pa | de dag de phyir ji bzhin don | theg pa chen po pa nyid 'thob ||; for an English translation, see Ichigō 1989: 221, 223.

³⁰ Śāntarakṣita's teacher Jñānagarbha (c. 700–760), while inheriting Bhavya's system without much innovation, departed from the latter in embracing Dharmakīrti's style. It is in Śāntarakṣita that the assimilation of Yogācāra into Madhyamaka reaches its culmination whereby Dharmakīrti's self-luminous *svasaṃvedana* is accepted as the true *saṃvṛti-satya*; see Lindtner 1997: 199–200; Ruegg 1981: 90–92.

³¹ See the *lTa khyad* (180–186) and the *lTa rim* (260).

³² See the *lTa khyad* (188).

³³ The major works belonging to Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Madhyamaka circle were translated into Tibetan around the turn of the 9th century. As for Bhavya's work, only the *Prajñāpradīpa* was translated during the same period. See Ruegg 2000: 12–13.

³⁴ The existence of a Tangut hagiography of the 8th-century Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen) teacher Vairocana alludes to the possible presence of Ye shes sde in the Tangut collection. The Tangut text is titled 'A General Presentation of the Five-cycle Dharmadhātu' (*tsjir kiej ŋwə djij •jij gu bu 禪歲歲龍龍編編 * 法界五部總序, *Chos dbyings sde lnga spyir bstan pa*). Only the second half of the work has survived. The extant part is concerning Vairocana's study journey to India. I thank Professor Kirill Solonin for exposing me to the existence of this text. Solonin's transcription of the

Hīnayānist selflessness in the person, through the Vijñānavādin self-luminous *svaṣaṃvedana*, up to the Mādhyamika emptiness which is free from four extremes. This is a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka depiction. Moreover, in addition to establishing the self-luminous *svaṣaṃvedana* as conventional truth, the third level leaves room for Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka in positing a conventional truth of ‘miraculous manifestation’, under the rubric of ‘transcending the over-negation’, which corresponds exactly with the *pratīyasamutpāda* ontology.

Then what about the fourth level, ‘returning to the source [of the mind]’? Tackling this question entails looking at the last centuries of the first millennium when the Mahāyāna doctrinal synthesis extended to—or subsumed—Buddhist tantric circles. Adding on to the traditional syncretic picture of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, the Buddha-nature (Tathāgatagarbha) current was granted import as a discursive thread which gave expressions to the newly flourishing tantric gnoseology.³⁵

Ratnākaraśānti (fl. c. 1000)—a great systematiser of tantric philosophy from the perspective of Mahāyāna scholasticism—put forth a fourfold *yoga-bhūmi* path (*rnal 'byor gyi sa bzhi po*) for the progressive refinement of one’s cognitive object (*ālambana*, *dmigs pa*): one first apprehends an external object (*dnogs po*), then on mind-only (*cittamātra*, *sems tsam*), on suchness (*tathatā*, *de bzhin nyid*), and finally perceives the *mahāyāna* (*theg pa chen po*).³⁶ The fourth stage, transcending the image-free (*nirābhāsa*, *snang ba med pa*) status of the third, directly perceives the *mahāyāna* without any *ālambanas*. Ratnākaraśānti seems to have unpacked Śāntarākṣita’s *paramārtha*—which is postulated as existing beyond the Vijñānavādin *svaṣaṃvedana*—into two stages, namely *ālambana* on *tathatā* and perception of the *mahāyāna*. Accordingly, it is legitimate to speculate that the *Notes* doxography overlaps with Ratnākaraśānti’s philosophical arrangement in that the third level of Madhyamaka corresponds to the *ālambana* on *tathatā* and the fourth level to the perception of the *mahāyāna*.

Moreover, combining both apophatic and cataphatic approaches in describing the experiential domain of ultimate reality (a direct perception of the *mahāyāna* built upon *nirābhāsa*), Ratnākaraśānti allowed room for the positive aspect of Buddhahood—characteristic of the Buddha-nature current—to unfold. A possible parallel of this in the *Notes* doxography is found in the expression ‘source’ (源 * 本 or 源 * 本) contained in the name of the fourth level.

text could be accessed through the link <https://www.academia.edu/38166091/GreatImage.pdf>. Vairocana—one of the first seven Tibetans to be ordained as Buddhist monks (*sad mi mi bdun*)—is said to have brought the mind-class (*sems sde*) and expanse-class (*klong sde*) teachings of Great Perfection from India to Tibet. According to the *'Dra 'bag chen mo*, which includes a historiography of the Great Perfection transmissions from India to Tibet and an extensive hagiography of Vairocana, Vairocana is also known as Ye shes sde sūtra-wise; see the *Bai 'dra* (f. 96.4): *mtshan kyang mdo ltar ye shes sde*]. Karmay (2007: 30), however, considers this identification as ‘simply a fancy’, since Ye shes sde belongs to the family of sNa nam, while Vairocana seems to bear the family name Ba gor.

³⁵ Kamalaśīla seems to be one of the earliest Madhyamaka teachers to incorporate the Buddha-nature doctrine into scholastic discourse and thought; see Ruegg 1981: 94–95.

³⁶ See Ruegg 1981: 122–123.

An example institutionally and temporally more immediate to our *Notes* doxography is found in the Assembly Teaching (*tshogs chos*) collections of sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1153) who drew exoteric doctrinal inspiration mainly from Atiśa (982–1054),³⁷ a disciple of Ratnākaraśānti. In the *Tshogs chos legs mdzes ma*, sGam po pa sketched a fourfold scheme for the fundamental reality (*gnas lugs gtan la phab*) by progressively eliminating conceptualisation (*rnam par rtog pa thams cad gcod par byed pa*).³⁸ The ontological status of being (*yin lugs*) one has to undergo across the four stages includes that of appearance (*snang ba*) to be recognised as mind (*sems*), of mind to be recognised as the nature of reality (*chos nyid*), of the nature of reality to be recognised as the inexpressible (*brjod du med pa*), and of the inexpressible to be recognised as the Dharmakāya (*chos kyi sku*). It is therefore obvious that sGam po pa's scheme agrees perfectly with both Ratnākaraśānti's and that of the *Notes* doxography in terms of both meditative content and progressive structure.

Concluding Remarks

Table 2 is a graphic representation of the levels of teaching and practice in the systems or schemes discussed above.³⁹

Table 2. Schemes found in different works

Śāntarakṣita	Ye shes sde	Ratnākaraśānti	sGam po pa	Notes
	Hīnayāna	<i>ālambana</i> on <i>artha</i>	<i>snang ba</i>	Hīnayāna
<i>svasaṃvedana</i>	<i>svasaṃvedana</i> (<i>saṃvṛti</i> of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka)	<i>ālambana</i> on <i>citta-mātra</i>	<i>sems</i>	Vijñānavāda
<i>anutpāda</i>	<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i> (<i>saṃvṛti</i> of Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka)	<i>ālambana</i> on <i>tathatā</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	Madhyamaka
	<i>anutpāda</i> and <i>nairātmya</i>	<i>nirābhāsa</i>	<i>brjod du med pa</i>	Buddha-nature
		absence of <i>ālambana</i> (perception of the <i>mahāyāna</i>)	Dharmakāya	

³⁷ Atiśa left a remarkable presence in the Xixia collection, either as the author of doctrinal compositions or an important personality in the tantric lineage accounts; see Solonin 2016.

³⁸ See the *Tshogs legs* (ff. 57a3–60a1).

³⁹ The graphic correspondence is only rough and for heuristic purposes. The typological parallels among systems do not necessarily imply historical inheritance.

As much as philosophical insight lays a claim to universality across time and place, its discursive form is historically and culturally conditioned. In the Buddhist case, philosophical thinking and scholastic writing, including its soteriology and gnoseology, are structurally entwined with a consideration of spiritual praxis.⁴⁰ The *Notes* doxography mirrors not so much a chronological and comparative presentation of different doctrinal schools as a scheme assigning teachings to rungs on a ladder leading to non-conceptual realisation. It sketches a fourfold scheme whereby a progressively deeper degree of reality unfolds in the practitioner's experiential domain. In its specifically Tangut expression, an orderly exposition of Hīnayāna, Vijñānavāda and Madhyamaka, shows a continuation with Ye shes sde's and dPal dbyangs's Tibetan doxographies informed by Śāntarākṣita's Yogācāra-Madhyamaka tradition. Meanwhile, placing 'returning to the source [of the mind]' atop the ladder represents a tantric emphasis of the Buddha-nature doctrine which transcends the image-free cognitive status, a practice also adopted by Ratnākaraśānti and sGam po pa. However, it is perhaps more of the *Notes*' innovation that the Mahāyāna hermeneutical devices of three natures, two truths, and the middle way free from reification and over-negation are combined to scaffold the entire doctrinal architecture.

I conclude the article with some complementary information regarding the doxographical schemes at work in the discursive pool of the Tibetan-inspired collection of Tangut Buddhist texts. A dilapidated text titled *Notes on the Keypoints Explaining the Two-truth Theory of Various Schools* (*tsjir kiej ηwə djij :jij gu bu* 薩禪釋義 * 諸宗二諦義釋要集記; 'Notes on the Two-truth') bears witness to a doxography different from that of the *Notes*. According to the *Notes on the Two-truth*, the causal vehicle (i.e., the sūtric or *pāramiā* mode) of Mahāyāna is divided into Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. While Yogācāra is further subdivided into the Sākāra and the Nirākāra types, Madhyamaka is subdivided into the Mayopama and the Apratiṣṭhāna types.⁴¹ This Mayopama-Apratiṣṭhāna division of Madhyamaka, which was not as well received as its Sautrāntika-Yogācāra equivalent during the *snga dar* (earlier transmission) phase of Tibetan Buddhism (7th–9th century), was confined to a small circle of tantric practitioners in India and therefore never had the chance to systematise properly. Thus, Tibetans inherited this scheme only in a very rudimentary form.⁴²

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⁴⁰ See Ruegg 1995.

⁴¹ As I am temporarily unable to access this Tangut text, I hereby thank Professor Kirill Solonin for kindly sharing his translation of the text with me.

⁴² See Almogi 2010.

- P Peking bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur. Numbering based on: Daisetz T. Suzuki (ed.) (1955–1961): *Eiin Pekin-ban Chibetto Daizōkyō* 影印北京版チベット大藏經 [The Tibetan Tripitaka]. Kyoto and Tokyo: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute.
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- Tshogs legs* sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, *Tshogs chos legs mdzes ma*. In GS: 443–451, Vol. 1.

2.3. Indic Works

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- MAU* Ratnākaraśānti, *Madhyamakālamkāropadeśa*. P 5586.

2.4. Chinese Works

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