

WATER MOONS AND OTHER PERFECTLY PURE ILLUSIONS:
LONGCHEN RABJAM'S DZOGCHEN SYNTHESIS IN *FINDING REST IN ILLUSION*

by

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ABSTRACT

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Thesis directed by Associate Professor Holly Gayley

Longchen Rabjam (*Klong chen rab 'byams*) was a fourteenth century Tibetan Nyingma master who wrote countless works on Buddhist thought and practice, specifically Dzogchen (*Rdzogs chen*). This thesis considers his use of Indian Buddhist metaphor in *Sgyu ma ngal gso (Finding Rest in Illusion)*, a text which goes chapter by chapter through eight classic metaphors of illusion. Through an inquiry into the social and political conditions of his time and a close reading on his chapter on the *moon's reflection in water*, I propose that his use of metaphor is both a pedagogical tool for liberation as well as a political method to position Dzogchen alongside Madhyamaka in order to legitimate the Dzogchen tradition and associated Nyingma tantras. Moreover, I reflect on the broader implications of metaphor as a means to mend suffering, alter one's relationship with their self and the world, and achieve pristine wisdom on the path to Buddhahood.

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Dedication

For all unreal beings, who though empty
Appear like reflections of the moon
Glistening upon a great ocean.
May they find ease in its *vast expanse*.

-An original poem of dedication inspired by
Longchen Rabjam's *Finding Rest in Illusion*

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Water Moons and Other Perfectly Pure Illusions: Longchen Rabjam’s Dzogchen Synthesis in *Finding Rest in Illusion*

Introduction

Overview of Themes

This thesis takes up the use of metaphor in a celebrated trilogy by Longchen Rabjam (1308-1364), titled *Trilogy of Rest* (*Ngal gso skor gsum*). Longchen Rabjam (*Klong chen rab 'byams*), commonly known as Longchenpa (*Klong chen pa*), was an acclaimed teacher in the Nyingma (‘old’ or ‘ancient’) school of Tibetan Buddhism, and continues to be recognized as a prominent link in the transmission of the Dzogchen and the Nyingtik cycles of practice. *Finding Rest in Illusion* (*Sgyu ma ngal gso*), the third and culminating volume of his trilogy is structured around a series of eight classic Indian Buddhist metaphors in its eight chapters. In each chapter Longchenpa interweaves traditional Mahāyāna understandings of appearances as *like a dream*, *like a mirage*, or *like the reflection of the moon in water* and so forth with Dzogchen rhetoric and insights. He presents a strong use of imagery in poetic verse, aimed at imparting the concept of illusion both in terms of Madhyamaka but even more so, in terms of the Dzogchen, or the Great Perfection. For example, in characterizing the illusory nature of phenomena, he states, “where the character of illusion is applied to the entire phenomenal field of both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—and even to the primordial ground from which these two states emerge.”¹ While phenomena are shown to be *dream-like* and devoid of origin, *like a magical illusions* in an unceasing display, coming from nowhere *like a trick of sight*, and neither coming nor going *like a mirage*, they nonetheless appear without compromise *like the reflection of the moon in water*—appearing in the manner of effortlessly present luminosity.

In this examination of Longchenpa’s poetic style and use of metaphor, I examine the ways that *Finding Rest in Illusion* synthesizes Madhyamaka, or the Middle Way school, into a distinctive Dzogchen rhetoric of the ground (Tib. *gzhi*) and ground-appearances (Tib. *gzhi snang*) in their dynamic display. In

¹ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boulder: Shambhala, 2018), xvi.

his expansion upon Nāgārjuna’s presentation of key Madhyamaka components such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *niḥsvabhāva* (lack of inherent existence), Longchenpa introduces a uniquely Nyingma arrangement of not just philosophical content but enduring Buddhist metaphors, specifically, the classic eight metaphors of illusion.² In doing so he responds to the political and religious pressures to conform to Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, the preferable philosophical school among the Sarma (new schools) during and after the second dissemination of Buddhist texts into Tibet and also assembles the foundation for a more ecumenical approach to Buddhist doctrine as a whole. The broad yet distinct approach of Dzogchen, which encompasses the entire range of the nine *yānas* (vehicles) is evident in the *lam rim* (stages of the path) layout of *Trilogy of Rest* with its focus on preliminary practices leading up to Dzogchen.³ While the nine *yāna* system is historically anchored in notable Nyingma tantras such as *The Sūtra which Gathers all Intentions* (Tib. *Dus pa mdo*) and the *All-Creating King Tantra* (Tib. *Kun byed rgyal po*), Longchenpa’s emphasis on the developmental stages of the path is characteristic of *lam rim*—a progression-based approach that became relevant and later standardized after Atiśa Dīpankara introduced *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*) to Tibet in the eleventh century.

The very conditions in which Longchenpa found himself in the fourteenth century allowed for a profound integration and transmission of esoteric literature from Dzogchen with a great many traditions including the more exoteric Buddhist schools of Madhyamaka as well as Yogācāra and other schools that teach the reasoning of valid cognition (Skt. *prāmaṇa*). In terms of exoteric literature Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvātāra* (*Entry to the Middle Way*) is one of the most prominent and relevant texts to the Sarma (schools that developed during Tibet’s second translation period). In addition, Tibet’s literary culture was developing with the influx of Indian poetics in accordance with prominent texts such as

² The classic eight metaphors of illusion (*sgyu ma’i dpe brgyad*) are cited in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhist Terminology* (*Chos rnam kun btus*): *skye ba med pa rmi lam lta bu/ 'gag pa med pa sgyu ma lta bu/ chad pa med pa chu zla lta bu/ rtag pa med pa smig rgyu lta bu/ 'ong ba med pa mig yor lta bu/ 'gro ba med pa brag cha lta bu/ tha dad pa ma yin pa dri za'i grong khyer lta bu/ don gcig ma yin pa sprul pa lta bu'o* (1770).

³ In *Trilogy of Rest*, Longchenpa refers specifically to the ‘common’ preliminaries including the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the dharma: 1) the freedoms and advantages of precious human birth, 2) the truth of impermanence, 3) karma, and 4) the suffering of saṃsāra. In *Finding Rest in Illusion* he references the ‘uncommon’ preliminaries including refuge, cultivating bodhicitta, and guru yoga.

Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* (*Mirror of Poetics*) translated by Sakya Paṇḍita (*Sa sakya paN+Di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan*) in the twelfth century. To further enrich and complicate the situation, Tibet also saw the arrival of 'new' tantras from India including the *Hevajra Tantra* translated by Drokmi Shākya Yéshé, the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* translated by Rinchen Zangpo, and the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* translated by Gö Khungpa during the tenth and eleventh century. This great convergence of philosophical, literary, and religious literature marks the later spread (Tib. *phyi dar*) of Buddhism into Tibet and the formation, propagation, and diffusion of Sarma (literally meaning 'new' schools) including the Sakya and Kadam, the last of which developed into the Kagyu and Gelug schools of Tibet. Needless to say, this period coined the 'Tibetan renaissance' by Ronald Davidson, marks a crucial 're-birth' of Tibet's culture intellectually, spiritual, and socially.⁴ Even in the centuries that followed Longchenpa, Tibetan culture continues to be characterized by a sustained interest in Indian Buddhist scholarship and values that surged between the tenth to thirteenth century. That said, as David Germano writes in *Poetic Thought* [...]:

It was Longchenpa who systematically refined the terminology used by the tradition with a series of subtle yet clear distinctions; brilliantly revealed its relationship with mainstream exoteric Buddhist thought; clarified its internal structure; created from it masterpieces of poetic philosophy remarkable for their aesthetic beauty, philosophical rigor, and overall clarity; and overall pinpointed the inner quintessence of the tradition with writings that not only systematized every major topic, but also creatively explained each to render crystal clear the unprecedented revolution in content, form, and structure of 'philosophical' thought in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism that the Great Perfection teachings entail.⁵

As a prime example, the *Trilogy of Rest* conveys a comprehensive presentation of the Buddhist view and path beginning with the 'four thoughts that turn the mind' from saṃsāra (Tib. *blo ldog rnam bzhi*), the very premise of the Buddhist path, followed by instructions for following a qualified teacher, the view of the Dzogchen ground, path, and fruition, guidelines for meditative practice, and finally, a vivid rendition of the illusory nature of reality introduced through eight metaphors in his final volume: *Finding Rest in Illusion*.

⁴ Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁵ David Francis Germano, "Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1992), 3.

In the chapters to follow, I will argue that Longchenpa's use of poetic metaphor in the *Trilogy of Rest*, and specifically in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, represents a doctrinal synthesis of Madhyamaka and an incorporation of longstanding Buddhist metaphors into an expanded ontology and cosmology of Dzogchen. Specifically, faced with major social, political, and religious shifts in Tibet, Longchenpa composed his literature for the sake of preserving and re-shaping the Nyingma tradition toward the contemporaneous ideals enacted by the Sarma schools. To clarify, by 'synthesis' I am not proposing that he came up with something new by combining the constituent elements of Madhyamaka and Dzogchen. Rather, I regard Longchenpa's synthesis as a poetic way to conjoin and blur the lines between the two. Specifically, by including notable Mahāyāna sūtras and eminent Indian Buddhist metaphors, Longchenpa builds a bridge to Dzogchen while drawing upon the philosophical authority of Madhyamaka. In doing so he softens the hard edges between the two, while retaining a distinctive faithfulness to Dzogchen.

As will be detailed in Chapter 1, the scholarship to date has shown four significant themes representing the prevailing ideas of his time, including (1) the increase in Tibetan scholasticism, including education in Indian grammar, science, and the arts, (2) a focus on Indic-origins as the standard of authenticity in combination with a developing interest in canonization, (3) a growing emphasis on the mastery of Indian *kāvya* (poetics) to demonstrate erudition and literacy, and (4) a budding interest in Tibetan authored commentarial literature indicated for example, by Longchenpa's verses in *Trilogy of Rest*, and his auto-commentary entitled *The Excellent Chariot*. To demonstrate Longchenpa's doctrinal synthesis, use of metaphor, and their social and political implications, I will conduct a close-reading of the fifth chapter, "The Reflection of the Moon in Water," examining his elucidation of the way things appear especially with regards to the Dzogchen conception of the ground, path, and fruition.

To begin with, I will introduce the prominence of metaphor from early Buddhism to Madhyamaka and Dzogchen while giving an overall presentation of prevailing themes to be discussed throughout this thesis. Thereafter, as a review of recent scholarship, Chapter 1 will be dedicated to an examination of Longchenpa's life and literature, as well as an overview of the literary culture in Tibet during the centuries prior to Longchenpa. Specifically, through a series of social and political changes,

along with a great influx of Indian literature during the tenth to thirteenth century, Tibet successfully re-invented itself after a century long ‘dark-period.’ In this thesis, I hope to illuminate how this combination of social and political shifts—alongside impressive new scholarship and an emerging cultured literati—both compelled and enabled Longchenpa to suffuse the ‘old’ Nyingma tantras and its associated practices, such as Dzogchen, with ‘new’ Sarma literary styles and philosophical structures that served to re-position the Nyingma within the new influx of Indic materials.

In Chapter 2, I give a more explicit consideration to how *Finding Rest in Illusion*, specifically Longchenpa’s chapter on the “The Reflection of the Moon in Water,” exemplifies a poetic synthesis of Madhyamaka within a Dzogchen paradigm. To do so, I examine the commonalities between Madhyamaka and Dzogchen and identify their variances in language related to the Madhyamaka articulation of *emptiness* and the *non-arising* nature of phenomena, and the Dzogchen appeal towards the figurative phrase that all phenomena are *like space, unborn* and thoroughly settled in inalienable *primordial purity* (Tib. *ka dag*) which is effortlessly achieved (Tib. *lhun grub*). The second chapter will focus on an in-depth reading of the “The Reflection of the Moon in Water,” where the quality of metaphor and similitude will be investigated especially with regards to the connection between Madhyamaka antecedents from Indian textual and cultural imports and Dzogchen ontology and cosmology.

Included in my in-depth reading of the chapter is an original translation of Longchenpa’s verses on the “The Reflection of the Moon in Water,” which I worked on with the generous guidance of Dr. Jules Levinson. The process of translating was both joyous and notably difficult at times. Anyone who reads and translates Tibetan knows that verse can often be intricate if not cryptic at times. The added dimension of difficult and subtle philosophical content, cultural and temporal differences, and what often seems like a complete incompatibility between Tibetan and English syntax only contributed to the challenges of translation. Nonetheless, despite the many moments of bewilderment, the process of reading slowly again and again seemed to not only aid my development as a translator, but to open up a way of

reading that took time to understand each word and appreciate each nuance of Longchenpa’s language and style.

In addition to a growing interest in the depth and clarity with which Longchenpa presented his material on Dzogchen, knowing that he was writing in a notably difficult yet dynamic time during which Tibet was in the process of reframing itself yet again, only heightened my interest in the context in which Longchenpa was living. In many ways I felt a certain appeal and even empathy to understand his world—seeing something of my own in the social and political instability that was taking place in Tibet during the fourteenth century. Just as Longchenpa was writing the *Trilogy of Rest* during a precarious time in Tibet, here I was in Longmont, CO during a global pandemic sitting at home in obligatory isolation, talking with Professor Levinson over Zoom every week to translate and ponder over Longchenpa’s work. While outside an uncertain future continued to brew as the United States underwent large-scale protests in light of social inequity and growing concerns regarding the 2020 presidential election, inside I was translating Longchenpa and contemplating the subtle differences between Madhyamaka and Dzogchen. In many ways my weekly meetings with Professor Levinson felt like a moment in time where everything outside just stopped. Just as in reverie the world seems fanciful, warm, and comforting however brief and fleeting, the world in which Longchenpa took us truly allowed for *finding rest* even if just for those moments.

We translated from the 1999 scanned reprint of a xylograph reproduction produced in Adzom Gar, a Nyingma monastery in the Tromtar region of Kham originally founded by the first Adzom Drukpa (1842-1924).⁶ On the topic of living through precarious times, it is quite astonishing to think that this particular reprint is the result of a remarkable sign of inner endurance by the second Adzom Drukpa (1926-2001). During the invasion of Tibet in the 1950s, Adzom Rinpoche was imprisoned for twenty-six

⁶ Dri med ‘od zer, “Sgyu ma ngal gso,” in *Rdzogs pa chen po ngal skor gsum dang rang grol skor gsum bcas po gsum nal gso skor gsum, rang grol skor gsum, dang snags kyi spyi don*, vol. 2, 693-705 (Tromtar: ‘dzom chos sgar par khang, 1999).

years by the Chinese Communist Party.⁷ It is said that he continued teaching Dzogchen to other prisoners and displayed signs of incredible yogic powers.⁸ After his release Adzom Rinpoche rebuilt Adzom Gar which had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Along with providing access to numerous texts, Adzom Rinpoche is a modern example of how Buddhist teachings such as the metaphors of illusion enable practitioners to settle their mind despite circumstances however distressing and protracted they are.

While there are a number of translations already available in English including Herbert Guenther's *Wonderment*, Padmakara Translation Group's *Finding Rest in Illusion*, and Keith Dowman's *Maya Yoga*, I believe my understanding of Longchenpa's work only increased with a valuable look into his own words in Tibetan.⁹ Each of the above three translations contribute a unique interpretation of Longchenpa's text, however, since like any language Tibetan has and continues to be in perpetual change, I found it worth considering the implications of his word choice. Since there are numerous word options for translation between Tibetan and English with little consistency between translations as seen in the titles above, my best option was to look directly into the source text. That said, since we only translated the fifth chapter (including verse, commentary and summary), I chose to work with Padmakara's most recent translation entitled *Finding Rest in Illusion*. I chose to retain their title throughout my thesis partially for the sake of ease, but also because I am partial to their more literal translation of the title. Aside from the choice title, all the translations from Longchenpa's *Finding Rest in Illusion* in this thesis are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ "Biography of Adzom Drukpa Thupten Padma Trinlé," Bodhicitta Sangha, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.bodhicittasangha.org/adzom-drukpa-rinpoche/>.

⁸ It is commonly said that he escaped his prison cell three times telling the guards that walls could not confine him. He could simply pass through walls, but since they wanted him to stay he continued returning.

⁹ (1) Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, trans. by Padmakara Translation Group (Boulder: Shambhala, 2018). (2) Longchen Rabjam, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us: Wonderment from the Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, trans. by Herbert V. Guenther (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1976). (3) Longchen Rabjam, *Maya Yoga: Longchenpa's Finding Comfort and Ease in Enchantment*, trans. by Keith Dowman (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2010).

Finally, in my conclusion I will give a brief overview of Longchenpa's legacy and consider a number of 'open questions' extending the notion of metaphor and figurative language to various aspects related to transmission, devotion, and the concept of lineage from the Nyingma point of view.

Metaphor and Similitude

Alongside a contextual analysis of the historical conditions which served to propel and inspire Longchenpa to compose his trilogy, I place metaphor at the center of my analysis—with specific interest in the question, 'how is it that perception can be altered through metaphor?' Ernest Gombrich asserted that metaphor is not a "transfer of meaning but a restructuring of the world."¹⁰ In *Metaphors: Figures of the Mind*, Zdravko Radman elaborates upon Gombrich's assertion, putting into question what composes 'the world' altogether and how language—specifically figurative language—enables us to successfully articulate how the world is itself conceived while simultaneously affecting how the world is itself experienced by individuals, communities, and societies at large. Radman observes that since 'world-views' are themselves infinite and open-ended, metaphors are likewise a 'process' since they articulate ideas about the world as well as bridge new or difficult ideas with common experience. In this way, metaphor not only promotes metaphorical shifts in meaning, but is also a "medium for promoting the shift of world paradigms."¹¹

As a matter of example, key metaphorical expressions articulated by classic allegories such as Plato's *Cave* or Orwells' *Animal Farm* as well as modern examples such as *The Matrix*, function not just as poetic uses of language, but as powerful instruments for articulating reality and re-shaping our experience of ourselves and the world itself. For Indian Buddhists, figurative expressions such as the *reflection of the moon in water, an echo, or a dream*, are anchored not only historically but also culturally in the sense that these very expressions articulate how the world is perceived on coarse and subtle levels. Metaphor as a 'world-making' mechanism "achieves this articulation by combining heterogenous and

¹⁰ Zdravko Radman, *Metaphors: Figures of the Mind* (Netherlands: Springer, 1996), 151.

¹¹ Zdravko Radman, *Metaphors: Figures of the Mind*, 153.

even disparate elements into a new whole...one brings together commonly unaffiliated things and aspects, and there is a bridging of what were previously considered to be worlds apart.”¹² In other words, the very *meaning* we make of our self and the world is assembled and also transformed via metaphorical expressions.

In *Finding Rest in Illusion*, I propose that Longchenpa applies metaphor not so much in a manner of ‘world-making’ but rather in terms of ‘world-revealing,’—a subtle yet meaningful difference. For instance, in the Nyingma tradition (as well as many other Buddhist traditions), by recognizing the ultimate nature of things as *emptiness*, that is, by comprehending and understanding its meaning, entails a complete shift in how the world and oneself are *conceived*. In fact, the ultimate ‘meaning’ (Tib. *don*) is revealed *through* metaphor, simile, example, or other instances of similitude (Tib. *dpe*). In this way, metaphor carries the capacity for revealing not just any world but rather the sacred-world of *dharmatā*—the genuine sphere of reality according to the Nyingma. ‘Sacred,’ in this manner does not entail a separate reality. Rather, *suchness* which is the unconditioned nature of reality—*dharmatā*—is ever present in all phenomena from *samsāra* to *nirvāṇa*. It is the genuine nature of all things seen clearly for what they are, as opposed to mistaken perception derived from the ignorance (Tib. *ma rig pa*) that sees things in terms of duality (Tib. *gzung ‘dzin*).

To be clear, the Nyingma school emphasizes not a complete change in outer and inner phenomena (apprehender and apprehended) in the sense of something being added or taken away, but rather, a transformation of *how* we see and understand them. In brief, in Buddhist epistemology more generally, an apprehending subject (Tib. ‘*dzin*) conceives of an apprehended object (Tib. *bzung*), in a manner of dualistic thinking, which produces a mistaken appearance (Tib. ‘*khrol snang*). Oftentimes Buddhists texts and living masters liken mistaken appearance, to a hallucination, and not the kind of hallucination that is fun or amusing like a hall of mirrors at an amusement park, but a mistake that has repercussions in the realm of intention and action. The mistake that ordinary individuals make when they

¹² Zdravko Radman, *Metaphors: Figures of the Mind*, 154.

see these hallucinations as separate from themselves is the result of mistaken dualistic conception. This dualistic outlook is then reinforced in an ongoing habitual pattern that assumes the reality of oneself and the phenomenal world. The function of Buddhist metaphor is then to describe phenomena in terms of their illusory, mirage or reflection-like nature, suggesting the problem with holding onto the oneself and the world to be real. In this regard, set within the container of Buddhist metaphor, the picture of the world is construed within an ontology of emptiness and illusory appearances.

Expanding upon these long-standing Indian Buddhist metaphors Longchenpa brings their illustrative and instrumental capacity into the broader world-view of the Nyingma, weaving them into the fabric of Dzogchen cosmology where they bear not only the empty aspect of appearances, but also their dynamic and vividly clear qualities. As instruments for not only articulating ideas but also transmitting and transforming individual and communal views of the world, the way in which Longchenpa synthesized Buddhist metaphors effectively carved out the very landscape of Nyingma ontology and cosmology into the rich and colorful world-view that we see even today. The metaphorical dimensions of his language, are in fact indicative of how language functions to establish and transform world-views, how ideas are synthesized and blended, and how some figurative expressions endure the course of time. For example, in Longchenpa's use of the *reflection of the moon in water*, the expression itself retains its liberatory capacity as a metaphor uttered by the Buddha, while evoking a revolutionary re-shaping of the Buddhist world-view into a Dzogchen outlook. In this manner, though metaphor remains a contemplative pedagogical tool, it simultaneously provides the means for an important ontological shift in perspective.

By contrast, in *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that, according to the objectivist view of linguistics, just as objects are credited with inherent properties independent of human apprehension, "linguistic expressions are [treated as] objects that have properties in and of themselves."¹³ Likewise, within Buddhist Studies, philologists have been more concerned with the semantic meanings of philosophical texts and less interested in how literary style contributes to that

¹³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 204.

meaning. Within the last fifty or sixty years however, philosophers, linguists and cognitive scientists alike have considered metaphors as important sites for the crystallization of cultural meaning—that is, an element of language that permeates all aspects of our life.¹⁴ In this regard, Lakoff and Johnson argue that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical.”¹⁵

Concepts about ourselves and our world necessarily structure how we perceive, how we relate and how we negotiate our way through the world. Likewise, since language is so obviously involved with communication and therefore how we think and act, it indicates the qualities and characteristics of our conceptual system. A simple metaphor such as *time is money* operates not only as an isolated linguistic event. *Time is money* influences and is influenced by a far more extensive body of values, beliefs, world-views, social practices, personal constructs, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors making up our conceptual system. Linguistic expressions thereby produce, rectify, and support an extensive systematic *idea* about ourselves and the reality we live. *Time is money, love is kind, mind is a machine*, and so forth, therefore serve as coherent linguistic markers that illustrate the various metaphorical models of the reality we construct and live by.¹⁶

As such, metaphor is not only an aspect of poetic expression, it is an essential linguistic element that pervades our conceptual system, so much so that “metaphor is not just a word or concept used outside its usual meaning to express a similar idea, but is rather a way of conceiving one entire realm of concepts in terms of another realm.”¹⁷ Metaphor shapes cognitive function, but more simply, metaphors affect the way we understand and relate with ourselves and experience of the world altogether. Likewise, in the context of Madhyamaka, metaphor acts to influence the way reality is understood. The linguistic

¹⁴ Examples of this re-positioning can be seen in the growing interest in embodied cognition, a branch of cognitive science that extends the influence of perception and behavior beyond the brain, to include influences of time, culture, and physicality.

¹⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, ix.

¹⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*.

¹⁷ David McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 64.

expressions of illusion such as *phenomena are like dreams*, function in a similar manner, albeit with an agenda to uproot the very conceptual system that is anchored in mental and emotional confusion and propels the turning of birth and death.¹⁸ By comparing appearances to dreams and illusions, Buddhist teachings attempt to shape a person’s disposition toward their mistaken division of self and the world in such a way that holding to the ‘realness’ of inner and outer phenomena progressively diminishes and suffering wanes.

As a method to transform the way a person sees the world, the metaphors of illusion operate not only on how a person thinks about reality but also how they see and relate with it. According to the tradition, the mistake of dualistic perception—where mind and objects are distinguished as uniquely independent things—is responsible for the perpetual turning of saṃsāra throughout eons and eons of lifetimes. Dualistic perception is tantamount to with ignorance (Tib. *ma rig pa*), characterized as a lack of awareness about the genuine nature of reality. From the Madhyamaka point of view, genuine or ultimate reality is emptiness. Realizing emptiness is the initial step that thrusts an individual onto the stages toward attaining Buddhahood. Consonant with similar values and regard toward the ultimate empty nature of a personal self and phenomena, Longchenpa identifies Buddhist metaphors within a Dzogchen paradigm, aligned with the fundamental truth of emptiness, yet replete with rich and affirming linguistic expressions.

Language and Metaphor Early Buddhism to Madhyamaka

While the use of metaphor is not exclusive to Buddhism, it has become a notable approach for teaching and transmitting the Buddhist worldview since the time of the Buddha. Early Buddhist literature tends to reject the idea that words themselves offer a means for attaining ultimate knowledge. In *Empty Vision*, David McMahan credits this negative attitude toward words and concepts to the Buddhist dismissal of the Vedic notion that words possess an intrinsic and eternal power.¹⁹ Accordingly, even though Buddhist

¹⁸ According to Buddhist thought, mental and emotional obscurations (Skt. *jñeyā-varaṇa* and *kleśā-varaṇa*) are what hinder liberation from Saṃsāra.

¹⁹ David McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 18.

tantra would later reinvest in and employ the power of mantra, early Buddhists argued that language, specifically denotive language, did not have such a function.²⁰ The production of speech or written language goes hand in hand with abstract thought and conceptual proliferation (Skt. *prapañca*)—which is traditionally regarded as the basis for delusion and bondage in *samsāra*. It is merely through reification and designation, the application of names to otherwise dynamic phenomena, that things seem permanent and reliable, and while the early Buddhists argued for the existence of inherently real *dharmas* (basic elements of the empirical world), they asserted that words themselves do not possess any intrinsically real nature.

Likewise, according to McMahan even the Buddhist scriptures were not themselves treated as divine or eternal revelation; rather early Buddhists endorsed the idea that the words of the Buddha were meant to be examined, contemplated, and put into practice. In other words, language is able to impart the Dharma, but realization requires the listener to hear and make sense of the words and then to train and put them to practice. Perhaps this notion was aimed at hindering conceptual proliferation and curtailing narrow thinking and dogmatism. In this regard, when asked to elaborate upon his disciple's more speculate questions, such as 'whether the world is eternal or not,' the Buddha pragmatically answered by not answering them directly, rather he demonstrated the futility of speculation as well as the limits of speech through literary devices.²¹

For example, in the *Cūḷa Mālunkya Sūtra*, when asked to respond to the question of whether or not there is life after death, the Buddha tells the 'parable of the poisoned arrow.' There he describes a wounded man, struck with a poisonous arrow, refusing to allow his friends and relatives to provide him with a surgeon to remove the arrow. Instead of accepting help he demands to know what caste the person

²⁰ In *Magical Power of Words* (1968), Stanley Tambiah argues for the performative power of speech, specifically in terms of ritual and mantra as an important feature of both symbolic expression and communicative activity geared toward orienting practical activity. Denotive language on the other hand, speaks toward the function of words in terms of definitive or literal meaning.

²¹ There are believed to be ten or sometimes fourteen or sixteen 'unanswered' or 'indeterminate questions' to which the Buddha remained silent. They generally have to do with whether or not the world is eternal or not, finite or not, whether or not the soul and body are the same or not, and whether or not a realized person exists after death or not.

who wounded him was, the name of their clan, whether they were tall or short, the color of their skin, the make of the bowstring, the kind of feathers fastened to the shaft of the arrow, and what shape the bow itself was. Finally, the man dies and his questions remain unanswered. Lost in speculative thinking, the man fails to pursue the thing that would save his life—removing the arrow, which in this case, represents the path of Dharma as a practical approach to relieving suffering.²²

Although the early Buddhists articulated the idea that language does not have ultimate inherent existence while *dharmas* do, this became a point of departure and contention in the Mahāyāna. Especially with regards to language the Mahāyāna, specifically the Madhyamaka school, found fault with the notion of intrinsic *dharmas* and sought to eradicate any lingering reification of outer phenomena. McMahan describes the Madhyamaka approach as “radicalizing the ‘constructivist’ claims implied in the theory of dharmas,” by asserting the ontological claim that “dharmas themselves are conceptual constructs and have no more inherent reality than any other names and conceived thing.”²³ Indian Buddhist authors such as Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva saw the inconsistency with refuting the inherent existence of language while attributing reality to outer phenomena. According to the Madhyamaka, if referential language is not intrinsic, then how could any ontologically substantial phenomena (to which referential language is directed), exist? The idea that phenomena cannot possess any ‘essential’ or inherent existence (Skt. *svabhāva*) is in fact the primary presentation of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses of the Middle Way*). Through a process of *reductio ad absurdum*, Nāgārjuna demonstrates the fallibility of substantiating outer phenomena by deconstructing *dharmas* (phenomena) through a process of word play and analytical meditation. Language serves as a catalyst to analyze concepts about phenomena, such as time, which is broken into infinitesimally smaller fragments until nothing is left to analyze and what is left is an experience of emptiness.

²² “The Shorter Exhortation to Māluṅkya Cūḷa Māluṅkyovāda Sūtra,” Talks, Writings and Translations of Thānissaro Bhikkhu, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/MN/MN63.html>.

²³ David McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 26.

McMahan continues to draw on this point, noting that in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, an early Mahāyāna sūtra, the tendency to delimit phenomena by way of conceptual divisions is described as “false discrimination or construction” (skt. *vikalpa*). The function of language is itself a process of conceptually dividing and defining phenomena into comparable categories, which for the early Abhidharma schools led to claiming the intrinsic nature of phenomena. What Nāgārjuna and other Madhyamaka Buddhists argued however, is that because all phenomena are conditioned they are themselves inherently empty of intrinsic nature. While possessing seemingly unique characteristics, phenomena are situated within an indeterminate and boundless empty nature exemplifying Madhyamaka’s presentation of the two truths. Referencing *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, he writes: “in this respect, they [dharmas] are all ‘like space’ (skt. *ākāśa*).”²⁴ Their fundamental nature is boundless, and thereby lacking intrinsic nature (skt. *svabhāva*).

Interestingly this notion fits quite well with Lakoff and Johnson’s argument against objectivist claims in *Metaphors We Live By*. According to objectivist linguists such as Richard Montague and Noam Chomsky the notion of the “building block theory,” i.e., an empirical world made up of objects with inherent properties, forms the premise of “objectivist linguistics” and misattributes inherent properties to language.²⁵ Additional objectivist linguistic theories such as universal grammar, and deep-structure grammar, propose the idea that all languages share a common structural basis which govern and simultaneously limit the available linguistic expressions available to people and communities. While critiques of such ideas admit that theories such as universal grammar are not falsifiable, the overall approach is rather rudimentary and more often than not limited to only a few features of language.

In *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, George Steiner contends that Chomsky drew many of his linguistic examples from similarly structured languages resulting in “a profound bias towards ‘monolingualism’ [that] pervades transformational generative theories and their inference of

²⁴ David McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 28.

²⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, 201-208.

universality.”²⁶ In contrast to Chomsky, and especially with regards to poetry and translation, Steiner remarks that “language is a constant creation of alternative worlds. There is no limit to the shaping powers of words, proclaims the poet.”²⁷ Moreover, “uncertainty of meaning is incipient poetry. In every fixed definition there is obsolescence or failed insight. The teeming plurality of language enacts the fundamentally creative, ‘counter-factual’ genius and psychic functions of language itself.”²⁸ In a similar light, according to Lakoff and Johnson, the objectivist view of language fails to consider the way people understand and construct meaning. Metaphor is as much related to our conceptual system as it is to language, so much so that metaphor forms the basis of *how* we make sense of our experience. Immersed in a world of language(s) and meaning, each and every individual and community constantly communicates through a symbolic transaction of words and meaning out of which a series of “structured gestalts” emerge as coherent human experience.²⁹ In this manner, words and meaning are not categorized in terms of fixed inherent meaning. Rather, human experience *and* language are in constant communal flux.

To continue, the Mahāyāna shift in ontological discernment came with a number of additional insights, namely an emphasis on *prajñā* (insight), and the ability to ‘see’ the true nature of phenomena. Perhaps more importantly, the shift in the ‘status’ of phenomena resulted in a novel Buddhist idea: the possibility for attaining wisdom and consequently liberation while remaining in the world, suggesting a novel approach to the ontology and characterization of *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra*. It followed then, that Mahāyāna Buddhists acquired a new understanding of the condition of suffering and the causes for liberation. While advocating for the philosophical view of emptiness, Mahāyāna writers pushed the limits of language in order to express a ‘new’ and radical ontological view founded on the refutation of inherent existence (Skt. *svabhāva*) and a renewed interest in metaphor.

²⁶ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 234.

²⁷ George Steiner, *After Babel*, 234.

²⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel*, 234-235.

²⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, 122.

Metaphors became especially important as a way for Mahāyāna authors such as Nāgārjuna, Śāntideva, and Candrakīrti to gesture beyond language and concept within the limits of language. For example, in *Bodhicaryāvatāra (The Way of the Bodhisattva)* Śāntideva describes emptiness as the interdependence and conditionality through the metaphor of a reflection in a mirror. He writes: “What is seen when circumstances meet and is not seen in absence of the same is not real; it is like an image in a mirror. How can true existence be ascribed to it?”³⁰ In a familiar explanation of dependent origination, Śāntideva relies on the common experience of seeing a reflection in a mirror. The image is produced as a result of conditions coming together, but as we all know, no substantial *thing* is really there.

Now that we are aware of the pervasiveness of metaphor throughout our lives and within our very sense of self—aware of the power and potential of metaphor to deconstruct and reconstruct our sense of social and individual reality, perhaps it is easier to see the reason behind these Buddhist metaphorical examples. Just as I am habituated to thinking of myself as an American—accustomed to rock music, cool but casual dress, two weeks of vacation, drive-through burgers, and American slang, the metaphor of illusion introduces a distinct yet all-encompassing sense of reality equipped with subtle nuances pertaining to self (or no self)-hood. Through the metaphor of illusion, the notion I have of my ‘self’ as an American, or what not, is put into question and the subtle and not so subtle grasping to my self diminishes while Buddhist ideals such as equanimity and compassion increase (ideally at least). In fact, the Tibetan term *sgom* while often translated as ‘meditation,’ refers more specifically to ‘cultivation’ or ‘habituation’—i.e., habituation toward the Dharma and a loosening of conceptual *patterns that perpetuate saṃsāra*. If the aim of Madhyamaka is to bring about a shift in perception and a transformation of ontological knowledge, it makes sense to regard metaphor not just as a casual or incidental expression in philosophical discourse, but as a significant and practical pedagogical tool and element to transform epistemologically our way of seeing the world and ourselves in it.

³⁰ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala, 2012), 157.

According to Madhyamaka, analytical meditation (Tib. *dpyad sgom*) is a relevant and necessary application intended to enhance not only formal meditation practice but also one's life and future lives altogether. Again, the process of cultivating or habituating oneself towards seeing all phenomena as *like an illusion* decreases a person's mistaken belief in an inherently real self through a process of uprooting subtle habituation toward the 'mechanism' ie. the assumption of duality that conceives of an apprehending subject and an apprehended object. The process of Madhyamaka's analytical approach involves a sophisticated process of introspection, where even the smallest fraction of phenomena are analyzed until the intellect is unable to take the evaluation further. What remains is a realization of emptiness. For example, a vase can be broken into smaller components such as the shape or the raw material, the front, back, inside or outside of the vase, and even the process it takes to construct it. By looking at the vase and the concept of the vase itself from a number of varying angles, the process of analytical meditation seeks to find something that is permanent (Tib. *rtag*), independent (tib. *rang dbang can*), and singular (Tib. *gcig*).³¹ When a person looks deep enough they find nothing of the sort and its nature is resolved to emptiness. In conjunction with the use of metaphor as a pedagogical tool, through a process of analytical reasoning the aim of the Madhyamaka 'view' is to recognize the natural interdependence of phenomena; how things are neither singular, autonomous, nor permanent, and that 'things,' including our very 'selves' function via mutually dependent support, and are thereby empty of any inherent existence.

To be clear, the reason I highlight such terms as 'things' and 'self' is not random, and likewise the terms 'singular,' 'autonomous' and 'permanent' are not of chosen based on my own ideas. These concepts are thoroughly described in the Buddhist tradition, specifically Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka, which makes up the view of Candrakīrti, the seventh century Indian Buddhist and author of *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Entry to the Middle Way*), the famous commentary on the meaning of Nāgārjuna's

³¹ Madhyamaka reasoning adds four additional objects of negation (Tib. *dgag bya*) which deny 'entitiness' including the refutation of 1) intrinsic characteristics (Tib. *rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*), 2) establishment by way of intrinsic entity (Tib. *rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*), 3) being truly established (Tib. *bden par grub pa*), and 4) establishment through inherent existence (Tib. *rang bzhin gyis grub*).

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (*Root Verses on the Middle Way*). Terms such as those above are fundamental to Madhyamaka and ‘middle way reasoning’ (Tib. *dbu ma'i rigs pa*), which through careful examination of various aspects of phenomena seeks to uproot the very cause of suffering according to the Buddhist tradition: firmly believing that the self is truly ‘real,’ as in singular, autonomous and permanent. Moreover, the Madhamakans take it one step further, stating that even outer phenomena fall under these conditions. Believing them to be real causes only more confusion and more suffering.

The aim of Buddhist practices such as Madhyamaka’s analytical reasoning is intended then, to transform the way in which we see ourselves and the world. By loosening one’s hold on established habits of mind, which adhere firmly to the concept of ‘real self’ and ‘real outer phenomena,’ it is said that a natural sense of compassion arises and continues to build in accordance with *prajña*, that is insight into emptiness, which is the actual nature of reality. Adhering to a real self is like trying desperately to hold a handful of smoke, which merely disperses instantly into thin air, or reaching out to touch the reflection of the moon in water expecting to find something solid and lasting only to find there is nothing there at all.

Metaphor in this way serves as a method; a way to approach the difficult conclusion that the entire world, including ourselves, does not exist in the manner that we have always believed in. The habits of mind—how it seeks comfort in self and objects, how it goes out of its way to preserve itself often at the cost of others’ welfare, how it continually affirms some false sense of permanence and solidity, are merely the instrument by means of which *samsāra*—the cycle of birth and death—turns again and again and again in an endless round of suffering. Though such notions can be difficult in the beginning, Buddhist teachers themselves confirm that upon getting even a glimpse of the empty nature of reality, the compassion, the wisdom-intelligence, and general openness that arises in the mind provides for a ‘softer landing’ when faced with struggles large and small. Even Longchenpa writes in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, that upon recognizing the non-intrinsic nature of phenomenon “...one will laugh thinking, “How amazing! Appearances are nothing like how [I thought] they were before.”³²

³² *'di ci sngon dang mi 'dra ba'i snang ba ngo mtshar snyam du dgod bro*, (696).

Teaching through metaphor, in fact, touches upon the very elements of cognition that tend to produce and re-produce our sense of self and solidity. The beliefs we (in relative terms) grasp or push away, the characteristics of our self or others that we admire or reject, the ideas we have about success and failure, good and bad, or any sort of conceptual idea we have about our self, others, and the world around us, are sustained through habituation that continually builds layer upon layer of concept. In the case of Madhyamaka, these metaphors seek to cut through the mechanics of delusion and bondage in *samsāra*—the constant stream and multiplication of erroneous concepts, thoughts, and ideologies (Skt. *prapañca*). Paradoxically (or not), language, and more specifically metaphor, is employed in Madhyamaka to attain utter freedom from conceptual proliferation (Skt. *aprapañca*). While still a linguistic device, metaphor carries with it undertones of meaning without pointing to an object or idea directly, because in the context of Madhyamaka the ‘object’ is not an object at all. It’s *like the reflection of the moon in water*; you can see it, it functions, but nothing is really there. Likewise, metaphor gestures to a state or experience that cannot be spoken of directly without implying an existent object.

Since metaphor is not only a linguistic production but also informs cognition and our *sense* of reality, we could say that metaphor has the quality of directing one’s attention to something beyond, within, and between words and concepts themselves. Words construct reality, and since words are not themselves intrinsic to the things they name and neither are their referent objects, they are all at once incapable of penetrating the core ‘truth’ of phenomena. However, figurative language, while simultaneously possessing the same false core (unable to describe phenomena intrinsically), does possess a certain distinction. If I were to say *life is a dream* it would be wholly different from saying *life is like a dream*. In fact, Buddhist teachers are quick to reiterate this point—demonstrating an emphasis on the subtleties of ‘poetic’ device. Similitude, in this manner, performs the productive method of bringing to mind an experience of ‘something,’ without incurring an antecedent or referent object—because dreams, illusions, reflections, and so on are as we know not really there.³³ There is nothing to seize, nothing to

³³ Goodman (2005) makes a similar point in his article “Vaibhāṣika Metaphoricalism.”

conceptualize, nothing to grasp onto, and still there is an experience to be had. Just so, in the Dzogchen tradition, despite their lack of inherent existence, ‘ground-appearances’ continue to manifest in a dynamic display.

The Dzogchen Approach to Appearances

The language imbedded in the Dzogchen approach to realizing the nature of phenomena, features the qualities of ‘primordial purity,’ in the sense of not needing anything added or detracted. Near synonymous with the notion of ‘primordial emptiness,’ (Tib. *ye stong*) all that can possibly exist in samsara and nirvana have been and always will be *perfectly pure* in their nature. In his doctoral dissertation, Gregory Hillis describes this emphasis on naturally pure appearances as “the rhetoric of naturalness,” indicating the power of persuasion linked with language—how it evokes emotions, sways an audience, appears reasonable and sound, and moreover, how “to bind the convictions of the audience,” rhetoric “must appeal to their most deeply entrenched, as well as to their most immediate, desires and interests.”³⁴ In other words, by eliciting experience as opposed to pure intellectual reasoning, metaphor catches the interest of those who are not persuaded by strict logic or are otherwise unable or uninterested in intellectual reasoning.

As we will discover in Longchenpa’s *Finding Rest in Illusion*, even though he demonstrates sheer intelligence and ability to convey and illustrate sound reasoning associated with Madhyamaka, he nonetheless emphasizes the practical application of the Madhyamaka view, synthesizing it within a Dzogchen paradigm. For him, there is little point in mere intellectualism of which he associates with partisan and biased ideals. For him in fact, although he places Madhyamaka upon a pedestal, as did many other Tibetan schools at the time (and they still do), he asserts that all the Buddha’s teachings from his first discourse on the Four Truths of the Noble Ones in Sarnath to his explanation of the *Pajñāpāramitā* at Rajgir, as well as teachings on buddhanature can be subsumed into the profound path of Dzogchen.

³⁴ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness: A Critical Study of the gNas lugs mdzod” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2003), 24.

For this reason, metaphor and analytical reasoning are equally catered to in his *Finding Rest in Illusion*, demonstrating the means and methods of thinking critically about the nature of phenomena, while providing accessible illustrations of the *way things appear*. Even without a background in analytical reasoning, a person can read his text and find some awe and inspiration to practice and realize the aim of Buddhadharma. His language is accessible, its character down to earth, and his style overflowing with instances of poetic device especially metaphor, similitude, or likeness, which are not only relatable, but serve the function of providing experience to his readers. Moreover, his wish for individuals to truly understand the ‘nectar-like instructions’ are apparent in his words. As the contemporary Tibetan Buddhist scholar and master, Tulku Thondup exclaims, “By reading Longchen Rabjam’s warm, enchanting, and penetrating writings, one can feel the touch of his compassionate mind.”³⁵

Through his emphasis on luminosity and the ground-appearances Longchenpa adds a Dzogchen flourish to these metaphors that reveals a striking glimpse into the yogic worldview of the Nyingma. The “[ultimate] view *is* Longchen Rabjam,”—described by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche as inseparable “primordial purity,” and “spontaneous presence.”³⁶ *Long chen* meaning ‘great expanse’ followed by *Rabjam* meaning ‘infinite’ or ‘all encompassing,’ indicate the quality of boundlessness and pervasiveness attributed to the ultimate nature of reality. The union of the ground and ground-appearances described by the Nyingma tradition emphasizes an indivisible coalescence between the ultimate *dharmakāya* (truth body), and the ceaseless manifestation of the *rupakaya* (the *sambhogakāya* ‘enjoyment body,’ and *nirmāṇakāya* ‘emanation body’). The realization of that union is the very ‘sacred outlook,’ (Tib. *dag nang*) of the Nyingma where all forms, sounds and thoughts appear as the pure display of deities, mantras, and *dharmakāya*.

More specifically, the language present in the “The Reflection of the Moon in Water,” incorporates Dzogchen rhetoric emphasizing qualities of the ‘resultant vehicle,’— ground, path, and

³⁵ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, trans. Tulku Thondup (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2002), 177.

³⁶ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *Primordial Purity: Oral Instructions on the Three Words the Strike the Vital Point*, trans. Ani Jinpa Palmo (Boulder: Shambhala, 2016), 24.

fruition—and employing watery imagery which instills a sense of how *things* shimmer with the radiance of light, in the natural arising of appearances—in their beauty, bliss, and elegant purity. As a resultant vehicle, the path of Dzogchen focuses on purifying the temporary stains that obscure fundamentally pure and primordially present mind from shining with its natural radiance. It is merely by the temporary stains or dualistic “turbulent waves of apprehender and apprehended” and grasping to false appearances in the water of the mind that sentient beings suffer.³⁷ While due to temporary disturbances of an afflicted mind hallucinatory appearances manifest “the very nature of mind is similar to the center of a pure ocean,” unmoved by the winds of karma and temporary obscurations of the mind.³⁸ The calm, unmoving ocean, is likened to the primordial nature of mind, correlative with the notion of *sugatagarbha* (‘essence of the bliss gone,’ or buddhanature); the naturally present potential residing in all sentient beings, which comes to light when the temporary impediments that limit and prevent realization are purified.

At the same time, Longchenpa continues with the Madhyamaka notion that phenomena are empty of any abiding reality, *like an echo*—empty from the very moment they are perceived, as ephemeral as a hallucination—just as one might perceive of a *city of gandharvas*.³⁹ At last, they are *like an emanated apparition* of an accomplished yogi—appearing due to an accumulation of conditions, just as the phenomenal world appears to ordinary beings due to habitual tendencies. Whatever appears however, simply does not exist in the manner in which it is perceived. They are neither reliable nor enduring, and grasping to appearances as such only causes suffering—a theme that suggests a necessary shift in how one’s self and the world are conceived. While upholding the view of emptiness, Longchenpa enfoldes the full range of phenomenal existence, both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, within the boundless ocean of *one taste* (Tib. *ro gcig*)—where ontological extremes of existence and non-existence are cut through entirely and mind and phenomenal appearances arise inseparably. Accordingly, “when awareness—*rigpa*—is

³⁷ *gzung 'dzin du gyos pa'i rlabs kyis*, (694).

³⁸ *sems nyid rang bzhin dag pa'i mtsho dbus lta bu ba*, (694).

³⁹ *Gandharvas* are a class of heavenly deities in both Hinduism and Buddhism. In terms of the metaphor, *a city of gandharvas* is described as a mythical place used synonymously with the metaphor of a *city in the clouds* where there is no real place to dwell and no one dwelling there.

recognized as unfettered openness, one's conduct accomplishes the deeds that perfect the great accumulation. Thus, all phenomena that can possibly appear [in the world] arise as the playful display of a single *maṇḍala—center and periphery*.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *rig par nga yan phyogs bral du rtogs ba na byed spyod tshogs chen rdzogs pa'i spyod par grun pa'i phyir / snang srid kyi chos thams cad dkyil 'khor gcig gi rol par shar ba, (701).*

Chapter 1: Longchen Rabjam and Tibet's Literary Renaissance

Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam: A Life of Revelation

Even before his birth, Longchenpa was declared a noble bodhisattva. As the story goes, when he was conceived, his mother was awakened by a dream in which she envisioned, “that rays of the sun shone upon the forehead of an enormous lion, illuminating the three world realms, and vanished into her body.”⁴¹ On the tenth day, second month of the earth monkey year (March 2, 1308), Longchen Rabjam was born in a village called Todrong in the Yoru region of central Tibet. According to the tradition, a protectress by the name of Namtrul Remati appeared with a sword (a symbol of wisdom in the Tibetan tradition) and held the newborn child up high proclaiming her aim to protect him.

From birth onward, Longchenpa was provided with an enormous amount of opportunity to hone his abilities. While the tradition attributes him with the qualities of a bodhisattva such as faith and compassion from birth, he was also born into an elite position that afforded him access to esoteric practices and scholastic education. Dudjom Rinpoche, author of *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, an encyclopedic collection of their history, writes that Longchenpa, known as the ‘second conqueror,’ i.e., second Buddha, was born from a line of noble descent—the Öki Kyinkorcen, the ruler of Ngenlam (Tib, *Ngan lam*). Among the early descendants of the Ngenlam clan, was Gyelwa Chokyang, Longchenpa’s ancestor, and a direct disciple of Padmasambhava, the renowned Indian Buddhist master who visited Tibet in the eighth century. His father, Tenpasung, who was a master of the sciences and yoga of mantras, educated Longchenpa in medicine, astrology, and other sciences and granted him numerous transmissions on esoteric practices.⁴² Furthermore, his mother Dromza Sonamgyen was a descendant of Drömton Gyelwa Jungney, a disciple of the famed Atiśa Dīpaṅkara who introduced *blo sbyong* (mind training) and *lam rim* to Tibet in the early eleventh century.

⁴¹ Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* (Boston, Mass: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 575.

⁴² Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School*, 575-575.

In this way, Longchenpa was already in a position to bridge the Nyingma and Sarma schools. With an incredibly opportune birth—enabled with a wide range of education including access to the ‘old’ esoteric teachings of the Nyingma and the ‘new’ scholastic teachings from Atiśa’s Kadam disciples—along with his accredited natural gifts, by age five he could read and write and at age nine he had already memorized the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* in 25,000 lines and 8,000 lines (middle and short length sūtras). At twelve he took novice ordination at Samye, the famed Nyingma monastery, and began his study of *vinaya* (monastic vows and guidelines) and continued to receive a number of empowerments and instruction including those belonging to the Secret Mantrayāna (Tib. *Gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa*) or Vajrayāna.

The extensiveness of his studies is truly remarkable. According to Dudjom Rinpoche, he “comprehended most of the philosophical and spiritual systems that were known in the land of snow mountains” and therefore, “he thoroughly mastered all the branches of conventional sciences [ie., grammar, logic, etc.], the textual traditions of the sūtras and the way of mantras, the cycles of esoteric instruction, and so forth.”⁴³ By age sixteen he left for Sangpu Neutok, a Kadam monastery founded by Ngok Lekpai Sherab, a disciple of Atiśa Dīpaṅkara. Among the many teachings he received during his time at Sangpu included the entire collection of treatises by the renowned Madhyamaka master, Nāgārjuna. In addition, he studied a number of treatises related to Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses of the Middle Way*) including Candrakīrti’s commentary, *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Introduction to the Middle Way*), and Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Way of the Bodhisattva*). He also studied the *Five Treatises of Maitreya*, the *Seventeen Treasures on Valid Cognition*, and the Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa* (*Mirror of Poetics*). In terms of esoteric training, he studied the *Māyājāla*, or *Web of Magical Illusion*, which includes the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (*Secret Essence Tantra*) associated with the Nyingma school with Zhonnu Dondrup. Furthermore, he received transmission and instruction for cycles of teachings associated with the Kadam tradition including the *Cycles of the Meditational Deities* of Atiśa, as well as a number of doctrines transmitted to him directly by the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, including the *Six*

⁴³ Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School*, 578.

Doctrines of Naropa, Guhyasamāja, and the Hevajra Tantra. In addition, he studied the *Great Development of the Enlightened Mind* with Lama Tampa Sonam Gyeltsen of the Sakya. Overall, he acquired a vast range of studies and practice associated with the Nyingma, Kadam, and Sakya resulting in his extremely diverse range of knowledge on everything from sūtra, tantra, and their commentaries as well as grammar, poetics, and astrology.⁴⁴

Following this period of intense study, it is said that in conjunction with a growing distaste for the partisan behavior and rough nature of the monks at Sangpu Monastery along with a deepening sense of disillusionment with the world he resolved to live in solitude. What followed his decision to leave the monastery is perhaps one of the more vivid and momentous visionary experiences described in his biography. As the tradition puts it, after departing from Sangpu, he had a vision while engaging a dark retreat. Retelling his vision, the contemporary Nyingma scholar and master Tulku Thondup writes,

He was standing on the sandy bank of a river, from which he could see some hills. He heard the sound of singing accompanied by music. Looking in the direction of the sound, he saw a beautiful sixteen-year old woman attired in brocade, ornamented with gold and turquoise and wearing a golden veil over her face. She was riding a horse with leather saddle and bells. He held on to the end of her dress and prayed: ‘O Noble Lady (ie., Tārā) please accept me with your kindness.’ She put her crown of precious jewels on his head and said: ‘From now on, I shall always bestow my blessings upon you and grant you powers.’ At that point his body and mind became absorbed in a contemplative state of bliss, clarity, and freedom from conceptions. ‘I did not wake up for a long time!’ as he put it. Although he awakened at sunrise, for three days, he remained in the same experiential state. It established the interdependent causation of his encountering the Nyingtik teachings.⁴⁵

There is a lot to be said about this particular instance in Longchenpa’s life. The short of the matter is that having ‘established the interdependent causation’ he was able to give an empowerment (Tib. *dbang*) of Vairocana to thirty men and women after his encounter with the Noble Tārā. Moreover, it set the stage for the continued unfolding of prophecies in which Longchenpa played a key role. From a Buddhist point of view actions are not random. Rather they are set in motion through causation. Accordingly, Longchenpa’s connection with the deity Noble Tārā, set in motion important conditions resulting in his ability to teach

⁴⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School*, 575-579.

⁴⁵ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 148-149.

and spread important Dzogchen cycles such as the *Heart Drop of the Ḍākinī* (Tib. *Mkha' 'gro snying thig*) and other *gter ma* (treasure texts) associated with the famed Nyingtik tradition of the Nyingma.

Following that, at age twenty-seven as prophesized by his *yi dam*, or tutelary deities, Longchenpa set off to meet Rigdzin Kumārarāja, a great transmission-holder of the Nyingtik tradition. Upon meeting the nomadic yogin to which Longchenpa would become his 'heart son' (principle disciple), it is said that Rigdzin Kumārarāja was deeply inspired with a revelatory vision. According to Tulku Thondup, when he met Longchenpa, his master stated: "Last night I dreamed of a wonderful bird, said to be the divine bird, with a flock of a thousand birds. They came and carried away my texts in all directions."⁴⁶ At that, Rigdzin Kumārarāja agreed to offer Longchenpa the complete transmission of the *Vima Nyingtik* (*Heart Drop of Vimalamitra*), a collection of Dzogchen scriptures.

In this light, the prophecy granted to Longchenpa before his birth combined with his encounter with the Noble Tārā and master Rigdzin Kumārarāja's dream, paint his life in the color of vision and revelation. From the moment of his conception the numerous signs pointed him, knowingly or not, in the direction of not just mere scholasticism but genuine mastery of the transmissions he was granted. Moreover, as described in his master's dream, Longchenpa would be the very individual to spread and preserve the Nyingma teachings, such as the *Vima Nyingtik* taught by Rigdzin Kumārarāja as well as the *Khandro Nyingtik* and *Khandro Yangtik* which Longchenpa would reveal later in his life.⁴⁷

Equipped with a rich well-spring of opportunity and learning in the face of a dynamic and unstable socio-political Tibet, Longchenpa's literary corpus demonstrates a tremendous amount of fortitude and willingness to secure the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism in a shifting religious landscape. The tenth to fourteenth century brought significant changes for Tibet, many of which uplifted Tibetan culture to pick up the pieces of a broken empire. At the same time, significant social and political

⁴⁶ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 149.

⁴⁷ The *Vima Nyingtik*, *Khandro Nyingtik*, and *Khandro Yangtik* along with the *Lama Yangtik* make up to *Four Parts of the Nyingtik or Snying thig ya bzhi*. The *Lama Yangtik* in addition to the fifth addendum, the *Zabmo Yangtik*, are Longchenpa's very own compositions which are said to be the 'pith instructions' or condensation of the Nyingtik cycle texts.

changes came with a number of partisan differences. Contributing to these challenges, the Sarma prompted socio-political sanctions that made it difficult for the Nyingma to advance and retain their tradition. For example, Yeshe Ö's decree against 'unorthodox tantra' (Tib. *sngags log sun 'byin*) though intending to prevent charlatans from composing false texts, was largely aimed at tantric practices associated with the Nyingma resulting in further doubt about the Nyingma tantras. Nonetheless, in line with the vision of the divine bird carrying forward a flock of a thousand birds, Longchenpa pursued the task of preserving, teaching, transmitting, and advocating for the Nyingma tradition against all odds.

While retaining a sense of devotion to his own Nyingma lineage, Longchenpa carried out the task of demonstrating that the tradition of the 'old school' actually can and does measure up to the philosophical and practical applications of the new Buddhist trends. Exemplified in his writing, Longchenpa found ways to approach the Nyingma tradition within a 'Sarma landscape,' measuring up to ideals such as the increase in Tibetan scholasticism, including education in Indian grammar, science, and the arts. Specifically, during the Tibetan renaissance of the eleventh and thirteenth century there was an increased focus on Indic-origins of authenticity, a developing interest in canonization, a growing emphasis on Indian *kāvya* (poetics) to denote erudition and literacy, and a budding interest in Tibetan authored commentarial literature.

That said, as can be identified in his literary works, these four aspects of Tibetan Buddhist life in the tenth to fourteenth century represent not only a shift in Tibet's culture, but an exciting turning point for the Nyingma school. Having been associated with wild and disorderly *tantrikas*, or merely some offshoot of the indigenous Tibetan Bön tradition, the Nyingma school was thrust into a necessary remodeling—and as the story goes, prepared even from before birth, Longchenpa was just the person to accelerate and establish those changes.

Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam: The Erudite Hermit and his Literature

Longchenpa remained primarily in solitary places and emphasized the virtue of residing and practicing in the forest so as to inspire the mind toward joy and tranquility. In his words, he affirmed the "peaceful

vastness and beauty of the external nature as the support and the peaceful vastness and awareness of the inner nature of enlightened mind as the goal.”⁴⁸ Although he drew the attention of numerous devotees including scholars, he remained a hermit for the majority of his life, refraining from organizing any institutions.

After he meet and trained under his guru, Rigdzin Kumārarāja, Longchenpa continued to meet with a number of deities in visionary experience. On one account he meet with the Protectress Dorje Yundronma who declared that Longchenpa would be the one to reveal and transmit the *Vima Nyingtik*, a Dzogchen *gter ma* associated with Vimalamitra. Moreover, in a conversation with her, Longchenpa asked, “When I am introducing students to their true nature, do I explain that one rests in the unborn nature of thought or that one rests the mind without making any evaluation?’ She answered, “What is the point of stabilizing one’s thought process? Introduce them to the enormous expanse of timeless freedom!”⁴⁹ In this regard, the Dzogchen teachings are characterized by a meditational style which enables complete freedom of the mind as opposed to mental stabilization or cessation of thought. His name Longchen Rabjam Drimé Özer, or ‘Vast Expanse, Stainless Luminosity,” depicts that very aim of Dzogchen.

While residing in Ganri Tökar at Orgyen Dzong Longchenpa composed a voluminous collection of texts including the *Trilogy of Rest*. Throughout his relatively short life he studied with roughly twenty-seven teachers and is credited to over 250 treatises on history, ethics, as well as the sūtras and tantras. His collections include the extensive *Seven Treasuries (Mdzod bdun)*, the *Trilogy of Dispelling Darkness (Mun sel skor gsum)*, the *Trilogy of Natural Freedom (Rang grol skor gsum)*, and *Thirty Pieces of Advice from the Heart (Snying gtam sum cu pa)*, among countless prayers and *sādhana*s.

Several years after his time in Orgyen Dzong, he arrived in Bumthang, Bhutan and founded Tharpaling hermitage during a period of self-exile from Tibet. Although little can be found about his

⁴⁸ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 166.

⁴⁹ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, trans. Chökyi Nyima (Junction City: Padma Publishing, 2005), 111.

reasons for self-exile, traditional historians seem to agree that he left Tibet because his life was in danger. As the histories describe it, Longchenpa became the teacher of Gompa Kunrig, a powerful rival of Tai Situ, the leader of the Phagmodru Dynasty, who assumed political authority in 1354. The exact affairs are not documented in either Dudjom Rinpoche's or Tulku Thondup's biography of Longchenpa, but it can be well assumed that since Gompa Kunrig was a Drikung and Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen a Sakyapa, there were significant partisan differences, both religious and political between the two that led to a threat to Longchenpa's life. The tradition affirms that owing to continued social and political instability, Changchub Gyaltsen was threatened by the growing attention that Longchenpa was receiving, and more specifically, the potential influence that he might have on his rival.

Finally, despite the variety and range of his writing, Tulku Thondup makes it clear that although Longchenpa wrote on the paths and stages of practice and emphasized philosophical reasoning, he stressed again and again that all the *yānas* of the path can be condensed into one means of achieving Buddhahood. In the *Treasury of Dharmadhatu* (*Chos dbyings mdzod*) Longchenpa writes, "All are liberated in the infinite expanse of Dharmakāya, so all the realizations of the (nine *yānas*) are completed in this great secret essence (awareness)."⁵⁰ In a Dzogchen fashion, Longchenpa presents here, 'awareness,' or 'bodhicitta' (Tib. *byang chub kyi sems*)—the mind intent on enlightenment, for the sake of all beings—verifying its position as the ground from which all Buddhas are born and all Buddhas dissolve primordially, in an unbroken genealogy spanning time with no beginning and no end.

The Rise of Tibetan Scholasticism and the Tensions of Canonization

The extent to which Indic language and literature influenced Tibetan culture throughout the centuries can be traced as far back as the early beginnings of the Tibetan alphabet. Tibetan scholar Thönmi Samḥboṭa under the authority of Dharma king Songtsen Gampo (circa. 617-650) established Tibet's alphabet from Indic Brahmī script. Following its formation, literary Tibetan became an instrument for implementing the

⁵⁰ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 180.

Tibetan empire, assimilating aspects of Indic culture, and adopting Buddhism and Buddhist learning during the time of King Trisong Deutsen (circa. 742-797).⁵¹ Likewise, state sponsored translations of Buddhist scripture from Sanskrit into Tibetan sustained the growth of ‘dharma language’ (Tib. *chos skad*). The ‘first wave of translation,’ was in fact a massive enterprise, the scale of which suggests considerable funding from royal patronage, institutionalized regulation, and cooperation from qualified experts, namely Indian *paṇḍitas*. In his research, Georgios Halkias demonstrates that the colophons from the *Denkarma*, an early imperial catalogue, reveals that translators worked in small teams of Tibetan translators along with Buddhist scholars, mostly from India, but also from China, Uḍḍiyāna (modern-day Pakistan), Khotan (modern-day Iran), and Nepal, along with chief editors, editorial revisers, and scribes.⁵²

Although translation groups included a variety of scholars working in different languages, the fact that the large majority of recorded texts translations are derived from India reveals the preference for Indic Buddhist scripture and supports the reason for the Tibetan’s active pursuit of Sanskrit grammar and lexical techniques. In this regard, along with a Buddhist Council, Trisong Deutsen laid out the *Mahāvvyutpatti* or *Great Volume of Precise Understanding or Essential Etymology* as a word-by-word compendium with equivalent religious terminology in Sanskrit and Tibetan along with standard methods of translation. The result of their adherence to translation-equivalents and rules of Sanskrit syntax resulted in such precision that it has allowed for some Buddhist scholars to attempt ‘back translating’ Tibetan texts into Sanskrit with remarkable accuracy. To be clear however, the uniformity of Tibetan translations is not only a result of imperial authoritative compendiums, but also the early development of the Tibetan canon, more accurately described as a ‘catalogue’ in its early stage. The standardization of what texts were admitted and eliminated, including the eradication of variant translations, resulted in a uniform collection of texts as well as an ongoing crystallization of the Tibetan Kangyur and Tengyur.

⁵¹ Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

⁵² Georgios T. Halkias, “Translating the Foreign into the Local: The Cultural Production and Canonization of Buddhist Texts in Imperial Tibet,” in *Translation and Global Asia: Relocating Networks of Cultural Production*, ed. Kwan Uganda Sze-pui and Wong Lawrence Wang-chi (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2014), 148-152.

Evidently, these threads of Indic literary culture are retained in Tibet's own process of safeguarding the dharma through standardization practices around translation and textual inclusion. At the same time, by the late tenth century, with the introduction of new literature from India, especially those catalogued in the Tengyur, Tibetans began devising their own literary footprint in the form of Tibetan compositions, commentaries, and treatises—which despite their innovation, continued to reflect Indian literature in style, composition, and lexicon. Within that mix of innovation along with strict adherence to Indian models of standardization, however, there developed a process of crystalizing the Tibetan canon into what is today known as the Kangyur and Tengyur. The Kangyur being the translation of the authoritative 'words' of the Buddha (Tib. *bka'*) which for Tibetans included vinaya, sūtra, and tantra, and Tengyur being the translation of the 'treatises' (Tib. *bstan*) on sūtra and tantra as well as abhidharma. The canonization process became particularly more concrete and problematized during the second wave of translation beginning in the late tenth century, especially for the Nyingma tradition which was excluded from the Sarma catalogues.

This dynamic whereby Tibetans both glorify Indian models of language and learning as the source of genuine Buddhadharma, and branch out into their own expanded version of literary innovation through their own engagement with Buddhist literature and development of Tibetan authored treatises, is thoroughly illustrated in Tibet's tenth to thirteenth century renaissance. Again, the Tibetan renaissance was an era when Tibet entered a series of revivals both in terms of its Indian Buddhist 'heritage' and the Tibetan royal dynasty, particularly that of Dharma kings and the hagiography surrounding them. Davidson describes the stretch between the late tenth to late thirteenth century as a vigorous emergence from a dark period of social unrest after the fall of the Tibetan empire out of which Tibetan civilization was reinvented by placing Indian esoteric Buddhism at the center of its religious, political, social and educational practices. As Davidson concisely states, "from the tenth to the twelfth century, Tibetans used the evolving literature and practices of later esoteric Buddhism as iconic forms and points of reference to reconstruct institutions, found monasteries, and reorganize the political realities of the four horns [or

regions] of Central Tibet.”⁵³ Although the aristocracy added to Tibet’s social instability during the early portion of fragmentation, during Tibet’s renaissance, the aristocratic clans played a central role in building Buddhist institutions and establishing common Buddhist discourse.⁵⁴ However, there continued to be tension between the old aristocratic clans of the imperium and new aristocratic groups, particularly in terms of new Buddhist ideas associated with the Sarma compared to the Nyingma. In this regard, as Sarma monasteries began to canonize Buddhist literature and the standards of practice around inclusion and exclusion were tightened around the axiom of Indic origins many of the tantras from the ‘old’ translation period were placed under scrutiny.

Likewise, as the tension between the Nyingma and Sarma grew Tibet was also undergoing a significant social and political transformation. By the tenth century Tibet was in a state of unrest after two centuries of broken leadership after the collapse of the Tibetan empire. As Sam Van Schaik points out, there was a significant growth in monasteries which came with competition for patronage from local nobility.⁵⁵ The result was a lack of unification and coherent leadership. Nonetheless, many of those in the aristocratic class saw Buddhism as a central part of Tibetan culture and sought to unify Tibet by reinvigorating Buddhist ideals and practices. The first of these aristocratic clans to gain greater authority founded the Kadam school, which promulgated *blo sbyong* and *lam rim* according to the Indian paṇḍita Atiśa Dīpankara (982-1054). While the religious influence of the Kadam continues to survive even today, its political authority was relatively short lived.⁵⁶ By the middle of the eleventh century power fell into the hands of the Khön clan who quickly assumed religious authority and established the Sakya school. Although they sought to unify Tibet through standard Buddhist practices, their authoritative scope quickly

⁵³ Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

⁵⁴ Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 3-5.

⁵⁵ Sam Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 61.

⁵⁶ For example, all three Tibetan Buddhist schools in fact, integrated *blo sbyong* into their lineages, and Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), known as the founder of the Gelug school, drew his main source of inspiration regarding *lam rim* from the Kadam school.

seeped into social and political jurisdiction, especially during their century-long feudal lordship, during which the Sakya and Yuan dynasty of the Mongol empire combined forces between 1271-1368.

In particular, Könchok Gyalpo of the Khön clan, though originally a disciple of the Nyingma school, founded Sakya Monastery in 1073 and in turn established the Sakya school which played a vital role in the growth of Buddhism in Tibet while posing a number of challenges for the Nyingma. Davidson notes that the Khön clan became a leading force in the conflict between the old and new aristocracy, in part because they represented both the legacy of the old royal dynasty and supported the new Buddhist persuasion leading to the conflict between the Nyingma and Sarma. The Sakya school therefore converted the stronghold of their aristocratic power into a religious and scriptural enterprise—and one that, though not without problems, led to Tibet's assimilation of Indian esoteric Buddhism.

Despite the tension between Tibetan schools that arose between the tenth and thirteenth century, and again in the fifteenth to seventeenth century during the so called 'rise of the Dalai Lamas,' the growth of clan structures produced a sense of cohesiveness, at least in the sense that they provided common ideals especially with regards to education, scripture, and literacy in monastic institutions. In fact, the institutions established by the Sakya provided the groundwork for the great scholar and heir to the Sakya patrilineal line of abbots, Sakya Paṇḍita, to compose his famous and highly influential manual on Buddhist learning, *Mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo* (*Gateway to Learning*) or simply *Mkhas 'jug*, which includes a partial translation of *Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa* (*Mirror of Poetics*).⁵⁷

Like Longchenpa, Sakya Paṇḍita accomplished an exorbitant amount learning and composition during his lifetime, the weight of which made a great impact on Tibetan literature, culture, and religious practices. His primary source of influence, however, had to do with language, literature, and scholarship. The *Gateway to Learning* emphasized the need for Tibetans to become learned in matters of philosophy, grammar, debate, composition, and poetics, not for the sake of merely learning, but as advocates of the

⁵⁷ Sakya Paṇḍita's *m khas pa'i tshul la 'jug pa'i sgo* is not to be confused with Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche's *M khas pa'i tshul la 'jug pa'i sgo zhes bya ba'i bstan bcpos*, or *Introduction to the Way of the Scholar* which is also abbreviated as *M khas 'jug*.

genuine Buddhadharma. According to Sakya Paṇḍita, ‘scholarship’ entails methods of scriptural analysis intended to determine scriptural inclusion; allowing ‘in’ whatever is genuinely of Indian source and excluding ingenuine literature, that is, scripture that merely mimics ‘Indic’ literature. In *The Dharma’s Gatekeeper*, Jonathan Gold describes Sakya Paṇḍita’s aim stating that he “believed that the responsibility of all legitimate scholars is to defend the true Buddhist teachings against corruption and fabrication.”⁵⁸ His ‘vision of the scholar’ entailed education in epistemology, philosophy of language, translation studies, and literary theory among other aspects of learning such as poetics and meter, geared toward preserving the genuine dharma. This time of his visionary ideal was of course concurrent with an increased development of the Sultanates (Muslim dynasties) in India resulting in the decline of Buddhism in India. Tibet thereby assumed the role of preserving Buddhism altogether, placing themselves (in their point of view) in the new epicenter of Buddhist studies. As such, Tibet saw a rise of Indian *paṇḍitas* asserting interest in Tibet’s preservation of Buddhism, and in all likelihood, reserving the status of their particular lineages.

One such combination was formed in the interaction between Sakya Paṇḍita and his predecessor Śakyaśrī, who according to Gold, is known for transmitting the last major import of texts from India into Tibet. By imparting teachings from some of the great Buddhist monastic colleges in India, Śakyaśrī made Sakya Paṇḍita and the rest of his circle of students able to formalize the scope of Indian learning in a way that Tibet had not yet witnessed. The ‘new’ way of the scholar encapsulated the formal traditions of India while encouraging Tibetan authors to hone their own commentarial works through the use of Sanskrit poetics and literary theory. Likewise, the legitimacy of Tibetan works were determined in part by whether or not they followed formal rules of composition.

Gold, among other scholars, describe this ‘neoconservative movement’ of Śakyaśrī and Sakya Paṇḍita as a practice of distinguishing authentic texts from inauthentic texts and a strategy to build up

⁵⁸ Jonathan C. Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Paṇḍita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 8.

one's reputation and undercut rivals but also undermine or limit the promulgation of 'false doctrines.'⁵⁹ Another common phenomena of this period is that religious leaders joined forces with aristocratic and/or authoritative figures in a sort of 'patron-priest' relationship in order to retain social and religious power which in turn preserved their sectarian tradition. The result of this combination can be seen for example, in the patron-priest relation between the Mongol-Sakya during the Yuan rule over Tibet.⁶⁰

Despite any tensions that arose, we can infer that the massive influx of Indian literature and the growth of Tibetan authorship during the tenth to thirteenth century renaissance period indicates the innovative and inspired effects of Sakya Paṇḍita's authoritative treatises on scholarship and in particular the introduction of *kāvya*. In many ways, the combination of authoritative power and creative and/or spiritual talent can be an immense support for cultural and spiritual growth within a society. As a notable example, as part of the aristocratic Khön clan, Sakya Paṇḍita's role in governance, religious development, and scholasticism indicates the synergy between politics, society and religion in Tibet during the tenth century.

In a similar light it should be noted that in early India, the relationship between 'patron' and 'poet' was established in a similar symbiotic relationship. It was the role of kings or nobility to provide support for poets to focus on their creative work. At the same time, as A.B Keith writes in the *History of Sanskrit Literature*, "It was the duty of the king to bridge the gulf between wealth and poetic talent, of the poet to save his patron from the night of oblivion which else must assuredly settle on him when his mortal life closed."⁶¹ We can infer from this statement that in India, *kāvya* was neither estranged from the ranks of nobility nor from the status of religious life. Moreover, the *kāvi*, or poet, was granted a dignified status, on par, albeit of a different stroke, to the king himself.

⁵⁹ Jonathan C. Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers*, 7.

⁶⁰ Sam Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 61-84.

⁶¹ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression: The Central Chapter of Dandin's" *Kavyadarsa*" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), 60.

Sakya Paṇḍita's Scholastic Model and the Influence of *Kāvyaḍarśa*

One of the key factors of Sakya Paṇḍita's work that was particularly influential was his instructions on Indian poetics and literary theory, specifically through his translation and teachings on *Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa (Mirror of Poetics)*. Tibetan literature, therefore, inherits from India not only the problems of language posed by early Buddhism and the Mahāyāna, but also a sophisticated understanding of figurative language through the influential *Kāvyaḍarśa*, which was beginning to come into vogue during Tibet's renaissance among intellectuals in central Tibet. By the time Longchenpa was writing his texts in the fourteenth century poetic literary practices had become the norm for a wide range of literature including but not limited to poetry itself. The categorizations of figurative language which takes up much of *Daṇḍin's work falls into the divisions of 'imagery' (Tib. gzugs), 'vitality' (Tib. srog), and 'ornamentation' (Tib. rgyan)*. Roger Jackson makes the point that these characteristics of *kāvya*, occur more widely in Tibetan styles of versification or "metrically regulated composition" which is largely associated with three primary oral and literary genres: 'song' (Tib. *glu*), 'poetic songs' (Tib. *mgur*), and 'poetry' (Tib. *snyan ngag*) each distinguished by their varying degree of imagery, vitality, and ornamentation.⁶²

While these qualities of literature define the boundaries of characteristic genres of versification, Roger Jackson is quick to note that a significant amount of Tibetan literature is written in verse, even when not technically classified as 'poetry' or one of the other two poetic genres.⁶³ Everything from biographies, words of praise, ritual texts, instruction manuals, and philosophical treatises are often written in verse, in part because verse is a helpful mnemonic device making it easier for practitioners to study, learn, and memorize texts. Especially by the thirteenth century when *snyan ngag (kāvya)* was imported from India, the convergence of the ornate and polished Indian *kāvya* and Tibetan genres re-shaped and refined the literary tradition altogether. It is in this regard, as the contemporary Nyingma teacher, Dzigar

⁶² Roger R. Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet: Glu, mGur, sNyan ngag and 'Songs of Experience,'" in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (New York: Snow Lion, 1996), 368.

⁶³ Roger R. Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 369.

Kongtrul Rinpoche explained, versified literature such as Longchenpa's *Trilogy of Rest*, 'could' be described *kāvya* (Tib. *snyan ngag*), but is not technically classified as such. Rather, it is a philosophical trilogy.⁶⁴ Likewise, as Gedun Rabsal clarified, the eight metaphors of illusion are more about dharma teachings and less about figures of speech described in texts on poetry.⁶⁵ That said, the characteristics of metaphor and 'poetry,' in the sense of versification and qualities of figurative language according to *Daṇḍin* are pervasive in Tibetan literature including Longchenpa's *Trilogy of Rest*.

Perhaps what guides the categorization of the eight classic metaphors as dharma teaching rather than figures of speech has to do with the Tibetan the division of the ten major and minor sciences. While the metaphors of illusion *are taught for the sake of explaining the nature of empty phenomena, an aspect of dharma teaching, in contrast, poetics is regarded as a minor science. In this regard*, what guides the division between what is classified as poetry vs. philosophy or dharma teachings is worth examining in future research. While Rinpoche and Rabsal-la equally confirm the categorization of the metaphors of illusion as philosophy and teaching, the question of how poetic devices such as similitude and resemblance (Tib. *dpe*, Skt. *upamā*) *are used in instances specific to dharma teachings raises questions about how Tibetans value certain figures of speech in terms of their spiritual efficacy over others. To highlight this point, I have heard Rinpoche vouch for the potency of classic metaphors and examples because they were spoken by the Buddha himself and therefore retain a certain efficaciousness that new and modern metaphors do not. For now, this is a compelling point to flag, but necessitates more extensive research on Indian and Tibetan poetics.*

That said, by the thirteenth century at the height of the Tibetan renaissance, Sakya Paṇḍita's perspectives on education and Indian literature became influential and "cast a mold for the treatment of Indian literary theory that has endured in Tibet to the present day."⁶⁶ Despite the overturning of the Sakya rule and the eradication of the Mongol empire in Tibet in the middle of the fourteenth century, Sakya

⁶⁴ Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche (*Mangala Shrit Bhuti*), in discussion, April 2020.

⁶⁵ Gedun Rabsal, e-mail message, November 10, 2020.

⁶⁶ Matthew Kapstein, "Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," in *Literary cultures in history: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 781.

Paṇḍita's writing continued to inspire literary composition across Tibetan schools. In fact, as demonstrated in John Frederick Eppling's extensive research on *Kāvyaḍarśa* and its textual transmission into Tibet, the range of its influence goes far beyond the time of Sakya Paṇḍita. Noting a number of important Tibetan figures from the twelfth to twentieth century including Longchenpa, Eppling confirms that "the interest in *Kāvyaḍarśa* runs throughout Tibetan history, from its introduction to the present where it serves as a textbook in the Tibetan schools."⁶⁷ He continues, asserting that "in a very real sense it is in Tibet that the full force of the *Kāvyaḍarśa* was and is evolving."⁶⁸ Although fragments of *kāvya* are found from earlier spread of Buddhism and incorporation of Indic texts in the eighth century, including evidence of Tibetan translations of Indian poetic works found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, Eppling as well as Gene Smith agree that the study of *kāvya* was formally introduced by Sakya Paṇḍita.⁶⁹

Quoting David Jackson, Eppling writes that the aim of Sakya Paṇḍita's *Gateway to Learning* was to introduce traditional Buddhist scholarship into Tibet, thereby "putting Tibetan scholarship on sound methodological footing" based on its Indian antecedent.⁷⁰ Divided into three sections, including composition, teaching, and debate, the *Gateway to Learning* laid an extensive ground from which numerous Tibetan authors would attune their written work.

In terms of composition, the text first advises authors on how to begin a text followed by a portion on language, grammar, meaning, and finally the composition of *kāvya*. According to Eppling, Sakya Paṇḍita opens his explication on *kāvya* in terms of *Daṇḍin's* view of the fundamental elements of creative expression stating:

The embellishment of language lies in the manner of expressing characteristic natures, attributes, and actions through the description of the nature of something in its actual state, or though praising its virtues or censoring its faults through literal (*drang po*) or figurative (*zur mig*) expression, which involves the explicit and implicit understanding of words (*tshig*) and meaning (*don*). I shall begin, presenting the *rasas* (*ro*)⁷¹ of the nine

⁶⁷ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 1479.

⁶⁸ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 1479.

⁶⁹ Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 192-193.

⁷⁰ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 1444.

⁷¹ *Rasas* literally means 'juice' or 'taste,' but refers to aesthetic or emotion 'flavor' in Indian poetics

bhāvas (nyams)⁷² that are formed by embellishment through upamās (d̥pes) and other poetical devices.⁷³

In our consideration of Longchenpa's *Finding Rest in Illusion*, the poetical device, or rather, the *alaṃkāra* or 'ornamentation' (Tib. *rgyan*) called 'upamā,' which I will for the time being translate as 'simile,' is of particular significance. *Upamā*, as *Daṇḍin* describes, is "where—variously—similarity is clearly seen," and as *Eppling* explains, it is perhaps the most fundamental feature of 'twisted speech' (Skt. *vakrokti*).⁷⁴ The quality of 'twisted speech,' of which *upamā alaṃkāra* is coextensive, manipulates language in a way that is distinct from a more prosaic 'literal' norm. In terms of an English translation, we might call *vakrokti* something like 'figures of speech'—a linguistic method that uses words or phrases in a non-literal way in order to provide a rich and vivid effect.

Since it is a complex and rich word, before moving forward it is necessary to clarify the use of the term *upamā* in terms of Sanskrit poetics compared to the notion of 'simile' and 'metaphor' as they are used in English. In the English language tradition, 'metaphor' is the dominant category of figures of speech and 'simile' is a sub-category marked and limited by the presence of 'like' or 'as.' For the Sanskrit language tradition however, *upamā* is central and *rūpaka*, generally translated as 'metaphor,' is a sub-category. Furthermore, as *Eppling* notes, *upamā* is not restricted to markers of comparison (although certain categories of *upamā* are restrained by comparative markers). More so, the relevance of *upamā* for the Indian tradition and subsequently assimilated into the Tibetan language cannot be overemphasized. It appears in some of the earliest extant examples of Indian poetry and poetic analysis including the *Rig Veda* (circa. 1500-1200 BCE). Although the meaning of the term *upamā* has shifted and evolved over time since its usage in the *Rig Veda*, *Eppling* points out, even before there was any formal literary theory in India, examples of *upamā*'s similitude, is frequently articulated in such great works of literature, that it is convincingly plausible to argue that the early Indian poets were well aware of the linguistic craft and had already evolved it to a great extent.

⁷² *Bhāvas* literally means 'to become,' but refers to sentiments such as love, sorrow, anger, and so on.

⁷³ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 1450.

⁷⁴ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 408-409.

That said, a thousand years after the *Rig Veda* was written, *upamā* appeared as a technical term in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭāhyāyī*, one of the oldest linguistic and grammar texts known today. Again, Pāṇini denotes the word 'upamā' as 'similarity.' A couple centuries later Yāska's *Nirukta* was the first to formally recognize *upamā* as a linguistic device, where it again refers not only to 'similarity,' but also to a series of items that indicate distinct linguistic procedures of comparison, including methods of identifying objects through 'dis-similarity.' All in all, the complexity of *upamā* as a poetic device as well as the obvious evidence that Indian poets, linguists, and grammarians took interest in its linguistic usage, indicates its significance but also the range of its function. Even by the eighth century CE when Daṇḍin wrote the *Kāvyaḍarśa*, the notion of similitude continued a process of refinement.

In terms of our study, the notion of *upamāna* and *upameya* (explained below) is relevant not only to Longchenpa's use similitude in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, but it may also lend towards clarifying reasons as to why such linguistic devices serve the purpose of 'pointing out' particular aspects of Longchenpa's teachings altogether, which I might add, is particularly relevant to this thesis at hand. *Upamāna* refers to the object to which something is being compared, while *upameya* is the subject of that comparison of which the *upamāna* serves to elucidate though an item of similitude, be it a comparison of common attributes (*dharma upamā*), reciprocity (*anyona upamā*), restriction (*niyama upamā*) and so forth.⁷⁵ In brief, knowledge of an aspect or characteristic of an *upmāna* serves the purpose of providing details about a second object—the *upameya*. For example, if someone had never seen a yak before, I could say it is like a cow with big horns and long shaggy hair. Assuming they know what a cow looks like, they could imagine a yak with a certain degree of accuracy.

On perhaps more poetic terms, Daṇḍin's example of the *upamā* of reciprocity states, "the lotus is like your face, your face is like the lotus."⁷⁶ Granted the reader has seen a lotus and knows how lovely they are, or more so, knows their association with deities and divine perfection according to the Indian tradition, a sense of their reciprocal excellence is achieved. A poet could variously express his affection

⁷⁵ Daṇḍin cites 32 unique varieties of *upamā*.

⁷⁶ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 473.

for a beautiful face, perhaps of their secret love, with the upamā of restriction as Daṇḍin states, “your face is similar only to a lotus—nothing else.”⁷⁷ In a similar regard (no pun intended), the upamās of reciprocity and restriction equally generate the quality of a lovely face, but nonetheless, their effects are fundamentally different.

It is worth noting the inclusion of *upamāna* in Indian epistemology or *pramāṇa*, wherein the similarity (or dis-similarity for that matter) between two things provides the *means* of gaining the knowledge of something previously unknown. The example of the unknown yak which becomes known, to a greater or lesser degree, by the example of a shaggy cow denotes this point.

Longchenpa’s *Finding Rest in Illusion* provides additional examples of *upamāna-upameya*, where the similitude of the *moon’s reflection in water* features a resemblance to the very nature of phenomena. In that way, his manner of demonstrating their resemblance, is illustrative of both *upamā* as a device of ‘twisted language,’ as well as a broader epistemological trend to show, or rather transfer higher knowledge, by means of example. I will elaborate on this further in Chapter two’s close reading of “The Reflection of the Moon in Water.” Before doing so, let us first clarify some of the reasons that Longchenpa may have incorporated literary and philosophical tools of the time into his Dzogchen teachings, namely poetic devices such as *upamā* and, as we will see later in this thesis, the philosophical tenant system called Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka (Middle Way ‘Consequence’ school), which was brought into Tibet’s attention during the later translation period.

Models of Authentication

As previously mentioned, what operated in conjunction with these energetic literary developments was significant tension along the lines of transmission, lineage, and scriptural authenticity, as well as political and social aristocratic power. Many scholars suggest that various Tibetan translators, religious leaders, and political authority were at odds in their competition to garner attention, prestige, and power among

⁷⁷ John Frederick Epling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression," 475.

their followers. While history and examples of polemic literature generally agree with this assumption, Kapstein notes that “the areas of contention in eleventh and twelfth century Tibetan Buddhism, however, also fueled a creative dialogue that was characterized in some instances by imaginative and visionary syntheses and restatements of Buddhist teachings, and in others by the effort to clarify that teaching through reasoned analysis, interpretation, and debate.”⁷⁸ As an example, the *gter ma* tradition of the Nyingma and their reliance on Indian textual imports from the imperial era, is often seen at odds with what is described as the ‘scholasticism’ of the Sarma traditions. This is indeed the case if we consider the judgment of many Nyingma tantras as apocrypha by the Sarma, including not just berating remarks but also their exclusion from the Buddhist canon devised by Sarma leaders such as Butön Rinchen Drub (1290-1363).⁷⁹

Much of what the controversy comes down to is a lack of charitable interpretation towards the old textual translations of the Nyingma. According to the Sarma, the Nyingma texts were apocryphal, that is, they were likely written by Tibetans and therefore, never existed in India and were never taught by the Buddha. According to the Nyingma however, the notion of what constitutes ‘genuine scripture’ includes not just commonly accepted criteria for establishing legitimacy, but also acknowledges the authority and efficacy of more elaborate visionary transmissions of literature and revelatory *gter ma* hidden by lineage masters such as Vimalamitra, Vairocana, and Padmasambhava and discovered by treasure revealers (Tib. *gter ston*) such as Longchenpa.

David Germano suggests that these three lineage masters of Nyingma Dzogchen account for the Nyingmapa’s very own standards of legitimization, which invariably involved a process of narrative patchworking, but nonetheless “continued the long-standing Indian tradition of ongoing reinterpretation of the text in line with newly emergent traditions.”⁸⁰ Lineage therefore—and one that is inclusive of their Indian predecessors more properly called *Rig ‘dzin*, or ‘Wisdom holders’ (Skt. *Vidyādhara*)—serves the

⁷⁸ Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 85.

⁷⁹ Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 16-17.

⁸⁰ David Germano, “The Seven Descents and the Early History of Rnying ma Transmission,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. David Germano and Helmut Eimer (Boston: Brill, 2002), 248.

purpose of not only preserving and transmitting the Nyingma tantras, but of providing the backdrop from which the Nyingma authenticated and transformed Dzogchen into a major tradition in Tibet. In this way the Nyingma retained an allegiance to their own tradition while transforming it in ways that both honor their past and build a new narrative. At the same time masters such as Longchenpa demonstrated their ability to participate in a new sectarian environment by satisfying standards of literary composition, philosophy, debate, and so forth.

As Davidson points out, the Tibetan ‘model of authentic scripture,’ involved a highly specific process leading to a strict exclusion of texts relegated to the category of so called ‘doubtful scriptures.’⁸¹ The rigorous process of determining the author, the time and place it was written, the audience, and the associated doctrine of a text along with documenting the process of transporting, translating, and transmitting the text with the aid of an Indian *paṇḍita* resulted in a strenuous process that often resulted in continued criticism of a number of old texts that had been functioning as Buddhist scripture since the eighth century. Davidson also acknowledges that Tibet’s model of scriptural authenticity was compounded with a number of problems rooted in Indian scriptural composition, especially regarding esoteric Indian Buddhism. He explains that during the period between seventh to the mid-eleventh century, a kind of Buddhism that employed *mantras*—ie. Indian esoteric literature—was growing in popularity. Enabled by the freedom afforded by the decline of the Gupta empire and an increase in localized Buddhist centers, Indian masters were able to compose scripture and institutionalize their teachings more easily during this creative era. Due to a lack of central authority there was no unified model for scriptural criticism, allowing for a great expansion of Buddhist esoteric literature. Still, as Davidson notes, “not all putative scriptures were accepted blithely by Indian representatives.”⁸² Indian Buddhists continued to discuss their contentions about the validity of certain texts and ideas. Likewise, certain Indian aesthetics as well as Indic ritual objects continued to be employed in esoteric literature—

⁸¹ Ronald Davidson, “Gsar ma Apocrypha: The Creation of Orthodoxy, Gray Texts, and the New Revelation,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. David Germano and Helmut Eimer (Boston: Brill, 2002), 204.

⁸² Ronald Davidson, “Gsar ma Apocrypha,” 206.

which is perhaps another reason the Tibetans chose to reflect literary Indian styles in their own commentarial tradition.

That said, while the Tibetans were focused on tightening the standards around ‘authentic scripture’ in the tenth century, the Indian Buddhists had just undergone a four century long creative expansion and exploration of esoteric literature described by Davidson as “one of the most fertile [periods] in Buddhist history,” so much so that “virtually all our Indian esoteric literature was composed in this short four centuries, and the Indian Buddhist institutions that evolved during this period did so in the hothouse climate of scriptural composition.”⁸³ All the while, Tibetans retained the idea that Indian origins equals authenticity, forgetting that India had undergone a transformative era of their own which brought about significant changes in their literature.

As Davidson notes, Tibet’s ‘modals of authenticity’ are, from a certain perspective, narrowly fictive. It is not, however, only modern western scholars who make this claim. For example, regarding the authentication of certain Dzogchen texts, specifically the *Guhyagarbha*, even the late twentieth century Nyingma master and first appointed head of the Nyingma lineage, Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, argued that by “just going to India [and finding that] they [Dzogchen texts] were unknown in a few districts does not disprove the ancient translations.”⁸⁴

To be realistic, strict adherence to any standards of historicity as a means of authentication would have likely eradicated the majority of the Buddhist canon, especially the Mahāyāna sūtras with their many glorifications of Buddhas and bodhisattvas receiving scriptures and transmissions from super-mundane other worldly beings. ‘Realism’ models of scriptural authentication, such as the tendency to assign genuine words of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhavacana*) to only the actual speech of Śākyamuni Buddha himself, did not therefore bear total authority, at least not for the Tibetans and Indian Mahāyānists. In the same light, the notion of Indic origins, at least from the Mahāyāna point of view, could just as easily be

⁸³ Ronald Davidson, “Gsar ma Apocrypha,” 205.

⁸⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 914.

discredited by the fact that even some of the most famed scriptures are said to have been discovered in non-human realms, such as the *nāga* realm in the case of *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.⁸⁵

Likewise, there are entire corpuses of treatises that are characterized by an emphasis on primordial Buddhas such as Samantabhadra for the Nyingma, Vajradhara for the Sarma, along with a wide range of Buddhas and Buddhafields described in the *Kālacakrantra*. According to some texts such as the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, even the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī is ascribed with the non-dual wisdom normally attributed to primordial Buddhas who have mastered the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself.⁸⁶ That said, in terms of scriptural authenticity, Kapstein argues that while these two seemingly dichotomous orientations (visionary and rational) appear at odds according to our western scholastic model of scholarship, according to Buddhist thought the two are not in complete opposition. In fact, the lives and activities of various Tibetan Buddhist masters indicate that the two are not entirely exclusive of one another.

This brings into light an important discussion on the notion of canon altogether. I mentioned this briefly before, but the question of what defines a canon and what criteria suffices whether or not a text is included in a canon is an ongoing debate, but it was a particularly crucial topic for Tibetans between the twelfth and thirteenth century as the framing of the Kangyur and Tengyur began a solidification process. In fact, even the notion of ‘canon’ is under scrutiny by many of today’s Buddhist scholars. Kapstein, for example, argues for the concept of *canonical for* as opposed to a stricter notion of ‘canon,’ conveying the idea that although a collection of texts may be classified as apocrypha by one tradition, it may well be canonical for another.⁸⁷ The idea of a ‘canon’ generally refers to as a closed catalogue of literature owing to authoritative inclusion of select texts. However, like many other religious and even secular canons, the Buddhist canonization process has resulted in various iterations which began just after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* and continues to this day.

⁸⁵ Nāgas are a class of half-human/half-serpent deities that live in a marvelous underworld. As the story is told Nāgārjuna recovered the entire *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* from the depths of the Nāga kingdom.

⁸⁶ Anthony Tribe, *Tantric Buddhist Practice in India: Vilāsavajra’s commentary on the Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 8.

⁸⁷ Matthew Kapstein, "The Purificatory Gem and its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts," *History of Religions* 28, no. 3 (1989): 217-219.

The *canon for* Tibetans is different than that of the Chinese, and the Pāli canon is certainly different than the Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan canon. In short, what is counted as genuine ‘words’ or ‘treatises’ in one canon, may very well be apocryphal in another. According to Kapstein, the notion of *being canonical* is therefore based upon a two-term predicate which includes (1) said religious community in conjunction with (2) a literary corpus. This distinction is certainly useful in considering the development of the Tibetan Kangyur and Tengyur. In light of Kapstein’s argument, the process of canonization during the Tibetan renaissance entails canonicity for the Sarma. The exclusion of Nyingma literature and *kama* (canonical teachings), *tantra*, and *gter ma*, owed to the eventual development of the *Nyingma Gyubum*, or *Collected Tantras of the Nyingma School*, which began consolidation in the fourteenth century.⁸⁸

In the same light, the determining factors of what constitutes a ‘Buddhist text’ in the Nyingma tradition is augmented by the inclusion of revealed or transmitted texts discovered by extraordinary individuals, lending to a wholly unique and expanded sense of the world we are living in. Such is also the case with Nāgārjuna’s retrieval of the *Pajñāpāramitā Sūtras* mentioned above, Aśaṅga’s ascension to Tuṣita heaven where he received Maitreya’s teachings on Yogācāra, and Maitripa’s re-discovery of Maitreya’s *Uttaratantraśāstra*. This expanded vision of reality is especially relevant for the Nyingma tradition with regards to *gter ma* and other texts considered apocryphal by the Sarma. Of course, the concept of ‘Buddhist texts’ is made further complex, in the case of the Nyingma, by the fact that *gter ma* is often discovered in ritual objects, relics, special landscape features, and even out of mere space or from within mind.

That said, the notion of ‘revelation,’ at least in some sense of the word, is long attested to in virtually all forms of the Buddhist tradition in Asia, and revelatory ideas are not only present in Mahāyāna. In *Mediums and Messages*, Paul Harrison explains that even ‘mainstream’ canons include

⁸⁸ According to Nyingma histories, Tertön Ratna Lingpa began the process of compiling Nyingma texts in the 14th century. The collection was later completed and published in the 18th century with guidance by Jigme Lingpa. The collection continues to exist today in various editions.

teachings that are said to have been preached by deities, but are still considered words of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhavacana*), suggesting “that from the earliest times some Buddhist practitioners experienced visions in which divinities appeared to them and conferred revelations to them...and that these revelations were accepted positively by the tradition.”⁸⁹ So much could also be said to the fact that a sūtra itself is often not directly spoken or written by the Buddha himself, and rather, is restated by one of his close disciples indicated in the classic sūtric phrase *evaṃ mayā śrūtaṃ* (Sanskrit), commonly translated as ‘thus I have heard.’

According to Kapstein, “Tibetan scholasticism inherited from this state of affairs [the problems of verification and scriptural authority], the full tension between the impulse to affirm that in fact there was some set of determinate correlations linking the original *buddhavacana* to its present instances, and the impossibility of ever discovering decisively what these correlations might be.”⁹⁰ Divided on this front, Tibetans seem to have come to an agreement, presumably following in the footsteps of their predecessors (the Indian Mahāyānists) who in turn appeared to have adopted certain assumptions from their early Buddhist Sthaviravāda forbearers (although they certainly expanded on their normative principles), that strict historicity does not provide the only criteria for scriptural authenticity.

Following suit, Tibetan scholasticism readily involves *more than ordinary* assumptions about reality and an expanded ontology underlying textual authority. The Buddhist *imaginaire*, for example, openly embraces the notion of Buddhas of the past, present, and future, whose legendary biographies span lifetimes if not countless eons. For the Nyingma and tantra altogether, the broader ontological outlook of timeless Buddhas spreads out into the very phenomenological nature of ‘subject’ and ‘objects,’ which, despite the mistaken perception of sentient beings who see phenomena in dualistic terms of ‘self’ and ‘other,’ are never truly divested of their primordial purity. That said, whether set within a Nyingma or Sarma context, Tibetan scholasticism reflects the Buddhist *imaginaire*, in that it both informs and is

⁸⁹ Paul Harrison, "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras," *The Eastern Buddhist* 35, no. 1/2 (2003): 126.

⁹⁰ Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 124.

informed by the Buddhist view of reality, which as I have discussed above, is both elaborate and specific all at once.

Longchenpa's Assimilation of Indian Poetics and the Welding of Dzogchen Rhetoric

While the growth of textual revelation commenced largely between the tenth and fourteenth century by some of the first treasure revealers of the Nyingma school, the expansion of intellectual scholarship combined with an admiration of Indian language, literature, and learning made a powerful impression upon the life, language, literary culture, and philosophical undertakings of Tibet. Of particular importance was the life and influence of Sakya Paṇḍita, whose mastery of Indian literature led to the growth of learning via the 'intellectual tools' of the great Indian tradition, namely grammar, philosophy, literary theory, poetics, and metrics. Along those lines, Tibetan literature was able to both honor its Indian heritage and expand in ways that established it as a new center for Buddhist learning.

This is the world in which we find Longchenpa. In terms of politics, he was alive just after the political overturn of the Sakya-Mongol rule and the introduction of the Phakmodru Dynasty established by Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltzen (1302-1364). In terms of literary culture, the high regard for Indian literary styles, especially those derived from *Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa* was just beginning to flourish. In his dissertation, the *Rhetoric of Naturalness*, Gregory Hillis describes this fourteenth century period as "breathhtakingly fertile" in terms of Tibet's intellectual history.⁹¹ Hillis argues that "the level of literary skill during this time was extremely high due largely to the breadth of the major figures' education and training."⁹² In particular, Longchenpa's writing style displays vivid examples of his diverse training. Hillis remarks that his range of literary strategies "reveals his mastery of the literary arts, and his ability to bring all of this still to bear on a complex intellectual issue...he deploys these strategies as a means to respond to and critique competing religious ideologies, as well as their philosophical and contemplative

⁹¹ Gregory Alexander Hillis, "The Rhetoric of Naturalness," 5.

⁹² Gregory Alexander Hillis, "The Rhetoric of Naturalness," 5.

significance.”⁹³ His use of apophatic and cataphatic rhetoric, as well as his use of literary devices such as metaphor, analogy, paradox, humor, parallelism, antithesis, and benedictio (blessing, prayer or dedication), and as his use of common Buddhist philosophical terms serve to respond to critiques from the Sarma tradition in an intelligent way.⁹⁴ In particular his use of apophatic and antithetical terminology in *Finding Rest in Illusion* demonstrates a commonality between Dzogchen and Madhyamaka. Meanwhile, his cataphatic rhetoric inspires awe and interest for Nyingma readership, especially with regards to the broader ontology of Dzogchen which emphasizes subjects such as buddhanature and the natural clarity of mind.

Likewise, Hillis argues that it is unlikely that his ‘Dzogchen rhetoric,’ as it is found in *The Treasury of Abiding Reality*, and I will add as well in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, was actually persuasive to followers of other Tibetan Buddhist traditions. He adds however, that even if followers of other schools rejected Longchenpa’s Nyingma sources, they were bound to recognize his literary skill, which according to Hillis, had “an almost intrinsic persuasive value” for the Tibetan literati.⁹⁵ Moreover, the mind series (Tib. *sems sde*) rhetoric which emphasizes innate awareness (Tib. *rig pa*) and natural clarity (Tib. *gsal ba*), which Longchenpa employs in *Finding Rest in Illusion* among many of his other texts, appeals to an individual’s experience as opposed to the rhetoric of structured logical argumentation. In this regard, Hillis writes, Longchenpa’s “language at times nearly seems to have the power to induce the experience it describes, and this can have a powerful effect on the reader.”⁹⁶ He qualifies his statement by pointing out how Longchenpa’s use of *via negativa* and symbolic language addresses the contemplative and transformative features of Buddhist thought while refraining from too much technical jargon. In that way, his writing is shaped by a sense of immediacy and directness for his readers, which by and large, supports the very aim of Dzogchen altogether. As a literary device metaphor naturally produces the effect of immediacy in that a phrase such as *the moon’s reflection in water*, promptly produces an experiential

⁹³ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness,” 231.

⁹⁴ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness,” 231.

⁹⁵ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness,” 247.

⁹⁶ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness,” 247.

image in one's mind. In many ways, his emphasis on direct experience as opposed to mere intellectualism is indicative of both Longchenpa's deep knowledge of mind's natural clarity and freedom, as well as his deep appreciation of solitude and peaceful landscapes. In fact, it is perhaps due to his many years in retreat that allowed for him to simultaneously gain experience and realization as well as compose an extraordinarily large collection of texts including *Finding Rest in Illusion*.

Chapter Two: A Close Study of Longchenpa's *Finding Rest in Illusion*

Longchenpa's Dzogchen-Madhyamaka Synthesis

Indicative of his wide range of learning, Longchenpa references a number of diverse source material throughout *Finding Rest in Illusion*. In addition to illustrious Nyingma tantras found within the *Māyājāla* cycle of tantric texts such as the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, Longchenpa taps primarily into *Prajñāpāramitā* literature including specific references to Nāgārjuna, Śāntideva, and Candrakīrti, and also, though with less frequency, literature that is largely associated with Yogācāra and Buddha-nature theory such as Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra (Ornament of Clear Realization)* and *Uttaratantraśāstra (Supreme Continuum)*.

His use of various literature across different genres, namely Mahāyāna sūtra and Nyingma tantra, demonstrates both an astonishing literacy and mastery of Indic-Buddhist sources, but also his pursuit in synthesizing Dzogchen and Madhyamaka. In fact, it can be well assumed that much of his literature served to anchor the Dzogchen tantras into what is now established as the *Nyingma Gyubum* or the *Collected Tantras of the Nyingma*, thereby securing it within the greater spectrum of authenticated Buddhist literature. In a time when the authenticity of the foundational literature of the Nyingma school, such as the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, were under attack by the Sarma schools, Longchenpa's great legacy was undoubtedly his ability to 'rise to the occasion' in order to preserve the Dzogchen tradition.⁹⁷ By taking on the scholastic rigor and new standards of scholarship introduced by leading Sarma adepts such as Sakya Paṇḍita and his *Gateway to Learning* and anchoring the philosophical thought and practices of the Nyingma school into the broader context of Mahāyāna he justified the validity of the Dzogchen doctrine.

⁹⁷ While the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* is classified as an important Buddhist tantra of the *Mahāyoga* (Great Yoga) class, it continues to be the Nyingma's main source for Vajrayāna topics such as empowerment, samaya, mantra and so forth, in addition to influencing the Dzogchen tradition altogether.

While Longchenpa draws many of his assertions directly from *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, he indicates clearly in his prologue that “the treatises *Finding Rest in Illusion*, [is] a teaching belonging to the corpus of the Great Perfection.”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, he also indicates in the beginning of each of the eight chapters that the eight ‘vajra points,’ are drawn from the *Middle-Length Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (MLP)*, making a clear line between the Dzogchen doctrine and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. These ‘vajra-points’⁹⁹ elucidate the idea that phenomena are utterly suffused with a status similar to illusions, dreams, mirages, and so forth—a theme characteristic of the Madhyamaka doctrine of two truths.¹⁰⁰ In brief, Madhyamaka stresses the point that all ‘phenomena’ (i.e., everything that is possible in the world including outer objects and inner experiences and consciousness) lack what is called ‘intrinsic nature’ (Tib. *ngo bo*), often translated as ‘entity-ness’ by Jeffrey Hopkins. Because phenomena lack intrinsic nature or ‘realness’ they are ultimately empty. The two truths are then distinguished in terms of phenomena’s ‘ultimate’ (Tib. *don dam*), and the ‘relative,’ or more literally, ‘all concealing’ status (Tib. *kun rdzob*).¹⁰¹ The examples of illusions present a method of teaching and perhaps *transferring* the meaning of emptiness by comparing it to more universally acknowledged experiences such as dreams or reflections, both of which can be experienced in the sense that they appear but are nonetheless empty of any intrinsically real status. In keeping with the idea that phenomena are not actually how they seem, Longchenpa arranges *Finding Rest in Illusion* by emphasizing different aspects of empty appearances in each of his eight chapters.

Again, while the poetic modality that Longchenpa draws upon is not defined explicitly as poetry per se, his focus on the eight classical metaphors of illusion is indicative of the influence and efficacy that language has. Figurative language such as the metaphors of illusion operate not only as creative

⁹⁸ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 70.

⁹⁹ *Vajra* refers to a diamond-like quality of indestructible force. In addition, the vajra as an instrument in Tibetan Buddhism also symbolizes skillful means in conjunction with the bell, which symbolizes wisdom.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* are solely Madhyamaka literature. In fact, the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* and its core themes are key to a number of Mahāyāna schools of thought including Yogācāra where Asaṅga’s *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which is considered to be a commentary on the profound meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*.

¹⁰¹ The term ‘truth’ is a bit misleading. In Madhyamaka, *bden pa* (truth) tends to mean *snang ba ltar grub pa* (established according to how things appear). While the Tibetan term *bden pa gnyis* is often translated literally as ‘two truths,’ neither the ‘ultimate’ nor the ‘conventional’ truth are ‘true’ in the sense of being the one and only truth.

expressions of a different reality but as catalysts into a novel way of thinking and relating with one's self and the world *as it is* according to Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. Just as Plato's allegory of the *Cave* justifies a way of thinking about the world and also proposes a model of how to relate with notions of ignorance and higher wisdom, the Buddhist metaphors of illusion delivers a message about the abstract concept of emptiness in a manner that can be experienced through ordinary examples. To clarify, I am not saying that Plato's the *Cave* is similar in content to the metaphors of illusion. Rather, as a manner of example the *Cave* along with a number of other examples of prominent literary devices, has played a significant role in 'western' thought, influencing the breadth of society from religion and science to politics and law. Likewise, the metaphors of the illusion have played a prominent role in Buddhist thought throughout India and Tibet since the early formation of Buddhism during the time of the Buddha.

As a matter of contrast, it is worth noting the differences in mentality and emotionality when it comes to individuals and communities of diverse backgrounds, which if we are to take the influential power of language seriously, may be largely shaped by the use of metaphor, simile, and other figurative categories associated with poetics. In her remarkable research on the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, Sara Lewis demonstrates how core Buddhist ideas such as impermanence and suffering enable Tibetans to reframe communal and personal tragedies resulting from forced migration.¹⁰² While quick to characterize the adversity of witnessing violence, the destruction of one's homeland and the loss of a loved one's as trauma inducing, Lewis illustrates that Tibetans in exile are less likely to suggest or confirm that such experiences resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder. Rather, by regarding suffering not as an individual exception but a universal norm while also applying the notion of impermanence and the illusoriness of phenomena to every day experience Tibetans retain a sense of resilience. Likewise, she notes that compared to 'western' psychological frameworks, Tibetans are far less likely to speak about personal experience within a narrative of trauma, believing that speaking too much only reifies one's experience. Rather, Tibetans are more likely to let go and move forward, acknowledging the universality

¹⁰² Sara E. Lewis, *Spacious Minds: Trauma and Resilience in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

of suffering and the value of seeing things as impermanent. Such a way of thinking is emblematic of how the metaphors of illusion can reframe one's relationship with their self and the world, enabling greater mental and emotional well-being if not liberation.

The Tibetans that Lewis interviewed called this “hallmark of resilience” *sems pa chen po*, which she translates as “vast or spacious mind” indicating a quality of openness.¹⁰³ As Lewis describes it, “a spacious mind is not merely an outcome but a pathway, a method, a view, and a horizon, orienting those who are suffering toward recovery.”¹⁰⁴ In this manner, the metaphors of illusion are not merely conduits for experiencing the world according to a set of ideas. In their practical application, they are catalysts for liberation or at least freedom from everyday mental and emotional distress and even excruciating experiences.

Residing in the realm of poetry Longchenpa emphasizes the experiential modality of the Buddhist teachings on illusion and encourages his readers to inhabit that realm throughout the text. While artfully framing each chapter within the series of the eight metaphors of illusion he nonetheless emphasizes Dzogchen principles. For example, he highlights the natural clarity and luminescence of mind as well as the resplendence and primordial purity of phenomena both of which remain untouched by the corrupting hypostatization of dualistic conceptualization and the mistaken bifurcation of an apprehending subject and an apprehended object. Nonetheless, Longchenpa does not resolve to contrast these Dzogchen principles as something *more real* than false illusions. Rather, he demonstrates how the very ground or ‘basic space’ of Nyingma ontology with its emphasis on luminosity, natural clarity, primordial purity, and the ‘playful display’ of phenomena is in thorough alignment with the Madhyamaka’s view of emptiness. Equal in philosophical profundity, Longchenpa illustrates how Dzogchen is on par with Madhyamaka, and furthermore, the meditative and yogic practices derived from the Nyingma school are not just practically and philosophically sound but also originate from authentic Indic-Buddhist sources—a point confirmed by Longchenpa’s impressive use of textual evidence.

¹⁰³ Sara E. Lewis, *Spacious Minds*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Sara E. Lewis, *Spacious Minds*, 9.

This gains credibility for Dzogchen and its associated Nyingma tantras, many of which Longchenpa places side by side with historically prominent Mahāyāna sūtras. Accordingly, he writes in his introduction that “all things in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are like magical illusions. They appear and yet they do not exist” followed by a quote from the *Middle Length Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*:¹⁰⁵

O Subhūti, phenomena are like dreams, like magical illusions. Even nirvāṇa is like a dream, like a magical illusion. And if there were anything greater than nirvāṇa, that too would be like a dream, like a magical illusion.¹⁰⁶

The prominence of remarks such as phenomena are *like an illusion* and so forth, and the importance of tracing them back to the *MLP* is not nominal. Whether referring to illusions, dreams, mirages, or reflections, the *MLP* and many other texts associated with the *Prajñāpāramitā* incorporate the eight vajra points at great length, and Longchenpa uses them to substantiate the authenticity of the Nyingma and their literature.

The rise of analytical meditation and Madhyamaka dialectics in Tibet emphasized by Nāgārjuna seemingly stands in conflict with non-analytical meditation associated with traditions such as Chan (Zen), but also (and here we perhaps see what may have provoked Longchenpa’s composition) Dzogchen.¹⁰⁷ Longchenpa suggests an alternative to the conflict between analytical and non-analytical meditation, at least with regards to Dzogchen. In fact, Longchenpa draws lines between the very heart of Dzogchen—the spacious and luminous, non-conceptual qualities of natural *pristine awareness*, and the experience of wisdom discovered in Madhyamaka’s analytical meditation. By explicitly showing their correlations, Longchenpa maintains that the traditions, literature and philosophical ‘ground’ of the Nyingma is neither entirely divergent from the new traditions brought to Tibet during the second translation period, nor a kind of polluted version of Buddhism mixed with some other non-Buddhist tradition. They are in fact

¹⁰⁵ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 71.

¹⁰⁷ The Tohoku Catalogue shows that Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* was translated by Jñānagarbha, a Buddhist philosopher from Nalanda, in the eight century CE (no. 3824). Śāntarakṣita’s commentary the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* was translated into Tibetan by Yeshe De in the eight century CE (no. 3884). Candrakīrti’s commentary *Madhyamakāvātāra* was translated into Tibetan by Patsab Nyima Drak in the eleventh century CE (no. 3861).

closely associated—so much that Madhyamaka forms the very ‘view’ that composes the starting point for Dzogchen philosophy and practice. In fact, Longchenpa preludes each of his eight chapters with a quote from the *MLP*, highlighting each metaphor as the antecedent from which his subject matter is matured.

As such Longchenpa arranges the ground upon which to cultivate his treatise within the premise of Madhyamaka. Interestingly however, he follows this gesture with following quote from the *Māyājāla* reiterating the Dzogchen principles of expansiveness and primordial purity of which illusions, i.e., phenomenal appearances, are naturally endowed:

In the second aspect of illusion, that of perfect purity, there is no self nor something other that belongs to self, for it is, by its nature, the expanse of utter purity.¹⁰⁸

Encapsulated within these prominent yet distinct textual selections (from *MLP* and *Māyājāla*), are the “two aspects of illusion” which Longchenpa highlights throughout his treatises: (1) phenomena *appear yet do not exist* (in line with Madhyamaka), and (2) phenomena are, by their very nature, *utterly pure* (illuminating his Dzogchen premise). By precisely drawing out the link between Madhyamaka and Dzogchen while retaining their unequivocal differences, Longchenpa aligns Dzogchen with the philosophical point of view of the Middle Way. However, as indicated by his selection of quotations and references, it is not just any ‘middle way,’ but *the* Middle Way as described by Nāgārjuna—a point that carries some momentous historical significance. In fact, in Longchenpa’s conclusion to the text he summarizes the message of the entire text by restating the above quote from the (*MLP*), along with a quote from Nāgārjuna’s famous *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses of the Middle Way*); “Like a dream and like a mirage, like a city of gandharvas, so arising and abiding and cessation have been taught.”¹⁰⁹

The weight of what is implied by his use of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* cannot be emphasized enough. If we can for a moment contemplate the polemics of his day once more—this was a time when Buddhist literature was entering a massive canonization process in Tibet. Meanwhile, a considerable

¹⁰⁸ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 71.

¹⁰⁹ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 249.

number of ‘new’ Indic-sources were being translated, and the tradition of the ‘old ones,’ or the Nyingma, were being characterized as apocrypha. Even the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* described as the “foremost authoritative scriptures of all the [vehicles] of sūtra and tantra” by eleventh century Nyingma master Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo, was under investigation during this time.¹¹⁰

Specifically, in his attempts to reform Buddhism in Tibet after the collapse of Imperial Tibet, Yeshe Ö, ruler of the Guge Kingdom (part of present-day Ngari Prefecture), with his famous *Refutation of Unorthodox Tantra* (*Sngags log sun 'byin*), launched a political campaign denouncing a number of tantric practices and texts and recruited Tibetan translators, such as Rinchen Zangpo, to go to Kashmir in order to determine the legitimacy of texts such as the *Guhyagarbha*. Forced to defend their tradition, Nyingma masters such as Rongzom, and later Longchenpa, became some of the first practitioners to dive into the uncharted territory of Nyingma ‘scholasticism.’ Contemporary Bhutanese scholar Dorji Wangchuk posits that Rongzom was first known Tibetan scholar to write in defense of Dzogchen. In fact, his commentary on the ‘difficult points’ (Tib. *dka grel*) of the *Guhyagarbha*—is believed to be the first commentary on the tantra written by a Tibetan scholar. The relevance of his work is evidence not only of the polemical atmosphere of the time, but the growing intrigue in Tibet’s very own commentarial tradition—a point further characterized by Longchenpa’s work and the continued development of the Nyingma scholasticism seen in masters such as Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798) and nineteenth century masters Ju Mipham (1846-1912) and Khenpo Shenga (1871-1927). Suffice to say, the expansion of Tibet’s literary culture was just hitting its prime during the time of Longchenpa, and Madhyamaka was fully in vogue among scholars.

That said, in his commentary Longchenpa offers respect to Nāgārjuna, referring to him as “the matchless sheltering protection of our world,”¹¹¹ Furthermore, he references Nāgārjuna’s homage in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* stating:

That which originates dependently

¹¹⁰ Dorji Wangchuk, “An Eleventh-Century Defence of the Authenticity of the Guhyagarbha Tantra,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. David Germano and Helmut Eimer (Boston: Brill, 2002), 268.

¹¹¹ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, vol. 3, *The Trilogy of Rest*, 250.

Does not cease and does not arise,
Does not come and does not go,
Is not annihilated and is not permanent,
Is not different and not the same.
To the true teacher who reveals this peace,
The complete pacification of constructs,
To the perfect Buddha I bow down.¹¹²

The relevance of Longchenpa's use of this quote to describe the 'message' of the text cannot be emphasized enough. Here Longchenpa illustrates a powerful observation regarding the ultimate status of phenomena according to Nāgārjuna and how that 'view' of reality is emended within Dzogchen's system of practice and outlook of phenomena. By adhering closely to the philosophical point of view of Nāgārjuna, Longchenpa draws specifically upon the view of the Prasaṅgika (consequence) school of Madhyamaka, while retaining a decidedly Nyingma system of thought.

What makes Longchenpa's synthesis of Madhyamaka and Dzogchen in *Finding Rest in Illusion* so unique is how he blurs the lines between the two rather than carving the lines deeper by catering toward a more polemic method. In fact, he does not outwardly discriminate the two. Instead he conducts his work within both of them by using the eight classic metaphors as a mode of transportation to carry his readers into the shared world of emptiness according to Madhyamaka and the Dzogchen notion of pure appearances. While he is not proposing a totally new approach to phenomena by taking bits and pieces of Madhyamaka and Dzogchen and turning them into something else, he does the work of advancing Dzogchen onto a level playing field alongside Madhyamaka. In doing so the reader is left percolating within Longchenpa's rhetorical strategy to stage Dzogchen within Madhyamaka. In addition, Dzogchen gains credibility amongst the most notable philosophical ideals of the time: Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka.

As mentioned before, throughout volume three of his trilogy, each chapter begins with a quote from the *MLP*, describing a key philosophical Madhyamaka view. Like the quotation stated at the outset of this chapter, these references to the *MLP* provide a link—in the form of a metaphor—between a number of key philosophical points: (1) phenomena's lack of intrinsic reality, (2) its status within the

¹¹² Translation from Mabja Jangchub Tsöndru, *Ornament of Reason: The Great Commentary to Nāgārjuna's Root of the Middle Way*, trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee (New York: Snow Lion, 2011), 2.

‘ground’ (i.e., the ontological basis of reality according to Dzogchen), (3) practical application on the ‘path’ of the Great Perfection, and (4) rather inspiring descriptions of the ‘result’ that develops upon reaching the so-called fruition or ‘end’ of the Dzogchen path, which paradoxically implies a sort of return to a primordial ‘beginning.’

Before moving forward, it is worth noting some of the literature which inspired him to compose in such a way, weaving some of the most essential key points of Madhyamaka into his Dzogchen treatise, which presumably, imparted renewed gravity toward validating the Nyingma tradition. In the following, I will introduce some of the key elements of Madhamaka including its literature relevant to *Finding Rest in Illusion*, a brief history of its inception and development in Tibet, followed by a short exploration of some primary factors that differentiate the Dzogchen and Madhyamaka.

To begin, Tibet’s socio-religious landscape shifted during the second translation period, transforming in striking ways in the midst of a massive influx of Indian culture and literature entering into the Tibetan stream of philosophy, religious practices, and political thought. As I mentioned earlier, Longchenpa consistently references the *MLP*, which (as I will explain below) is unequivocally espoused to Nāgārjuna and the Prasaṅgika school of Madhyamaka for reasons that were perhaps both philosophically and politically motivated during the second wave of translation.¹¹³ By inscribing politics here, I am referring to the way in which the Nyingmas responded to the pressures that were imposed on them; including bureaucratic sanctions such as those enforced by Yeshe Ö, Butön and other Sarmapas, and the exclusion of Nyingma texts from the canonization of Buddhist source material in Tibet. It seems that Nyingma authors such as Longchenpa were motivated not by an ambition for achieving a patron-priest status—a standard political structure of the day. Rather, their objective was in meeting the

¹¹³ To clarify, other Mahāyāna schools did and still do take interest in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* including Yogācāra. For example, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā* by Maitreya and Asaṅga, contains points related to Yogācāra. Likewise, there are examples of Chinese translations and commentaries of the *Prajñāpāramitā* associated with Chan Buddhism. The *Heart Sūtra* in particular plays an important role in various Zen recitation practices seen today.

standards of philosophical and scholastic inquiry and demonstrating the legitimacy of the Nyingma tradition.

The seminal works of these prominent Indian figures such as Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti and Śantideva, from the second, sixth, and eighth century in India, strongly influenced both the religious and socio-political dimensions of Tibet in the centuries that followed their composition and transmission into Tibetan language, religion, and culture. The translation of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Entry into the Middle Way*) into Tibetan during the twelfth century, made significant ripples in the philosophical and social dimensions of Buddhism, particularly in Tibet where Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka would come to occupy the highest rung on the doxographical ladder of 'views' dedicated to revealing ultimate reality. Emerging as the dominant view of the ultimate in his era, the accuracy and relevance of practice systems such as Dzogchen were often judged on whether or not their ideas agreed with Prasaṅgika or not. On top of that, while new source materials were being translated from Indian texts, existing teachings from the old school were further judged in comparison with these newly translated Indic-texts.

What induced so much interest in Prasaṅgika was likely the philosophical interest by a number of influential translators mixed with the force of political advocates as we will see in the controversy between Prasaṅgika and Svātantrika—it's rivaled philosophical school, though still a branch of Madhyamaka based on the teachings of Nāgārjuna. For example, Atiśa Dīpankara (982-1054 CE), who also advocated for the Prasaṅgika view, widely influenced the Tibetans, especially the Kadam—the principle school of Tibet during the tenth century. In particular, Atiśa's magnum opus the *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*) which laid the foundation for *lam rim*, established the method of summarizing doctrines in order of ascending views on the basis of distinguishing the 'right view' from all wrong views according to Buddhadharmā. *Lam rim* would in fact play a significant role in establishing the Gelug school—founded by Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) with his *Lamrim Chenmo* (*Great Treatises on the Stages of the Path*)—which by and large, capitalized on the notion of Candrakīrti's interpretation of Madhyamaka.

That said, the *Trilogy of Rest* is also an example of how the *lam rim* tradition influenced subsequent Tibetan writers, even those from different lineages. For example, Longchenpa's *Trilogy* is a comprehensive presentation of the sūtra and tantra which includes basic points on Buddhist view and methods, including refuge, and also scholastic expositions on philosophical points such as the 'three tatures' (associated with Yogācāra) and 'emptiness' described in Madhyamaka, as well as pith instructions for yogic practitioners. All that is to say, it is evident that he drew upon *lam rim* literature—indicating the stages and paths according to the Dzogchen tradition. In that way, Longchenpa is a shining example of how the Nyingma advocated for their tradition by utilizing the methods of their time, such as *lam rim* and Prasaṅgika reasoning, in order legitimate Dzogchen with mainstream Buddhist approaches.

While the tensions between the Nyingma and the Sarma schools revolved around this very complex issue of scriptural authenticity, faced with social pressures of being ostracized as a 'false doctrine' and political constraints of having their precious texts not just being excluded from the canon, but potentially neglected to the point of erasure, Nyingma scholar-practitioners such as Rongzom Paṅḍita and Kunkhyen Longchenpa, sought to show just how flawless and intellectually driven the Dzogchen view and Nyingma tantras really are. For Longchenpa, as witnessed in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, one available method was to point out how Dzogchen stands up not against, but *with* Madhyamaka. Longchenpa and this particular text is proof enough of that the Nyingma adapted their tradition in order to survive and thrive in a new modal. In fact, perhaps the Nyingma owes great praise to the influx of new school pressures. Without it, the great diversity of education, literature, and ideas may not have been possible. Arriving at the very tail end of this great era in Tibet the conditions that conspired to motivate the celebrated legacy known as Longchenpa may have never come together.

Madhyamaka During the Tibetan Empire and Tibetan Renaissance

That said, let us briefly return to the origins of Madhyamaka in Tibet, which, despite its historical impact on Tibet, was not Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Entry into the Middle Way*). Although Candrakīrti had written his famed treatise on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* in the seventh century, it was not

translated into Tibetan until the late eleventh century.¹¹⁴ Instead, it was the eighth century abbot of Nalanda university, Śāntarakṣita (725-788 CE), author of *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (*Ornament of the Middle Way*). Along with Padmasambhava and King Trisong Deutsen, these three figures are envisioned as the progenitors of the Nyingma tradition, taking on the common title *khen lob chos gsum*, ie. ‘scholar,’ ‘spiritual master,’ and ‘Dharma king,’ eulogizing their combined efforts in bringing Buddhism to Tibet. In brief, Śāntarakṣita was instrumental in the introduction of Madhyamaka, *Yogācāra*, and Pramāṇa to Tibet. As the tradition goes, he was also responsible for advising the Tibetan King Trisong Deutsen to invite the celebrated Indian tantric master Padmasambhava to Tibet in order to pacify obstructing spirits during the construction of Samye (Tibet’s first Buddhist monastery). Needless to say, Padmasambhava is credited not only with having introduced tantric Buddhism, which later coalesced into the Nyingma school, but remained (and remains) the central force in the Nyingma tradition continuing to influence the trajectory of Tibetan Buddhism via the tradition of *gter ma* revelation making for an ever-evolving ground of practice and scripture.

Interestingly King Trisong Deutsen’s daughter, Princess Pema Tsal, was later reborn as Pema Ledrel Tsal, a treasure revealer who revealed the Khandro Nyingtik (an important Nyingma *gter ma*), followed by his rebirth as Longchenpa who, as I have discussed in this essay, made a great impact on the preservation and expansion of the Nyingma tradition. Perhaps in illustrating and extolling Longchenpa’s connection with the historical lineage of the *khen lob chos gsum*, the Nyingma also generated a broader sense of ‘lineage,’ encompassing the cosmological view-point of re-birth and transmission among lines of spiritual predecessors. Again, what is observed here is a broadening of ontological categories around notions of time and history, and also the curious process of evoking and restoring fragments of Tibet’s imperial era.

¹¹⁴ According to Ronald Davidson (2005), the *Madhyamakāvātāra* was translated by Patsap Nyima Drak during the late-eleventh century. Scholars commonly remark that his translation signaled a turning point in Madhyamaka in Tibet as Candrakīrti’s commentary is said to be an accurate rendition of Nāgārjuna’s ideas in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Until its translation the tradition of Śāntarakṣita and his *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (*Ornament of the Middle Way*) was held to be the principle teachings on Madhyamaka.

In this manner, the Nyingma celebrated and extolled the *khen lob cho gsum* in such a way and that Longchenpa himself is placed within the traditional historical framework of the Imperial Era. His life a mere two lifetimes away from direct contact with Padmasambhava further heightens his connection to the foundational nature of the time period as the early inception of Buddhism in Tibet, breathing life and validation into the Nyingma tantras. The increase in *gter ma* revelation, such as the *Nyingtik Yabshyi* (*Heart Drop in Four Parts*)—the innermost teachings of Dzogchen—part of which was (re)-discovered by Longchenpa is exemplary of this promulgation. Moreover, *gter ma* revelation and historical documentation provides another example of how the Nyingma preserved and authenticated their lines of transmission, which seem to extend not only vertically to primordial buddhas but horizontally across seemingly distant lifetimes.

While the topic of *gter ma* is relevant to the discussion of Longchenpa's literary and metaphorical disposition, as well as the Nyingma's process of authentication, the extent of its research is well beyond the scope of this thesis and there is ample research on this topic.¹¹⁵ What is of greater concern here, is the shift in emphasis with regards to Madhyamaka literature between the tenth and thirteenth century. The question is, why did Longchenpa refrain from highlighting and even including texts such as Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālamkāra*, when his ascribed lifetimes and lineal heritage locates him in greater proximity to Śāntarakṣita? In what ways did the Tibetan renaissance, a time in which Indian Buddhism was making a radical transition and transmission into Tibet, prompt Longchenpa to reshape the work of his predecessors, presenting Dzogchen in a manner that not only coalesced with the philosophical trends of the time, but staved off political and social pressures to conform to 'new Buddhist' structures?

Longchenpa does in fact, seem to synthesize Dzogchen and Madhyamaka with remarkable ease. Perhaps suggestive of proto-*ris med* (non-sectarian) principles, Longchenpa *allows* Prasaṅgika

¹¹⁵ Significant work on *gter ma* to date includes Tulku Thondup's (1994) *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, Andreas Doctor's (2006) *Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition, and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism*, Matthew Kapstein's (1989) *The Purificatory Gem and its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts*, and Janet Gyatso's (1993) *The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition*, and (1996) *Drawn from the Tibetan Treasure: The gTer ma Literature*.

Madhyamaka to stand as the ultimate view, while constantly reminding his reader that *like the reflection of the moon in water* holding to philosophical tenet systems, schools, and traditions, and any type of bias, merely hampers genuine freedom from conceptual extremes. Characteristic of Dzogchen rhetoric, all conceptual thought, even those aiding individuals on the path to awakening, such as a tenet system, are in their core *like space*—"primordially empty in their very nature, inherently empty, empty from the very beginning."¹¹⁶ In this way, while simultaneously affirming the Madhyamaka view that all phenomena are by nature inherently empty, Longchenpa simultaneously sets up a fundamental fault with Madhyamaka from the Dzogchen point of view and thereby re-establishes Dzogchen as the pinnacle vehicle—where there is nonetheless, no more high and no more low. But how does he do this so seamlessly? In reading *Finding Rest in Illusion*, it is as though Dzogchen and Madhyamaka were simply made for one another. In fact, the very language of Madhyamaka with its emphasis on breaking down extreme modes of conceptual thought, specifically ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence,’ aligns quite well with the overall premise of Dzogchen: all phenomena are *like space*, that is neither ‘existent’ nor ‘non-existent,’ and yet—carrying a Dzogchen tone—everything is *primordially pure*.

The difference one might say, is in whether or not there is a ‘remainder,’ i.e., an aspect of reality that is inherently ‘real.’ This notion is often a breaking point for philosophical schools when faced with criticism from Madhyamakans. Longchenpa however, secures the reliability and authenticity of the Dzogchen tradition by stating again and again that even ‘primordially pure intrinsic awareness,’ is *like the reflection of the moon in water*—it is there in the sense of being experienced and yet there is nothing inherently real. There is nothing one could reach out to touch and hold. In the following sections, I will provide an investigative comparison of Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka and Dzogchen thought with the hope that their similarities and differences will be unraveled. But first, what exactly is Prasaṅgika and why did it gain such notoriety?

¹¹⁶ *ye stong babs stong rang bzhin gdod nas stong*, (699).

What Does Not Come Does Not Go: The Non-Arising Nature According to Prasaṅgika

Among this shifting literary landscape, Davidson argues that one of the most important translations of the twelfth century was Patsap Nyima-drak's translation of Candrakīrti's principle work, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, which gained popularity among Tibetans, eventually securing its philosophical prestige as the pinnacle elucidation of the ultimate truth.¹¹⁷ Candrakīrti, who proposed a strict reinvigoration of Nāgārjuna's 'original thesis,' argued that Svātantrika Madhyamaka, was flawed in its method of using syllogisms and epistemological reasoning to establish the ultimate.¹¹⁸ Likewise, around this time, the Madhyamaka teachings of Śāntarakṣita were placed within the category of 'later' Svātantrika Madhyamaka. Along with his predecessor, Buddhapalita, Candrakīrti argued that Nāgārjuna's intent in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, was to lead his reader to the 'consequence' of refuting all philosophical points of view without asserting a counter-position—a consequence that led to a non-conceptual, 'viewless,' experience.¹¹⁹

For the sake of comparison (and perhaps understanding), in the introduction to their English translation of *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Helena Blankleder and Wulstan Fletcher describe Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka approach as a kind of "via remotionis," a term derived from Christian theology, denoting that its dialectical method, "approaches its goal by showing all that the ultimate is not; its purpose is to demolish the theories produced by the ordinary mind and to reveal the hollowness of their pretensions."¹²⁰ Logical argumentation, kindred if not a close ally to theoretical reasoning and abstract thought, remains (according to Candrakīrti) a superimposition upon the empty nature of phenomena. He emphasizes the notion of the "ultimate truth in itself, which lies beyond the reach of all assertion."¹²¹ The aim then is a radical exposure to an experience of mind beyond conceptual thought—a way of perceiving that is utterly

¹¹⁷ Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 279.

¹¹⁸ Candrakīrti specifically sought to refute the commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by sixth century Indian Madhyamakan Bhavaviveka claiming that his use of logic impedes and misconstrues the meaning of ultimate truth—emptiness free from conceptual extremes. The Madhyamaka explained by Bhavaviveka is described as the 'early' Svātantrika Madhyamaka.

¹¹⁹ Georges Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock, *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005).

¹²⁰ Jamgön Mipham, *Introduction to the Middle Way: Candrakīrti's Madhyamakavatara with Commentary by Jamgön Mipham*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002), 24.

¹²¹ Jamgön Mipham, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, 143-144.

unfettered by the mental elaborations of *is* and *is not* (existence and non-existence).

It is thereby suggested in the Prasaṅgika approach that any attempt to speak of the ultimate is fated to failure. It is therefore tenable at this point to evoke the landmark “unanswered questions” of the Buddha—those metaphysical questions to which the Buddha famously remained silent. Similar to the Prasaṅgika attitude towards ultimate reality, the Buddha withheld answers to burning questions such as “whether the universe has a beginning, or not, or both, or neither,” among others found in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*Middle Length Discourse*), a classic sūtra of the Pāli Canon. Questions such as these and their lack of answers indicate a transcendent ‘truth’ beyond words and concepts.¹²² In a similar manner, illustrated in Candrakīrti’s disdain toward Svātantrika and their attempts to assert an absolute, Prasaṅgika avoids the use of language to describe the ultimate evading the temptation to conceptually construct a hollow absolute; a fault which would leave the philosopher brimming with intellectualism, yet devoid of any applicable and experiential transcendent wisdom. This notion of hollow intellectualism is emphasized again and again among philosophical schools, but particularly by Prasaṅgika Madhyamakans. Śāntideva for example states in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, that “the ultimate is not within the reach of intellect, for intellect is said to be the relative.”¹²³

Accordingly, Candrakīrti suggests that the essential meaning of Nāgārjuna’s two-truths model, in conjunction with the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, can be elucidated in the notion of ‘non-arising phenomena.’ The famous sixth chapter of *Madhyamakāvātāra*, similar to Śāntideva’s acclaimed ninth chapter (the “Wisdom chapter”) of the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, demonstrates how phenomena cannot arise from their ‘self’ nor from an ‘other’—echoing the first (and immensely influential) statement in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*: “Not from itself, not from another, not from both, and not uncaused—nowhere does anything ever arise.”¹²⁴ Hence Nāgārjuna alerts his readers to a nature beyond the four conceptual

¹²² Jamgön Mipham, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, 6.

¹²³ Shāntideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, 137.

¹²⁴ Mabja Jangchub Tsöndru, *Ornament of Reason*, 5.

extremes: is, is not, both, or neither. For all intents and purposes, they can be boiled down into two: phenomena are *not existent* and *not non-existent*—their essential nature is *śūnyatā* (emptiness).

Still, while both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti reason through the notion that the arising and thus abiding and ceasing of phenomena is unintelligible, the conventional truth, i.e., the transaction of cause and effect is not denied. Rather, life in all its experiences of happiness, suffering, and everything in between *does* appear and *does* seem to happen. Yet when investigated with the insightful eye of *prajñā* nothing substantial is actually found. To be clear, ‘investigation’ according to Madhyamaka reasoning demands a rigorous form of analysis whereby the practitioner holds in mind and explores a number of aspects of phenomena and dissects every nuance of it until there is nothing left to establish on a conceptual level. The phenomena of ‘time,’ for example, can be broken down into past, present, and future, but the Madhyamakans reason that the past is already gone and the future has not yet arrived. What is left seems to be the present moment. However, even the present can be further broken down into miniscule segments of time *ad infinitum*. The result of such analysis leads one to a point where concepts are utterly exhausted and what is left is a realization that the phenomena of ‘time’ is empty. As Śāntideva puts it in his famous verse: “When something and its nonexistence both are absent from before the mind, no other option does the latter have, it comes to perfect rest, from concepts free.”¹²⁵ No longer is there some *thing* for the mind to hold onto—an experience that results in a quality of natural unfettered rest.

Albeit the above example in no way captures the extent of Candrakīrti’s analysis or Nāgārjuna’s presentation of the middle way reasoning in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. *The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā is in fact comprised of twenty-seven chapters which examine the nature of everything from aggregates, the elements, actions and the agents of actions, suffering, cause and effect, beginnings and endings, contact, and even the transcendence of suffering to name a few. It is difficult to render here how impressive his work actually is and how ambitious it might be to undertake a genuine understanding of it.*¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, 142.

¹²⁶ Studies on Madhyamaka to date includes: Garfield’s (1994) *Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nāgārjuna Start with Causation*, and (1995) *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Ruegg’s

That said, with Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka as the current mode of philosophical inquiry at the time, combined with increased interest in scholarship among Tibetans thanks in part to Sakya Paṇḍita's legacy, as well as social pressures placed on the Nyingma to defend the authenticity of the Dzogchen tradition, Longchenpa is one a few key Nyingma scholars who took on the role of Nyingma scholarship and was granted the title *kunkhyen* meaning 'omniscient' or more literally 'all-knowing.' Whether the title *kunkhyen* refers in a literal sense to his omniscience or simply to his degree of literacy and profound training in both scholarship and the practical meditative application of dharma, Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam seemed to make every effort of his fifty-six years of life to strengthen, legitimize and preserve the Dzogchen tradition. *Finding Rest in Illusion* is one of many examples. What makes it special in this context is the degree to which Longchenpa impressively clarifies the 'view' of Dzogchen cast explicitly within the framework of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka.

Like Space: The Unborn Nature of Phenomena According to Dzogchen

Longchenpa introduces each of his eight chapters in *Finding Rest in Illusion* with a metaphorical image from the *Middle Length Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. Each chapter is in fact named according to the metaphors making them central to his efforts to forge a bridge between Madhyamaka and Dzogchen. Longchenpa explicitly introduces the 'view' of Madhyamaka at the outset of each chapter and synthesizes it within a Dzogchen paradigm, replete with its vital moving parts; ground, path, and fruition. As such, the ground of Dzogchen is positioned within the outlook of the pinnacle approach to ultimate nature—Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka—in order to exemplify the profound meaning of, 'the Great Mother' (Tib. *Yum chen mo*), i.e., the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, which is believed to be the earliest example of Mahāyāna literature.¹²⁷

Longchenpa's first chapter elaborates on the basic view that all phenomena are *dream-like* in the sense that they appear even though they have no intrinsic being. For him coming to this view means

(1981) *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* and (2010) *The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle: Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka*

¹²⁷ Conze (1967) locates the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* sometime in the first or second century CE.

arriving at the supreme dharmadhātu. Through retaining the Madhyamaka at the outset of each chapter, Longchenpa distinctly reframes Madhyamaka within a Dzogchen ontology, demonstrating their complementary qualities while affirming the Dzogchen outlook, attitude, and aesthetics. By structuring his text around significant Madhyamaka metaphors, he places Dzogchen itself within the context of enduring Buddhist imagery, re-telling or otherwise re-claiming the tales of Buddhist wisdom through a Dzogchen lens.

Subsequently, he dives into the notion that “the nature of mind, the self-arisen primordial wisdom, is primordially pure and space-like.”¹²⁸ The basic premise of Longchenpa’s teaching explains that when mind’s nature is recognized *as it is*, there manifests the “self-experience of awareness in the state of luminosity,” but when misapprehended, mistaken appearances manifest like magical illusions due to the condition of deeply ingrained “co-emergent” ignorance (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa’i ma rig pa*) and thoroughly conceptual ignorance (Tib. *kun du brtags pa’i ma rig pa*).¹²⁹ These appearances (i.e., all phenomena) are described as being false (Tib. *’khrul snang*) in the sense that they are mistakenly apprehended, resembling something similar to a hallucination that appears after consuming an intoxicant.

However, Longchenpa reflects again and again, that appearances are *like space*; meaning that when investigated they are not found to be ‘real’ in an ontological sense. ‘Real’ that is, in the sense that things exist permanently from their own side not in the sense that things are experienced. In other words, the experience of phenomena is not denied. As a practical explanation, in his auto-commentary *The Chariot of Excellence*, Longchenpa hints toward a well-known analytical reasoning found in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (although Longchenpa does not himself reference it). Longchenpa states:

If all phenomena are examined, they are like tricks of sight, for although they appear, they have no intrinsic being. If they are left unexamined, they seem to be perfectly fine. If on the other hand they are minutely investigated even the part-less particles and the subtle moments of consciousness that support [the experience of] coarse, extended phenomena are found to be without any identifiable nature. They are like space; they do not have any existence at all.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 102.

¹²⁹ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 102.

¹³⁰ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 160.

Similar to my previous example of ‘time,’ what Longchenpa is referring to when he mentions ‘minutely investigating,’ is reminiscent of Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka reasoning which emphasizes the fact that phenomena lack any solidity in the sense that they are not composed of partless particles. This is a typical refutation against early Buddhist epistemologists who claimed that outer phenomena are indeed composed of minute atoms. An example of this analytical reasoning is found in chapter two of the *MMK*, “The Analysis of Going and Coming,” where Nāgārjuna demonstrates the non-existence of past, present, and future, instilling the notion that there is no coming, abiding, and going.¹³¹ Like time, objects such as visual forms are investigated for their conditionality, impermanence, and interdependence and are thereby found to be empty. From Nāgārjuna’s point of view, how can an object exist in its own right if it is compounded *ad infinitum*?

Taking it a step further, he concludes that even the eye faculty that sees visual objects and the eye consciousness that renders them into awareness are equally conditioned by their mere dependence on one another. Accordingly, there can be no visible forms without the eye—what would see them? Likewise, no eye-consciousness could exist without the eye faculty or the visible object—it would be totally useless. *How*, Nāgārjuna asks, can two things that exist permanently ever come into true contact? The answer, from his point of view, is that they don’t: “the seen, sight, and the seer do not, either in pairs or as a group, ever come into contact,” moreover, “contacting, contacted, and contacter do not exist either.”¹³²

Longchenpa has a similar conclusion noting that outer objects composed of partless particles and inner consciousness, in conjunction with the sense faculty that renders awareness of that object are inextricably conditioned denoting their very nature as empty. Longchenpa is then (with presumable certainty) drawing upon reasoning found in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, namely the “analysis of contact,” where Nāgārjuna employs analytical reasoning to refute the intrinsic existence of the seen, sight, and the seer by breaking down contact into subtle relationships. Within this Madhyamaka framework, not only are partless particles unable to exist but a relationship between a real and solid visible object cannot by

¹³¹ Mabja Jangchub Tsöndru, *Ornament of Reason*, 8-12 and 175-197.

¹³² Mabja Jangchub Tsöndru, *Ornament of Reason*, 316-321.

any reasonable means interact with a real and solid eye faculty or eye consciousness. Likewise, consciousness is broken down in much the same way; no instance of mind's continuum can be identified as permanent or partless, and therefore it is not intrinsically real. According to Longchenpa, the result of not finding anything real and solid confirms the quality of phenomena being *like space*—empty of 'realness.' Consequently, being *like space*, phenomena (including outer objects and inner-mental phenomena such as thoughts and consciousness) have no genuine reality and thus no real jurisdiction or reason to harbor positive or negative affection toward.

However, as Longchenpa explains, sentient beings are deeply unsettled by this innate 'mistake' of misapprehending and misconstruing objects as something 'real'—so much so that they cherish some things and disregard others, further brandishing a false sense of self and other and further sustaining false impressions upon inner and outer objects. According to Longchenpa, and many other Buddhist sources, this 'mistake' and its sequential reactions only serves to build the bonds of saṃsāra's endless cycles of birth, death, and continual suffering. The path, therefore, that Longchenpa prescribes, entails learning to see things clearly. That is to say, to see things the way they are *like space*—unborn and therefore, unimpeded. What follows, according to Longchenpa, is an ever-growing recognition of what is actually there: *pristine fundamental nature*, free from being apprehended as 'this' or 'that'—as any conceptual idea.

Longchenpa reinforces the notion of phenomena being *like space*, as described above, by referencing a number of basic statements from the *MLP*. The eight images which constitute the entirety of *Finding Rest in Illusion*, serve the purpose of fortifying and increasing certitude in the notion that phenomena are like space—empty yet luminous, appearing while lacking any genuine reality. While lovely, poetic, and even humorous at times, Longchenpa leaves no room for doubting the purpose of his strategy. Each chapter is clearly organized in terms of illustrating the 'view' (which aligns each time with the *MLP*), followed by the ground, path, and fruition according to Dzogchen. Functioning as a *lam rim* style exposition of Dzogchen, Longchenpa instructs his readers in methods geared toward displacing habitually mistaken mind by recognizing the fundamental nature of reality. Beginning with preliminary

practices such as taking refuge in the three jewels, arousing bodhicitta, and engaging in guru yoga, Longchenpa arranges the path as a series of stages that culminates with Dzogchen, often translated as ‘Great Perfection’ or ‘Great Completion’ by scholars such as Anne Klein, to indicate a quality of wholeness or an original unbroken state.¹³³ To illustrate his position, Longchenpa expresses (in their respective order), that phenomena are: (1) *like a dream*, appearing yet without intrinsic reality, (2) *like a magical illusion*, unborn and unceasing—they do not come nor do they go, (3) *like tricks of sight*, coming from nowhere, (4) free from departing, *like a mirage*, (5) empty, yet appearing—not obliterated to nothing, *like the reflection of the moon in water*, (6) without permanence, *like an echo*, (7) *like a city of gandharvas*, their very nature unborn, abiding nowhere, and finally (8) *like emanations* of the mind, phenomena are not different nor are they the same.

Beyond just a matter of combining Madhyamaka points within a Dzogchen approach, Longchenpa structures his entire text around the eight metaphors emphasizing their centrality to Madhyamaka. Again, each chapter or vajra point resembles Nāgārjuna’s homage in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, demonstrating the centrality of Madhyamaka combined with Dzogchen rhetoric and a pedagogical aim in a doctrinal synthesis (see figure 1).

Vajra Point	Centrality to Madhyamaka	Dzogchen Rhetoric	Pedagogy
<i>Like a Dream</i>	Phenomena do not arise—although they appear, they have no intrinsic nature.	The illusory ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is the ground nature— <i>dharmadhātu</i> —empty and sky-like. Phenomena appear in terms of mistaken appearances due to habitual tendencies of ordinary sentient beings.	Understand that since the ground awareness is confused by ignorance, mistaken appearances manifest like images in a dream.
<i>Like a Magical Illusion</i>	Phenomena are an unceasing display.	The nature of the ground is illusory and space-like—when not recognized as such mistaken appearances arise in terms of outer and inner phenomena (duality).	Understand that phenomena arise through the power of interdependent causation, like a magical illusion conjured through an incantation.
<i>Like a Trick of Sight</i>	Phenomena do not come from anywhere—they are devoid of origin.	Mistaken appearances are different from the natural radiance of awareness in that they manifest like a hallucination that produce afflictions and karma.	Understand that phenomena arise through the power of conditions coming together, like tricks of sight.

¹³³ Anne Klein, “Assorted Topics of the Great Completeness,” in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David White (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 557-572.

<i>Like a Mirage</i>	Phenomena do not go anywhere—they are devoid of all departing.	The universe and beings are born through a subtle thought of self and sense objects. Giving rise to hallucinatory appearances. Nothing at all remains and nothing can ever go or be destroyed. All phenomena unborn and primordially empty.	Understand that like a mirage, phenomena have no origin, no place to abide, and therefore do not go. All phenomena are in their very nature empty and unborn.
<i>Like the Reflection of the Moon in Water</i>	Phenomena continue to appear although they lack intrinsic existence.	Appearances arise from the ground, or mind, which is like a pure ocean. The waves of karma and afflictions stir the ocean-like mind and produce mistaken appearances.	Understand the hollow nature of phenomena, which are like the reflection of the moon in water, appearing yet lacking any intrinsic nature.
<i>Like an Echo</i>	Phenomena appear, but they are not permanent.	In conjunction with co-emergent ignorance, false appearances arise from the ground as the result of the ground's own radiance.	Understand the groundless, rootless nature of phenomena, which are like resonate sound, heard but fleeting and intangible.
<i>Like a City of Gandharvas</i>	Phenomena are not different in that they are all empty.	In the same way that mistaken appearances are empty of intrinsic existence, the ultimate expanse of primordial ground is space-like—its qualities perfectly and naturally present.	Understand that saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are equal in their space-like nature. They are not two entities within the sphere of emptiness.
<i>Like an Emanated Apparition</i>	Phenomena are not one and the same—they are like emanations of the mind.	What appears to saṃsāric beings is the subjective experience of the ordinary mind. For Buddhas, what appears is naturally present primordial wisdom.	Understand that when the karma of confused body and mind come to an end, the excellent qualities of Buddhahood naturally come to fruition.

Figure 1. Chapter by Chapter Illustration of Longchenpa's Madhyamaka-Dzogchen Synthesis

Framed within each of these premises in support of the *Prajñāpāramitā* doctrine of emptiness, Longchenpa weaves Dzogchen threads into the established patterns of Madhyamaka reasoning. The view of non-arising fits into the ground of unborn phenomena; the 'illusory ground' of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, where the enlightened mind (Skt. *sugatagarbha*) endures primordially and the Truth Body (Skt. *dharmakāya*) reigns empty "like the sky," the Enjoyment Body (Skt. *samboghakāya*) relishes in the stature of its luminous character "like the sun and the moon," and the Emanation Body (Skt. *nirmanakāya*) exhibits its basis of manifestation, "like the limpid surface of a mirror."¹³⁴ Interestingly however, while Longchenpa obviously evokes the qualities of buddhanature, he never says so explicitly.

¹³⁴ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 72.

Likewise, he refrains from frequent reference to some of the more obvious texts that are associated with Yogācāra and Buddhanature such as the *Uttaratantraśāstra* (*Sublime Continuum*).¹³⁵

Instead, he focuses on the basic ontological veracity of the Madhyamaka middle way, which teaches freedom beyond the extremes. He thereby cohesively ties Madhyamaka into Dzogchen conveying a quality of mind that is free from the duality of apprehender and apprehended, uninhibited by the protracted habits of mental disturbances and indulgences, and fundamentally pure in its original nature. Indeed, the way that Longchenpa presents Dzogchen within the structures of Buddhist metaphors that are already deeply imbedded in Madhyamaka makes it appear as though their philosophical bases are founded in an effortless and uncomplicated alliance. *Finding Rest in Illusion* in this way serves as a device for Longchenpa to demonstrate their *likeness*; bridging, aligning and expanding the function, basic ontology, and liberatory purpose to which the metaphors of illusion aim to inform.

The Bridging Role of Metaphor: Similitude and Distinction

Even as he employs reasoning adhering closely to the analytical approaches found in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* he seems to elucidate those reasonings with such ease as if the Madhyamaka view and Dzogchen framework naturally fit like two pieces in a puzzle. In fact, without a background in Madhyamaka reasoning Longchenpa's allusions toward its approach could easily go unnoticed. In short, Longchenpa demonstrates by way of the *MLP* that phenomena cannot remain within, outside, or anywhere between the margin of the extremes. They are boundless, *like space*—a Dzogchen theme overlaid with Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka premise of *non-arising* and so on.

In a certain manner, Longchenpa is playing a bit of a sleight of hand, gesturing the parallels between Dzogchen and Madhyamaka in one hand while slowly drawing the reader into the world of Dzogchen as if walking through a fine mist only to discover one has become thoroughly saturated in the Dzogchen world of primordial purity. For had the reader entered into the text with the Madhyamaka idea

¹³⁵ On rare occasion, Longchenpa references the *Uttaratantraśāstra* in his chapters on the likeness of magical illusions, a city of gandharvas, and emanated apparition.

of the metaphors of illusion in mind they may have been charmed and lured into something unexpected. Something of awe and wonder. Something of natural clarity and luminescence.

While we can easily draw upon their similarities, noting examples of similar, if not directly mirrored lines of reasoning, what distinguishes Madhyamaka and Dzogchen are emphatically pronounced. In his introduction to *The Practice of Dzogchen* (an anthology of Longchenpa's writings), contemporary Nyingma master, Tulku Thondup quotes from Longchenpa's *Precious Treasury of Space*, in an explanation of what distinguishes Madhyamaka and Dzogchen:

Most methods of comprehending (analyzing) the freedom from the extremes (mtha' bral), and so on, of the Natural Great Perfection are similar to Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka. However, Madhyamaka regards the emptiness as the important thing. (Dzogpa Chenpo), relying on the primordially pure and naked intrinsic awareness which is just non-existent and unceasing, comprehends it (the intrinsic awareness) and all the phenomena arisen from it as free from extremes like space.¹³⁶

Here Longchenpa praises the view of Madhyamaka, yet emphasizes the unique qualities of Dzogchen, maintaining intrinsic awareness as the basis, despite it not being a truly existent entity.

To clarify, Longchenpa refutes any suggestion that intrinsic awareness according to Dzogchen is the same as 'self-awareness' or 'self-clarity' (Tib. *rang rig rang gsal*) described in the context of the Mind Only presentation. He clarifies that in Dzogchen, "the essence (ngo bo) of intrinsic awareness, the realization of non-existence of the apprehended and apprehender, is called the spontaneously arisen primordial wisdom...there is no existence of internal and external."¹³⁷ Likewise, in a manner reflecting Madhyamaka's insistence on an ineffable ultimate and a hesitance to trust language at face value, he states: "it should be realized that the self-essence (of Dzogchen) is inexpressible. Otherwise, if you take the meaning of the words literally, you will never find (in Dzogchen) any difference from the cognition of self-awareness, self-clarity, and non-duality of apprehender and apprehended of the Mind Only school."¹³⁸ What this means then is that the differences between Dzogchen and both Mahāyāna schools of thought (Mind Only and Madhyamaka) are subtle. According to the Nyingma, there are no differences

¹³⁶ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 104.

¹³⁷ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 103.

¹³⁸ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 103-104.

when it comes to the view of emptiness and the ultimate in the sūtras and tantras. However, as Bōtrül, the twentieth century Nyingma master wrote: “if you analyze from the standpoint of appearances...there are great differences between the views of sūtras and tantras (comparable to the distance between the) sky and the earth.”¹³⁹

From the point of view of Dzogchen, the pinnacle vehicle in the Nyingma system, appearances are luminous and empty in their nature and more so, they are the “appearances of the basis” (Tib. *gzhi snang*)—a profound and illuminating (though thoroughly abstruse) ingredient in Dzogchen, which brings us to the very original ground upon which saṃsāra and nirvāṇa emerged, and furthermore, a gateway into Longchenpa’s fifth chapter; “The Reflection of the Moon in Water,” which further elucidates the appearing quality of our phenomenal inner and outer worlds.

Homage to the Noble Land

Throughout *Finding Rest in Illusion*, Longchenpa showcases the harmony between Dzogchen and Madhyamaka, not only for the sake of exemplifying the scholastic elements of the Nyingma tradition, but also to identify the Nyingma textual tradition in alignment with Indian Buddhism and specifically Madhyamaka. Since Tibet was seeing an increase in interest in Indian literary scholarship, including Sanskrit poetics, Longchenpa followed suit, demonstrating his creative and intellectual capacity in defense of the Nyingma tradition.

An example of his use of common literary trends can be seen immediately in the title of his text—*Rdzogs pa chen po sgyu ma ngal gso* (*Dzogchen Treatise: Finding Rest in Illusion*), specifically in his commentary and summary—*Rdzogs pa chen po sgyu ma ngal gso'i 'grel pa shing rta bzang po* (*A Commentary on the Dzogchen Treatise ‘Finding Rest in Illusion:’ The Excellent Chariot*) and *Rdzog pa chen po sgyu ma ngal gso'i bsdud don man da ra ba zhi phreng* (*A Summary on the Dzogchen Treatise ‘Finding Rest in Illusion:’ A Garland of Mandāravā Flowers*). As we will see, he includes a Sanskrit title

¹³⁹ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 10.

as well as a descriptive and ornamental title—a trend that we see in Tibet’s early translation period, but became more relevant and developed during the second wave of translation with the introduction of the *Kāvyaḍarśa*. In fact, as Orna Almogi points out, it was not until the *Kāvyaḍarśa*, along with other works on Indian poetics, was translated into Tibetan during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that Tibetan titles became longer and more ornate.¹⁴⁰ Earlier works in fact, contained much shorter titles and were mainly descriptive. In this manner the significance of his use of a descriptive and ornamental titles reveals how Longchenpa aligns himself with scholastic practices of the day and showcased the Nyingma tradition within the scholastic framework in order to secure its position.

That said, from an emic point of view the title of a text holds significant value by the virtue of its ability to transmit the entire meaning of the text. It is said that an individual with superior intelligence is capable of understanding the text in its entirety simply by reading the title, while a person middling intelligence can read the outline and understand the text in full, and a person of lesser intelligence must read the whole text in order to understand it. In this manner, the title of a text performs the function of not only labeling and organizing the text, but of providing access to the entire body of knowledge contained within it. For example, in Longchenpa’s *Precious Treasury of Basic Space* (*Chos dbying mdzod*), he writes: “a person of sharp faculty would grasp [the meaning] simply through [its title], since this title shows all phenomena as one maṇḍala of primordial awakening. This is the purpose [of assigning a title].”¹⁴¹

The title *Finding Rest in Illusion* is itself a means to draw the reader into the overall aim of the text: to find a source of comfort and to restore one’s self from the fatigue and weariness of saṃsāra—the cycle of birth and death. While the entire text is framed around the classic eight examples of illusion, the fact that the title encourages the reader from the beginning to *rest in illusion*, demonstrates Longchenpa’s insistence on figurative language as a means to gain relief from pain and suffering if not liberation from

¹⁴⁰ Orna Almogi, "Analysing Tibetan Titles: Towards a Genre-Based Classification of Tibetan Literature," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 15, no. 1 (2005), 29.

¹⁴¹ Orna Almogi, "Analysing Tibetan Titles," 31.

the afflictive conditions of cyclic existence. Operating within the realm of poetry, the process of habituating one's self to see things in the manner of an illusion, a dream, a reflection and so forth, caters toward the possibility of 'letting go' to put it in colloquial terms. If things are *like an illusion*, what is the point in getting wound up in the mental and emotional misunderstanding of assuming things to be real? Again however, as Longchenpa explains specifically in his chapter on the vajra point—the *moon's reflection in water*—the fact that phenomena are not *real* is not to say that things do not matter. He reminds his reader, urging them to understand that just as existence is an extreme to be avoided, so too is non-existence. The genuine nature of phenomena lays beyond any extreme.

Just within the title we can see the strength of the poetic method as it proposes a way of seeing the world and one's self in the manner of an illusion. Saturated with compassion, Longchenpa's words *ngal gso* indicate his urge for his readers to give way to the subtle thought that things may not be the way they seem at first glance. More so, if one could habituate their self to see things as though they were not truly real, the tight grip on one's self—the source of dualistic perception and continued suffering—might be able to loosen and come to an open and relaxed state. As Longchenpa indicates, that state promotes a sense of wholeness and an opportunity to mend, to restore, and heal one's self from the long and tiresome rounds of suffering that result from mistakenly believing one's self and the outside world to be real. The idea of *resting in illusion* therefore draws the reader into a poetic atmosphere where Longchenpa paints an alternative to suffering by inviting his reader to contemplate how phenomena are *like an illusion*, proposing that resting in the experience of that thought provides a moment of relief from hardship. Likewise, as Longchenpa repeats again and again that things are *like a mirage, an echo, a trick of sight* and so forth, the reader is enticed to reflect again and again on the illusory nature of their self and the world as each moment of relief carves out a gap of freedom from the mistaken view of a reified self and other. Recognized in terms of their shared nature, all things are found to be primordially empty (Tib. *ye stong*).

As a matter of comparison, in his 1976 translation, Herbert Guenther translated Longchenpa's *Sgyu ma ngal gso* as simply *Wonderment*, while naming the overarching title of the trilogy as *Kindly Bent*

to *Ease Us*.¹⁴² While his translation of Longchenpa's title certainly embraces more creative liberty over faithfulness to the Tibetan text there is a certain efficacy involved in his choice of words. Indeed, what Longchenpa promotes in his encouragement to habituate one's self to see things in the manner of an illusion casts the reader into a poetic world of awe and wonderment. In comparison to our habitual way of relating with the world, which more often than not is entrenched in daily stressors and listlessness, the sense of wonderment proposed by seeing things in the manner of the eight metaphors of illusion invokes a quality of living that enacts the pristine clarity of mind associated with wonder. In his preface to his translation Guenther describes the process of coming to understand the illusory nature of things writing:

In this process the person is seen as not so much seeking for truth, but as letting the internal logic of Being shine forth, and this logic then becomes the 'sense' or 'truth' of his life, coloring in subtle hues his particular 'world' which represents the meaning he has found. This 'sense' may be said to be the feeling of wonderment, not so much as a passive state, but as an active, and, in the strict sense of the word, a creative manner of looking at our familiar world, as if it were for the first time. In wonderment we can see with enormous clarity and exquisite sensitivity.¹⁴³

Similarly, the notion of Guenther's title *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*, though criticized by Buddhist Studies scholars such as Robert Thurman for being an example of "his intellectual arrogance," it does capture a certain appreciation and even reverence for Longchenpa's work.¹⁴⁴ The notion of 'kindly bent' seems to refer to the compassionate determination of the bodhisattva ideal which seeks to attain liberation for the sake of other people's welfare and vows to remain in saṃsāra in order to aid others on their path to liberation. In this manner, Guenther's remarks is less of an example of arrogance and more a show of respect to Longchenpa for writing the *Trilogy of Rest* and encouraging his readers to engage with the metaphors of illusion as a means to liberation.

That said, as mentioned previously most titles of Tibetan texts are comprised of two parts: a descriptive and an ornamental. A descriptive title identifies the subject matter or genre of the text, while

¹⁴² Longchen Rabjam, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us: Wonderment from the Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1976).

¹⁴³ Longchen Rabjam, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*, iv.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Thurman, review of *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*, by Herbert Guenther, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37, no. 1 (June, 1997): 22, doi:10.2307/2718672.

the ornamental title is used to express more symbolic aspects of the text, elucidating its key components by means of a metaphor. For example, Atiśa Dīpaṃkara explains that in the case of the title, *Kāvyaādarśa*, “*kāvya* has been assigned [on the basis of] subject matter, and *ādarśa* (ie., mirror) on the basis of [the work’s] function. This treatise, which establishes [its subject matter] as *kāvya*, is called a ‘mirror,’ since [*kāvya*] is clearly reflected in it. [It] is called [a ‘mirror’] on the basis of similarity.”¹⁴⁵

Interestingly, Longchenpa does not explicitly follow the appeal toward the combination of a descriptive and ornamental title in his root text, *Dzogchen Treatise: Finding Rest in Illusion*. Nonetheless, he does retain the combination of descriptive and ornamental titles in his auto commentary—*A Commentary on the Dzogchen Treatise ‘Finding Rest in Illusion:’ The Excellent Chariot*, as well as his summary of the text—*A Summary on the Dzogchen Treatise ‘Finding Rest in Illusion:’ A Garland of Mandharava Flowers*. In this case, Longchenpa regards his commentary in terms of the metaphor of a chariot and his summary in terms of a garland of madharava flowers.

In addition to his use of descriptive and ornamental titles, the very kinds of metaphors that he emphasizes in his ornamental titles elicit even more connections with Indian culture and literature. For example, the *mandāravā* flower itself evokes the beauty of the Indian coral tree or tiger’s claw, a native tree of southern Indian which holds religious significance since the *mandāravā* flower is believed to grow in Sukavati (Tib. *Bde ba chan*), the pure land of Buddha Amitabha. In this way, Longchenpa elicits the metaphor to describe his condensation of the text, through which, in the manner of a tied ‘garland of *mandāravā* flowers,’ his summary of the root text is contained in lovely ornament.

The metaphor of the chariot (Tib. *shing rta*), or rather the excellent chariot (Tib. *shing rta bzang po*), elicits a number of allusions, many of which are culturally specific to Indian culture. In general, the chariot is often expressed as a kind of means to liberation. For example, the Eight Practice Lineages of Tibet are described as ‘Eight Great Chariots’ (Tib. *shing rta chen mo brgyad*), implying their ability to carry a person toward the goal of liberation, just as a chariot might take a person from one place to the

¹⁴⁵ Orna Almogi, “Analysing Tibetan Titles,” 41.

next. Although the distinction of the Eight Practice Lineages developed much later in Tibet during *ris med* ‘impulse’ in the nineteenth century, the metaphorical use of the chariot indicates the metaphors continued endurance in Tibetan culture.

In terms of Indian history, the chariot is often a symbol of power and social prestige as well as warfare and warriorship. Likewise, the chariot evokes a sense of skill and driving force. Specific to the India tradition, the famous *Bhagavad Gita*—a story in the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābharata*—is composed of a dialogue that takes place almost entirely in a chariot in which Krishna plays the role of a charioteer and guide for the prince Arjuna during battle. In a similar light, Longchenpa himself is often referred to as a “a great charioteer,” evoking the qualities of a masterful guide who leads his disciples toward liberation.¹⁴⁶

Regarding the metaphorical invocations described above, what both of these instances have in common is their Indian ‘derivation.’ This is important, because in order to safeguard the Nyingma tradition, Longchenpa saw it necessary to synthesize Dzogchen within prominent philosophical and literary views in Tibet. I hesitate to use the word ‘origin,’ here, although India is commonly referred to as the origin or source of Buddhism in the tradition itself. Rather, I prefer the image of these metaphorical expressions being ‘drawn from’ or ‘leading off from,’ one place to another like the branches of a tree spreading out in different directions, more accurately depicts the ancestral line of these metaphors. For like the Indian myths and imagery, the Greeks also welcomed the image of the Helios, the glorious charioteer who draws the sun across the sky, albeit several centuries after the *Mahābharata*.

That said, in line with trends of the day, the titles of Longchenpa’s text simultaneously demonstrate their place among Indian Buddhist posterity while expressing a signature of respect to India. In fact, Longchenpa includes with each of his titles a Sanskrit translation. Again, this is interesting because as far as we know the text was never composed in Sanskrit, and from what we can gather from his biographies Longchenpa never even went to India. From the tradition’s point of view, however,

¹⁴⁶ Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School*, 595.

including a Sanskrit title is a sign of paying homage to the *Phags yul*, or ‘Noble Land’ of India where the Śakyamuni Buddha first taught the dharma. In this regard, Longchenpa includes the title *Mahāsamdhi māyā viśrānta nāma* to his root text.

Lastly, in addition to his use of Sanskrit titles in his texts, Longchenpa retains his own instructive signature in each of his texts. According to a number of Nyingma biographers, Longchenpa self-classifies each of his texts by signing each treatise with a particular name. Tulku Thondup asserts that “Longchen Rabjam uses his various names in the colophons of his writings to distinguish the subjects of the text.”¹⁴⁷ For example, in his works on mundane sciences, grammar, and poetry, he signs as Tsultrim Lodro, for his writing on the profound meaning and the stages of meditation, he signs as Drimé Özer, and so on. While in his commentary to the trilogy he signs his name as Natsok Rangdrol. However, in the epilogue included in his verses he refers to himself as Drimé Özer, indicating that the verses are themselves writings on the stages of the path and profound subjects. Unfortunately, the name ‘Natsok Rangdrol,’ is not included in a number of lists describing the varying uses of his names. However, in *The Treasure Chamber*, his own index of written work, he lists the *Trilogy of Rest* and its commentary under the category of “works that offer an extensive examination of suchness itself,” which is further categorized into his “general discussion” which “serves to show how the Dzogchen path, together with its fruition, is in accord with, and incorporates, all other spiritual approaches.”¹⁴⁸ In this manner, it is validly reasonable to assume that *Finding Rest in Illusion* exemplifies the practical application of Madhyamaka subsumed within a Dzogchen understanding of phenomena, their nature, and the entire series of Nyingma ground, path, and fruition.

Moreover, the fact that he uses two different names for his verses and commentary is indeed interesting. In particular, his name Drimé Özer, or ‘Spotless Rays of Light’ gives the sense that the verses were written by the very fruition of Dzogchen—the stainless and limpid clarity of mind’s natural radiance. It is in this regard that a number of Nyingmapas including contemporary teachers describe

¹⁴⁷ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 188.

¹⁴⁸ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 141-143.

Longchenpa's writing as "indistinguishable from the words of the Victorious One."¹⁴⁹ Likewise, Tulku Thondup explains that in conjunction with his rigorous training Longchenpa wrote from experience. The result is therefore a more direct and unequivocal style of writing. I would add that from a linguistic perspective, in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, Longchenpa's syntax and consistent terminology makes reading relatively simple, or at least straightforward. He uses a lot of appositional phrases, which is common in Tibetan literature, but he does so in a coherent manner. Likewise, he balances the use of apophatic language with cataphatic statements which, by and large, make his writing more readable to a wider audience seeking inspirational words as opposed to mere negation commonly attributed with Madhyamaka reasoning. In this regard, perhaps like an inspired poet, Drimé Özer draws his genius from something more experiential rather than hypothetical. And Natsok Rangdrol, the synthesizer of sūtra and tantra, aims to elucidate the experience that oozes from his verses on a more practical philosophical level. That said, let us identify particular instances that demonstrate Longchenpa's approach to the text especially the way in which he uses metaphors or similitude to synthesize Madhyamaka within overarching Dzogchen themes. While incorporating newly established scholastic standards including Sanskrit poetics introduced by the Sarma schools he nonetheless retains his own sense of creativity.

Evoking the Words of the Buddha

The beginning of each chapter in *Finding Rest in Illusion*, opens with a verse featuring the speech of the Buddha. For example, in the root verse of his fifth chapter he writes:

Furthermore, the Victorious One has spoken of the likeness of water moons.
I will explain, so that what [he] stated may be brought into experience.¹⁵⁰

This is relevant not only because it serves as a sign of homage and respect to the 'Victorious One,' but also because it immediately positions Longchenpa's work within the Buddhist commentarial tradition and highlights the fact that these are not his own words but a mere expansion on the Buddha's original intent.

¹⁴⁹ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 145.

¹⁵⁰ *yang 'dir rgyal bas chu zla ta bu zhes / ji skad gsungs de nyams su blang phyir bshad*, (693).

According to Longchenpa, the Buddha himself spoke of the *likeness of the moon in water*. Furthermore, he highlights his purpose, introducing his role as an authorized ‘interpreter’ of the Buddha’s words and intent.

The fact that the Buddha is cited to have spoken of the metaphor of the *moon’s reflection in water* is significant both in the sense that Longchenpa capitalizes on it as an Indian Buddhist figure of speech, but also in that it is an enduring metaphor that captures the sense of how Buddhists think and relate with the world. The metaphor of the *moon’s reflection* in particular, can be cited at least as far back as first or second century CE where it is found in the *Śālistambasūtra*, (*Rice Seedling Sūtra*) and the *Samādhirājasūtra* (*King of Meditative Concentration Sūtra*) where the Buddha himself says to Candraprabha: “Young man, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should know that all phenomena are like illusions. They should know that all phenomena are like dreams, like mirages, like echoes, like optical illusions, like the moon on water, like hallucinations, like reflections, and like space.”¹⁵¹

His method of introducing the topic, simultaneously placing himself as heir to the Buddha and indicating his intention to explain the text is indicative of the standard practices of composition described by Sakya Paṇḍita. In chapter one of his *Gateway to Learning*, Sakya Paṇḍita outlines the “Entry into Composition,” emphasizing (1) the importance of beginning a text with a verse of reverence, (2) the oath of composition, (3) an expression of humility, (4) an outline, and (5) a statement of purpose.¹⁵² Longchenpa does this in the beginning of his text (although he excludes an expression of humility and an outline), and then he re-establishes his purpose and offers a sign of reverence for the Buddha at the outset of each chapter as a standard citational practice.

In terms of his exclusion of an expression of humility, Tulku Thondup explains that most Tibetan writers describe themselves as ignorant or illiterate even if they are great scholars in order to train themselves in humbleness. However, he writes “Longchen Rabjam, as some other great realized scholars

¹⁵¹ “The King of Samādhis Sūtra,” 84000 Translating the Words of the Buddha, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-055-001.html#node-477>.

¹⁵² Jonathan Gold, *The Dharma’s Gatekeepers*, 156-160.

do, discloses his true self and proclaims his fearless and limitless roar of scholarship and insight to inspire and generate confidence in the teachings in the minds of the followers.”¹⁵³ Moreover, although he does not include an outline, he does provide a summary (Tib. *bsdud don*).

While it is not evident as to why Longchenpa does not chose to include an expression of humility as well as an internal outline, we can infer that his reasons were sound. He may have even been appealing toward a different audience since he wrote the *Trilogy of Rest* while residing in Orgyen Dzong at Gangri Tokar (present day Bhutan)—the hermitage he established long after his monastic education and just after he revealed the *Khandro Nyingtik*. In this regard, he is not writing solely to monastics in the *Trilogy of Rest*. Perhaps more accurately he is writing to a yogic audience in line with Dzogchen.

It is said that he preferred to stay in quiet hermitages, caves or cliff sides rather than monasteries, that he often rejected the authority of noble people, and that he purported the notion of a single-vehicle (Skt. *ekayāna*) in which all the teachings of the Buddha could be condensed, rejecting the view that the nine vehicles of the Dharma are contradictory. In this manner, he seems more interested in teaching a kind of Buddhist practice geared toward liberating the mind from concepts and mental restrictions altogether—a point he emphasizes again and again in *Finding Rest in Illusion*. In line with the view expressed in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, describing a kind of freedom beyond the extremes of mental elaboration, Longchenpa bids his readers to consider what is truly meant by *natural mind*—unbound and free from any and all conceptual elaborations including that of utter negation and denial of all that appears.

Next, after recalling the words of the Buddha, Longchenpa evokes principal Madhyamaka literature by drawing directly from the *Middle Length Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, stating in his commentary:

All phenomena of the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) and the transcendence of agonizing sorrow (*nirvāṇa*) appear and consequently are not annihilated. They are very much like the moon in water. As it is stated in the *Middle Length Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*: “Subhūti, regarding all phenomena...they appear and consequently are not diminished to nothing. They therefore resemble the moon in water.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 173.

¹⁵⁴ 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa'i chos thams cad snang yang rjes su ma chad pa chu'i zla ba lta bu nyid do/ yum bar ma las/ rab 'byor chos thams cad ni snang yang rjes su ma chad ba'i phyir chu'i zla ba lta bu'o, (693).

The fact that he draws directly from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is relevant for a number of reasons. First of all, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* are considered to be the words of the Buddha from a Mahāyāna perspective. It is interesting that although he is clearly drawing upon the eight classic images of illusion as they are used by Nāgārjuna, he does not cite Nāgārjuna immediately. Rather, he cites the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Perhaps this is because he wants to emphasize the words of the Buddha himself, and though he consistently references Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, he nonetheless acknowledges the hierarchical position of the Buddha—whose words are regarded as superior in all traditions of Buddhism.

In addition, in the passage above, we are more thoroughly introduced to the topic at hand. The *moon in water*, or rather, the *reflection of the moon in water*, is used to indicate that although everything that appears in the world is empty, they nonetheless appear and are therefore not 'annihilated' (Tib. 'rjes su ma chad pa'). The term *chad pa* is often translated as 'destroyed' or 'nothing,' and is often associated with the concept of 'nihilism' in a number of Madhyamaka texts including Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, where he explains that all phenomena are neither 'destroyed nor permanent,' indicating the status of phenomena beyond the extremes. My choice of using the term 'annihilated,' i.e., 'brought to nothing,' is based on a number of conversations I have had with English speakers who are either rattled or distracted by the obvious superimpositions of the term 'nihilism' which is often translated as the counter-extreme to 'eternalism,' which may also be more accurately translated as 'permanence' (Tib. *rtag*).

In line with the Buddha's statement and Nāgārjuna's reasoning, Longchenpa's example of the *moon in water* demonstrates the particular attributes of appearances, as a means to counter-act the extreme which denies existence altogether. To begin, he jumps directly into the nature of mind itself, hinting at a quality of appearances that, when free of conceptual elaboration, appears with effortless clarity. He states in his root verses:

Within the center of a profound and limpid ocean—*mind itself*
There arises primordially, an effortlessly present *likeness of form*.
However, distorted by troubling waves,
Agitated by the winds of conceptual thought, clarity does not ensue.

The transient world and living beings, mired in confusion, arise out of conceiving a self.
Therefore, pristine awareness is not clear.
Unaware and afflicted, they sink into the cycles of birth and death
Till time with no beginning and no end.¹⁵⁵

From a Madhyamaka point of view, the extreme of annihilation is limited concept which binds the mind to ideas as opposed to complete freedom. Longchenpa however, carries the tone of Nāgārjuna's freedom from the extremes into a very profound Nyingma ontological and cosmological conception of the nature of the mind and the world. Using the image of a vast and peaceful ocean upon which images appear 'effortlessly present,' (Tib. *lhun grub*) in the manner of a reflection, the notion of a spacious and limitless landscape is brought to mind. Mind itself, akin with the Nyingma notion of the ground (Tib. *gzhi*) is in fact being described here.

To continue with his use of the metaphor, when calm and clear, the reflections of forms shining down from the sky are reflected in perfect semblance. However, because of conceptual thought, these effortless images do not appear in a clear manner. In his commentary, Longchenpa explains that this is similar to not being able to see the reflection of the planets and stars in the ocean because the waves are too turbulent. What the image conjures up is the *ocean-like* quality of mind—able to hold a vast range of experience. Furthermore, the mind is drawn out to be something like a vast plain from which appearances arise. In this regard, Longchenpa's verse seems to refer to the very 'beginning' of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, which from a Nyingma point of view, are like two sides of the same coin—like two versions of reality, both of which are derived from the same vast ocean of mind.

Longchenpa then explains in his commentary, that based upon *lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa* or co-emergent ignorance in conjunction with *kun du brtags pa'i ma rig pa* or thoroughly imputed ignorance, the reflections of planets and stars are obscured in the ocean of mind. In other words, what appears to an individual whose mind is compounded with these two types of ignorance is a distorted version, or rather a 'mistaken appearance' (Tib. *khrul snang*) of the way things naturally are when free of conceptual

¹⁵⁵ *sems nyid zab cing dwangs pa'i mtsho dbus su/ lhun grub gzugs brnyan ye shar gnas mod kyang / gzung 'dzin rba rlabs rnyog pa'i dri ma yis/ gsal bar ma gyur rtog pa'i rlung gis dkrugs/ 'jig rten rmongs pa bdag 'dzin las byung bas/ ye shes mi gsal mi shes nyon mongs te/ thog mthar dus med 'khor bar bying gyur te, (693-694).*

elaborations. Here he is referring to the so-called ‘origin’ of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, which from the Nyingma point of view, is not really an origin at all since time has no beginning or end.

For the Nyingma, the means of identifying the ‘source’ of ignorance from which mistaken appearances arise from the ultimate ‘ground’ (Tib. *gzhi*) or ‘primordial basis’ of mind without compounding or establishing the very ground of mind as a ‘thing’ in and of itself, is a delicate yet critical process. Many of the Sarma schools criticized the Nyingma for putting faith in a reified ontology which went against the proclamations of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti’s Madhyamaka school resulting in the claim that Dzogchen was not a genuine Buddhist practice. For example, during the eleventh century the translator Rinchen Zangpo along with Yeshe Ö and Zhiwa Ö from the Kadam school argued that Dzogchen resembled the non-Buddhist ‘substance view’ (Tib. *mu stegs rtag ba*). Citing the Dzogchen view of light (Tib. ‘*od*), Zhiwa Ö in particular, criticized the Nyingma for falling into the extreme of substance and permanence.¹⁵⁶ ‘*Od*, however refers to the Dzogchen notion of the ‘primordial basis’ (Tib. *gzhi*) as well as the ‘rainbow body’ (Tib. *ja lus*), which are nevertheless described as intrinsically empty as Longchenpa points out in *Finding Rest in Illusion*.

Likewise, Yeshe Ö argued that Dzogchen resembled the tradition of *Cig car ba*, the ‘simultaneous view’ associated with the Chinese monk Hva-shang Moheyan (eighth century).¹⁵⁷ Samten Karmay notes that since the simultaneous view began to fade out in the tenth century the Dzogchen tradition was developing from its embryonic beginnings, the Sakya and Kadam thought it was a disguised form of the simultaneous view.¹⁵⁸ Specifically, Karmay notes that certain parallels such as Hva-shang’s doctrine of buddhanature and the primordial basis (Tib. *gzhi*) provided reason for the Sarma to question the Indic-origins of Dzogchen. Karmay further notes however, that even the idea of buddhanature, often

¹⁵⁶ Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection (rDzogs chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 124.

¹⁵⁷ As the story goes, Moheyan was invited to Samye by the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen where he is said to have debated the Indian master Kamalaśīla who promoted the ‘gradualist’ school (Tib. Rim gyis pa). According to Tibetan sources Kamalaśīla won and by royal decree Moheyan sent back to Tun-hunag and all Hva-shang Mahāyāna texts on the simultaneous view were destroyed.

¹⁵⁸ Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection* 89.

synonymous with the ‘natural luminosity of mind’ (Tib. *sems kyi rang bzhin ‘od sal ba*), corresponds with the ‘naturally abiding lineage’ (Tib. *rang bzhin gnas rigs*) of the gradualist school, which in turn tightly parallels the Dzogchen presentation of bodhicitta—commonly translated as ‘the mind of enlightenment’ (Tib. *byan chub kyi sems*).¹⁵⁹

In a similar manner, the Jonang school headed by Dölpopa Sherab Gyeltsen (1292-1361), a contemporary of Longchenpa was criticized for including the doctrine of buddhanature in their teachings. Though highly criticized at the time, as an advocate of *gzhan stong* (emptiness of other) Dölpopa is attributed with an innovative philosophical approach as well as a development of new Dharma language geared toward a wider range of themes in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scripture. Even the Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) of the Karma Kagyu prophesized that Dölpopa would develop new and superior terminology. Cyrus Stearns, who has written extensively on the life, teachings, and activities of Dölpopa, notes that some of the language used by Dölpopa resulted in strong criticism and “hermeneutical shock.”¹⁶⁰ Words such as *bdag* (self), *rtag pa* (permanent), *brtan pa* (stable), *ther zug* (everlasting), and *mi ‘jig pa* (indestructible) were used by Dölpopa to describe the *dharmakāya* (body of dharma), *tathāgata* (buddha), and *sugatagarbha* (buddhanature). Stearns cites that Longchenpa does in fact use the term *gzhan stong* but not with the same connotation as Dölpopa. Likewise, the term *gzhan stong* is found in the *Heart Drop of the Dākinī* (*Mkha ‘gro snying thig*), a *gter ma* revealed by Longchenpa, but again not with the same usage. Nonetheless, as Stearns notes Dölpopa and Longchenpa were running along some of the same circles of teachers and disciples. There was certainly a substantial exchange of ideas. Longchenpa in fact, uses a number of the above terms to describe *dharmakāya*, *dharmadhātu* (the genuine sphere of reality), and *dharmatā* (genuine reality). Specifically, his verses on the ‘fruition’ of practice include terms like *rtag pa* (permanent) in interesting and, if one is imbued with the Madhyamaka view of emptiness, perhaps shocking ways. Nonetheless, since the Nyingma were under

¹⁵⁹ Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection* 87-89.

¹⁶⁰ Cyrus Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen* (New York: Snow Lion, 2010), 50.

investigation by the Sarma schools, the Nyingma had to make themselves clear that the ultimate ground from which both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are derived is not an inherently established ‘thing’ in it and of itself (Tib. *rang bzhin med*, Skt. *niḥsvabhāva*).

To explain the basic ontology described in Dzogchen, the Nyingma differentiate the ground (Tib. *gzhi*) and ground-appearances (Tib. *gzhi snang*), to indicate the ‘basis’ from which ‘appearances’ are derived. According to Longchenpa’s explanation in the *Precious Treasury of Words and Meaning*, intrinsic awareness breaks through the ground (Tib. *gzhi*), and then naturally manifesting appearances “flash out” (Tib. *phags*) from the basis as the “great simultaneous arising of the appearances of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.”¹⁶¹ In their ‘flawless manner,’ (that is to say, free from conceptual elaboration) those “natural-appearances,” arise from inner clarity (Tib. *nang gsal*) as outer clarity (Tib. *phyi gsal*), and thus appear in the manner of their actual nature (Tib. *rang bzhin*) in accord with their natural radiance (Tib. *gdangs*). However, sentient beings mistakenly conceive of those appearances in a dualistic manner—in terms of an apprehending mind and an apprehended object—resulting in the conception of illusory ‘mistaken appearances’ (Tib. *khrol snang*). In other words, they conceive of the ground-appearances as other, instead of recognizing them for what they are—inseparable from the primordially pure ground—the basic nature of all sentient beings. What follows is an ongoing manifestation of mistaken illusory appearances, arising from ignorance, or mistaken mind (Tib. *ma rig pa*), and compounded by layers of accumulated karma, which continues to bind beings via habituation.

Longchenpa puts it succinctly in the *Treasure of Words and Meaning* stating: “The intrinsic awareness having flashed out (‘phyag) from the ‘basis,’ and not (yet) having ripened (through realizing it as it is), one wanders in the three realms and six migrations of beings” (i.e., saṃsāra).¹⁶² If, however, in the moment that intrinsic awareness breaks through from the ground—that is, in the very instance that the ground-appearances arise—if those appearances are not perceived as ‘other,’ but rather, are recognized as the natural radiance of intrinsic awareness, that same intrinsic awareness is itself compelled to cease

¹⁶¹ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 206-207.

¹⁶² Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 209.

‘flashing out.’ What proceeds is a dissolution of appearances into primordial purity, in an unfolding of what Longchenpa describes in *TWM* as “the development of the basis (itself) as the result (of enlightenment).”¹⁶³ In other words, mind, the basis of all appearances returns to its ‘original state’—a state that, in reality, has always been there. It is like the ocean returning to its natural calm abiding, allowing its surface to act like an immaculate mirror, reflecting the entire range of the cosmos shining upon it.

The example that the Nyingma give to describe this immaculately perfect manifestation of mind is the illustrious primordial Buddha Samantabhadra—the symbolic expression of complete and utter realization of the primordial ground. As a symbolic expression of this complete dissolution of appearances into primordial purity, Buddha Samantabhadra is said to have not once turned his mind away from the primordial pure basis, and has therefore remained and continues to remain in perfect unity with the ground itself. As an expression of one’s own nature of mind, according to the Nyingma, Buddha Samantabhadra represents the very aim of enlightenment, but also stands as a reminder that Buddha-nature is primordially present within each and every living being. It is just a matter of realizing that nature rather than falling under the influence of karmic habits and delusional conceptions of one’s self and the world.

Incorporating a scholastic character, in order to support his claims, Longchenpa includes a number of quotations from various sūtras largely associated with Madhyamaka such as the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* and the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as well as a number of Nyingma tantras such as the *All-Creating King Tantra*, the *Guhyagarbha*, and the *Great Garuḍa Tantra*. For example, he quotes the *Māyājāla*, or *Web of Magical Illusion Tantra*, stating: “Because it is pervading and limpid, bearing the reflection of pristine awareness, ‘basic space’ is similar to a pure ocean. When agitated by the winds of confusion—of apprehender and apprehended, it is made soiled with mud.”¹⁶⁴ Referencing the tantras

¹⁶³ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 207.

¹⁶⁴ *rgya che ba dang dngas pa dang / ye shes gzugs brnyan 'dzin ba'i phyir/ dbyidas ni dag pa'i rgya mtsho 'dra/ ma rig gzung 'dzin rlung dag gis/ dkrugs bas rnyog pa can du byas*, (694).

nearly word-for-word, Longchenpa anchors his exposition in Nyingma esotericism. More so, by highlighting several key Nyingma tantras in conjunction with Madhyamaka sūtra and commentary, Longchenpa emphasizes their similarities, and thereby portrays Dzogchen in light of Madhyamaka.

Interestingly however, he continues to include a few key texts attributed to Yogācāra such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the last of which extends to both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. It is curious that Longchenpa focuses more intently on expounding the Madhyamaka view within his Dzogchen treatise while continuing to incorporate a number of Yogācāra texts. Certain Yogācāra ideas, such as the doctrine on buddhanature, in fact, are clearly operating in the background of his work. The notion of the ground from which appearances are derived, for example, is closely associated with the three-nature theory (Skt. *trisvabhāva*), which proposes a kind of ‘transformation’ of the basis from a conceptual-imputed nature (Skt. *parikalpita-svabhāva*) to a perfectly-pure consummated nature (Skt. *pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva*). In addition, the very notion of twofold absence of the apprehender and apprehended is central to the concept of emptiness in Yogācāra. Nonetheless, Longchenpa retains his rhetoric of emphasizing Dzogchen and the Nyingma tantras within a Madhyamaka view.

This is perhaps indicative of his advocacy for a single-vehicle, and his distaste toward substantiating any philosophical tenet system as the ‘right’ and only way in the manner of mere intellectual bias. Again, Longchenpa does not endorse a philosophical system which promotes conceptual grasping on the basis of being the best or most superior system. If anything, he promotes Dzogchen, but similar to Nāgārjuna’s famous ‘no thesis view’ he points out again and again that the reason for any system of philosophy is to practice and, in the end, too let go of all conceptual elaborations including the notion of a ‘vehicle’ or path altogether. He does all of this however, subtly, like a skilled painter aware of the many techniques and tools and infinite variety of colors available to him—painting layer upon layer, highlighting, hiding and transforming his piece of art with every stroke, building upon the metaphors of the classic tradition while creating with his range of experience, *similarities* of a new kind.

Similitude: The *Means* of Examination

In terms of his use of the metaphor, or similitude of the *reflection of the moon in water*, in his commentary Longchenpa calls attention to the reason for using figurative language altogether, stating: “When phenomenal appearances are examined, by means of the simile of the moon in water, these seemingly solid appearances are seen as empty forms in which there are not even any part-less particles.”¹⁶⁵ A number of important aspects of this passage can be commented on here. First of all, he uses the term *dpe*, which translates to *upāma* in Sanskrit, combined with the agentive case (Tib. *byed pa po*) to indicate a quality of ‘means.’ In addition, he includes the verb *bltas ba*, an intransitive verb which indicates ‘observation,’ not in the manner of a physical eye ‘looking’ at an object, but rather, in the sense of examining and investigating an object with the intelligence of mind on the basis of furthering one’s understanding of that object. The present tense of *lta ba*, is in fact, the Sanskrit correspondent of *dr̥ṣṭi*, or ‘view.’

Longchenpa emphasizes the method of examining appearances ‘by means of’ the simile of the *moon in water*. The figure of speech is therefore the very method through which the correct view is understood—a pedagogical tool for understanding the empty yet appearing nature of reality. When we consider how the metaphor of the *moon in water* plays out against the backdrop of Nyingma ontology (ground and ground-appearances) described above, it becomes evident that Longchenpa is articulating the Madhyamaka view within a Dzogchen paradigm.

Concordant with certain facets of Yogācāra, such as the three natures, Longchenpa reiterates that all phenomena are consummate with their essential emptiness. This includes mistaken appearances derived from the mind of individuals situated in saṃsāra, as well as the perfectly pure appearances derived from the minds of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas situated in nirvāṇa. Mistaken appearances are merely misconstrued through the power of ignorance and dualistic concepts regarding self and

¹⁶⁵*chu'i zla ba'i dpes chos su snang ba 'di dag la bltas pa gang gi tshe/ dngos snang 'di dag rdul phran ma yin pa'i stong gzugs su mthong ste, (695-696).*

phenomena. In the natural state of the mind—untainted by dualistic concepts—appearances manifest in their pristine presence.

From the point of view of the Nyingma school, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not distinguished in terms of their empty essence but rather in terms of their characteristics (their clarity on the level of how things appear). In this manner, Longchenpa encourages his readers to habituate themselves to seeing things as “flimsy and frail” and “appearing yet not truly existent.”¹⁶⁶ In doing so, the luminous abiding qualities of mind will naturally arise.

To reiterate, Longchenpa describes the reflections of stars and planets upon a clear and vivid ocean, explaining that when the ‘ocean of mind’ is clear and calm, the appearances of planets and stars shine clearly upon the water. However, when the ‘ocean of mind’ is agitated by cognitive obscurations and emotional afflictions, the images of planets and stars appear distorted. While the ocean, or mind, is the place from which appearances—both clear and distorted—arise, Longchenpa again makes it clear that it does not mean that mind is a real and permanent ‘entity.’ In line with the Madhyamaka notion of emptiness, the ground from which all appearances arise, i.e., the mind—is necessarily empty. Thus, in aligning Dzogchen with the view of emptiness, Longchenpa secures its position alongside Madhyamaka as a source of liberating philosophy and practice.

The use of long-standing Buddhist metaphors such as the *moon’s reflection*, are certainly not haphazard. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, “metaphors and metonymies are not random but instead form coherent systems in terms of which we conceptualize our experience.”¹⁶⁷ Formed within the metaphorical and structural system of Buddhist thought, metaphors of illusion which intend to *point out* the nature of mind and phenomena, are organized within basic underlying Buddhist principles such as emptiness in the case of Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka. As for Dzogchen, there is the added dimension of ground and ground-appearances, which take the forefront in Longchenpa’s *Finding Rest in Illusion*, while maintaining their resonance with the overall view of the two truths according to Madhyamaka. Until now,

¹⁶⁶ *snang bden med 'al 'ol*, (702).

¹⁶⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, 41.

I have focused on the use of metaphor from a philosophical, social, and historical approach. What is left to discuss is a study of similitude in terms of Longchenpa, or rather—Drimé Özer—the poet, and the effect of figurative language as a pedagogical tool for liberation. Liberation in this case however, entails not an escape to something wholly different, but a recognition of reality *as it is* since the ultimate status of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is primordially empty. For as Longchenpa explains, “Even *Dharmadhatu*—the *basic space of phenomena*—naturally, utterly pure awareness, the mind of clear understanding (*bodhicitta*), appears yet lacks intrinsic nature.”¹⁶⁸

The Desire for Resemblance

On a more expressive note, Wallace Stevens wrote in *The Necessary Angel*, that “poetry is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance.”¹⁶⁹ He clarifies however, that ‘desire,’ does not entail mere pleasure, but a rising above. He continues saying,

Its singularity is that in the act of satisfying the desire for resemblance it touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it. If resemblance is described as a partial similarity between two dissimilar things, it complements and reinforces that which the two dissimilar things have in common. It makes it brilliant. When the similarity is between things of adequate dignity, the resemblance may be said to transfigure or to sublimate them.¹⁷⁰

In light of Eppling’s research on *upāma*, Stevens is accurate in characterizing the distinctions between the resemblance of a categorically superior and inferior *thing*. Recall that *upamāna* is examined in its similitude with *upameya*, the object of comparison. Quoting Daṇḍin, Eppling writes: “when, whatever is considered as the common property between the standard (*upamāna*) and the object of comparison (*upameya*) itself figures in acts of comparison, some other common property, different from it, is adopted.”¹⁷¹ In this regard, the attribute of similarity necessarily exists in both *upamāna* and *upameya* despite their superiority, inferiority or equal dignity. Whatever the case is, what ‘conjoins’ them is their

¹⁶⁸ *chos kyi dbyings rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa'i rig pa byang chub kyi sems kyang snang la rang bzhin med pa*, (697).

¹⁶⁹ Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1951). 77.

¹⁷⁰ Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel*, 77.

¹⁷¹ John Frederick Eppling, "A Calculus of Creative Expression, 434.

common attribute: their similitude or resemblance through which poetic ‘figurative’ expression intensifies our sense of even the most commonplace objects.

For Longchenpa, he brings to *light* the natural luminescence of mind and phenomenal appearances by inscribing their similitude with the naturally luminous reflection of the *moon in water*. In conjunction with the object of examination (mind and phenomenal appearances), the very *reflection of the moon in water*—which is itself a phenomenal appearance—couples with the primordially empty nature of mind ‘made brilliant’ by their resemblance. In line with Dzogchen ontology, appearances are thereby restored to their naturally pure brilliance when recognized in terms of their inseparable unity with mind—the primordially empty ground. To demonstrate this, Longchenpa carves a path to *show* how appearances, though empty in nature, are intimately inseparable from the genuine ground of reality, establishing the Dzogchen ground, path, and fruition within a Madhyamaka framework via Indian Buddhist metaphor.

Again, Longchenpa’s first verse sets the tone of the chapter by bringing in the voice of the Victorious One himself—Śakyamuni Buddha stating:

Even the Victorious One has spoken of the likeness of water moons.
I will explain, so that what [he] stated may be brought into experience.¹⁷²

He follows with an explanation of the ground from a Nyingma ontological standpoint, clarifying how pure appearances effortlessly appear in the ‘ocean-like mind,’ just as the reflections of planets and stars appear on calm water, and how mistaken appearances form when the ‘waves of thought’ distort the clarity of the images reflected on the water:

Within the center of a profound and limpid ocean—*mind itself*
There arises primordially, an effortlessly present *likeness of form*.
However, distorted by troubling waves,
Agitated by the winds of conceptual thought, clarity does not ensue.
The transient world and living beings, mired in confusion, arise out of conceiving a self.
Therefore, pristine awareness is not clear.
Unaware and afflicted, they sink into the cycles of birth and death
Till time with no beginning and no end.¹⁷³

¹⁷² yang 'dir rgyal bas chu zla lta bu zhes/ ji skad gsungs de nyams su blang phyir bshad, (693).

¹⁷³ sems nyid zab cing dwangs pa'i mtsho dbus su/ lhun grub gzugs brnyan ye shar gnas mod kyang / gzung 'dzin rba rlab rnyog pa'i dri ma yis/ gsal bar ma gyur rtog pa'i rlung gis dkrugs/ 'jig rten rmongs pa bdag 'dzin las byung bas/ ye shes mi gsal mi shes nyon mongs te/ thog mthar dus med 'khor bar bying gyur te, (693-694).

In the same light, Longchenpa explains the consequence of assuming that mistaken appearances are genuinely real. As a result of assuming their reality, wandering beings are tormented and exhausted by suffering in the rounds of saṃsāric existence. He states:

Just as the vivid forms of planets and stars
Do not really exist, yet appear in clear water
The images of mistaken appearances—
Forms that surface in the water of mind,
Appear and are nonetheless, not really there.
Utterly exhausting wandering beings.¹⁷⁴

Next, Longchenpa digs deeper into the nature of appearances and how they resemble the *reflection of the moon in water*. Just like a reflection, appearances lack any real substance. Again, here Longchenpa ascribes figurative speech with the power to *show* how seemingly solid objects are nothing by empty forms. One could examine an object such as a cup, and find that just as the moon's reflection glows in a clear pool due to a process of interdependent causes and conditions, a cup is formed on the basis of an amalgamations of substances coming together in combination with the effort of a potter. He draws on a similar point in his commentary, however in his root verses, he pays stricter attention to the metaphor of the *moon's reflection* itself. By using an apophatic strategy, he deploys the metaphor in terms of what appearances are *not* thereby undercutting the possibility of reified philosophical views. He states:

What can be said of [appearances]?
They lack substance and cannot be made concrete.
They are without characteristics and yet are not characteristic-less.
They are beyond the limitations of non-existence and existence,
Beyond true and falsehood—
When it is said that *they are like a reflection*,
The meaning should be understood as such.¹⁷⁵

Here Longchenpa weaves a thread between the metaphor of the *moon's reflection* and the nature of appearances by remarking upon their similarity *via negativa*. Hillis explains that apophatic rhetoric, which largely characterizes Dzogchen discourse, gains its overall effect in its dramatic demonstration of

¹⁷⁴ *ji ltar cu gtsang nang gi gza' skar gzugs/ dngas la mi g,yo med bzhin snang ba ltar/ 'khrul snang gzugs brnyan sems chur shar ba'i gzugs/ med bzhin snang 'di 'gro kun nyam re thag, (694).*

¹⁷⁵ *'di ci'i dngos ma yin ngos gzung med/ mtshan mar ma yin mtshan ma med ma yin/ yod med ma yin bden rdzun mtha' las 'das/ gzugs brnyan nyid ces gsung de thog tu babs, (695).*

absence and non-existence usually indicated by *med*, *ma yin*, or *yod med* (not, is not, and does not exist).¹⁷⁶ As an added point, Hillis points out that Longchenpa often uses synonymous apophatic terms such as *bral ba* (free from) and *las 'das pa* (beyond) as adjectival phrases to describe the lack of affirmation and negation.¹⁷⁷ He further concludes that Longchenpa often places a number of synonymous compounds (often apophatic in character) in close proximity to produce the poetic effect of resemblance.

Furthermore, while *via negativa* may pose philosophical dis-ease if not irritation, from a poetic point of view, apophatic rhetoric imparts as much resemblance as *via positiva*. In terms of the empty substance-less nature of the moon's reflection, the *sense* of empty appearances inspires curiosity. The very hollow nature of the moon is something that *can* be experienced by any ordinary person. In this regard, the choice of metaphor is founded in something more than just its historical endurance. Because the moon's reflection is just as *real* as anything, in the sense that it can be experienced, and yet it is so obviously hollow in nature, an ordinary individual can relate with the seemingly ambiguous anomaly of something 'beyond the limitations of non-existence and existence.' In other words, they can interact with its resemblance to the genuine nature of reality which is neither existent nor non-existent.

Building upon the ubiquity of the *moon in water* in that all phenomena likewise resemble empty forms, Longchenpa demonstrates that even how we see objects entails interdependent origination, just like how the moon's reflection is derived from the causes and conditions of the moon in space. He states:

The six objects—forms and so forth, are like the moon in water.
 They do not exist and yet appear. They have no intrinsic reality and yet,
 Appear unimpeded, to [those with] mistaken perception.
 The six triads—the eye, eye faculty, eye consciousness and so forth,
 Are empty, contrived, and fake—similar to the moon in water.
 Futile, like a hollow reed without any inner core.
 Everything in their multiplicity, should be understood
 In terms of being empty of true existence.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Gregory Alexander Hillis, "The Rhetoric of Naturalness," 209.

¹⁷⁷ Gregory Alexander Hillis, "The Rhetoric of Naturalness," 189-190.

¹⁷⁸ *gzugs sogs drug po chu zla lta bu ste/ med la snang phyir ngo bo ma grub phyir/ rnam pa ma'agags 'khrul ngor snang ba'i phyir/ mig dang mig dbang mig shes la sogs drug/ chu zla 'dra zhing stong lga la gsog dang gsob/ ya ma brla 'dra chu shing snying po med/ rnam kun bden pas stong zhes rtogs par bya*, (696).

Finally, he enters into more expansive Dzogchen territory, pointing out that even the ‘stainless mind,’ is itself *like the moon in water*. In this manner, he undercuts all possible options to reify the ‘ground’ from which all phenomena arise.

Stainless mind, not clothed in extremes,
Also has the status of the moon in water.
It appears, and yet is empty—free from elaborations.
Profound and peaceful, non-conceptual
Pristine awareness beyond the limits of expression.
Understand that it never moves from
Innately luminous limpid clarity.¹⁷⁹

When referring to ‘enlightenment terminology,’ Germano proposes that one of the key elements of Longchenpa’s writing revolves around the “gnostic self-organizing intelligence of the Universe; the central mystery of recognizing ‘self’ in understanding the relationship between beings and Being, or individuals and the Universe as such; and the liminal zone between poetry and philosophy where ‘poetic thought’ dwells.”¹⁸⁰ By weaving the various ‘objects of resemblance’ such as appearances, consciousness, sense faculties, and even ‘stainless mind,’ Longchenpa illustrates their intimate link and necessarily reenacts the very “cosmic drama” of enlightened clarity and mistaken perception, or non-recognition of *Dharmatā*—‘the genuine sphere of reality.’ In this regard, philosophy, poetry, and practice merge in the sense that through figurative language, the ultimate nature of ground and ground-appearances is revealed to be equally empty—primordially empty, empty from the very beginning. In this manner, Longchenpa touches not merely upon the ontology of *things* in terms of their surface level of appearance, but the crux and crucial point of indwelling *pristine awareness*—the very sustenance of all sentient life. From within the layers of apophatic rhetoric, Longchenpa emerges with *via positiva*, re-establishing the very potential for enlightenment which steadily remains the heritage of all beings. And still, he reiterates the non-intrinsic nature of things ‘as they are,’ reaffirming that such experience is beyond concepts saying:

When the moon appears in water, it is not *the* moon.
Likewise, when various [phenomena] appear,
They are neither established nor negated.

¹⁷⁹ *mtha' yis ma gos dri ma med pa'i sems/ chu zla'i tshul de snang stong spros dang bral/ zab zhi mi rtog ye shes ba rjod las 'das/ rang gsal dangs las mi gyor shes par bya*, (697).

¹⁸⁰ David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought,” 57.

Separate from everyday awareness
That conceives the conventions of the three times.
Without concepts, settle into things *just as they are*.¹⁸¹

This is the ‘state’ in which Longchenpa encourages his readers to ‘settle’ and rest in ‘things *just as they are*.’ By way of antithesis in contrasting parallel structures he writes:

The unfabricated mind, naturally rests
The mind of clear understanding—*Bodhicitta*,
Leaves nothing out, yet neither comes nor goes.
The genuine sphere of reality—*Dharmatā*
Is neither outside nor inside,
It is beyond thought and does not withhold bias.
Neither wide nor narrow,
It does not fall in the direction of partiality
Put aside your frantic search to find
That which is neither high nor low.¹⁸²

Interestingly Longchenpa seems to highlight contrasting extremes while emphasizing their appositional relationship with both *bodhicitta*—the mind of clear understanding or enlightenment, and *Dharmatā*—the genuine sphere of reality. Hillis points out that the use of antithesis is commonly used by Longchenpa to demonstrate a sense of completeness around a topic. For example, Hillis explains that “when one understands that phenomena are neither pure nor impure, notions of good and evil with the concomitants acceptance and rejection naturally fall away and one achieves a balanced state in which all things are seen in an open positive way.”¹⁸³

Again, through antithesis, even the very ontological valuation of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are set within the ‘evenness’ produced by a sense of completion.

The primordial state however,
Does not abide as *mere* non-conceptuality
Anything and everything whatsoever is like the moon in water.
Neither true or false, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are equal as such.
Rest your mind in that state,
The genuine sphere of reality, *just as it is*.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ *chu zlar snang dus zla bar ma grub ltar/ sna tshogs snang dus sna tshogs grub bsal med/ dus gsum tha snyad rtogs pa'i blo dang bral/ mi rtog ji bzhin nyid du gnas de zhog*, (698).

¹⁸² *blo ma bcos rnal du gzhag pa ni/ ma lus 'gro 'ong med pa'i byang chub sems/ phyi dang nang med bsam 'das ris ma 'dzin/ rgya chad phyogs lhung med pa'i chos nyid la/ yangs dog mtho dman med kyi tshol khro zhog*, (698).

¹⁸³ Gregory Alexander Hillis, “The Rhetoric of Naturalness,” 180.

¹⁸⁴ *mi bsam gcig tu mi gnas gdod ma'i ngang / gang yin kun yin chu zla lta bu yin/ bden min rdzun min 'khor 'das mnyam pa nyid/ ji bzhin chos nyid ngang du sems pa zhog*, (699).

And,

[Like] the limpid form of the moon in water,
All that can possibly appear in the world of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are
Primordially empty in their natural condition
Naturally empty from the beginning.
In that respect, 'existence' and 'non-existence'
Are mistaken designations of the intellect.
Listen here! Do not adhere to the many biased views and systems.¹⁸⁵

With his final remark in the above verse, we enter a unique Dzogchen point. According to his commentary he remarks that there is no point in evaluating phenomena in terms of criterion or value systems. They are all equally empty in their naturally primordial condition. Alongside this, he includes an emotional exclamation marked by *kye* (listen here!), which functions as a vocative case to call attention to the reader. Hillis notes, that *kye* is rarely found in Longchenpa's verse or commentary, making it all the more meaningful. Hillis cites that in terms of the three prominent most ecphonetic literary devices (*emaho*, *kye ma*, and *kye*), *kye* establishes a direct address to one's audience and is frequently used in dialogues where the Buddha instructs a bodhisattva on a specific teaching or instruction.¹⁸⁶ While Hillis posits that Longchenpa generally refrains from use *kye* because it is reserved for the Buddha. His point further highlights the point that here, Longchenpa is deeply motivated to capture the attention of his readers. On that note, he reflects again on the mistake of conceiving a self, challenging his readers to re-examine their relationship with the nature of mind. For 'what is the point' he asks, of fabricating what is already so perfect?

As long as the mind adheres to a self
Saṃsāra continues and liberation does not ensue
Without conceiving of a self,
The genuine nature of mind falls naturally into place
Naturally liberated, unconstrained, it flows inexhaustibly.
What is the point of fabricating such nature?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ *snang srid 'khor 'das chu zla dangs pa'i gzugs/ ye stong babs stong rang bzhin gdod nas stong / de la yod med blos btags 'khrul bas na/ tha dad phyogs ris grub mtha' ma zhen kye*, (699).

¹⁸⁶ Gregory Alexander Hillis, "The Rhetoric of Naturalness," 198.

¹⁸⁷ *ji srid ngar 'dzin zhen pa'i blo yod pa /de srid 'khor ba nyid nas thar dus med/ 'dzin med rang babs sogs nyug rnal ma'i sems/ zad ka babs rang grol phyogs yan ni/ rang bzhin nyid de de la bcos cid gos*, (700).

In this manner he ascribes a positive valuation to the ‘naturally occurring’ and radiant nature of mind which becomes evident when both the apprehending subject and apprehending object come to rest in their naturally empty condition. By realizing the nature of objects, which are empty *like the moon’s reflection*, Longchenpa explains that mind likewise drops the assumption that self is real. In a practical application of the empty nature of oppositions the apprehender and apprehended naturally liberate into the primordial basis which is again combined with cataphatic terminology such as naturally liberated, effortlessly accomplished, and great joy.

Objects, are simply empty like the moon in water.
 When mind is also empty of assuming [a self]—
 Free from the duality of apprehender and apprehended,
 There is no longer a subjective mentally construed link with the object.
 The very state of the Great Perfection is effortlessly achieved *as it is*.¹⁸⁸

Whatever occurs takes the nature of one’s companion
 Free of partiality, great joy is effortlessly accomplished
 One realizes therefore, that there is no more ground to travel.
Bodhicitta—mind of pure understanding
 Becomes evident as the primordial basis.¹⁸⁹

After thirteen verses describing the nature of the ground-appearances and the ground itself, Longchenpa arrives at the path. Interestingly however, by demonstrating the very ground of enlightenment itself—*bodhicitta* and *dharmatā*, the genuine sphere of reality, Longchenpa establishes the very state of Dzogchen as both the ‘ground’ for enlightenment, the ‘path’ that brings Buddhahood to completion and as we will see, the ‘fruition’ of practice altogether. In this manner, the unique structure of ground, path, and fruition ascribed by the Nyingma does more than endorse a series of practical Buddhist applications—it permeates each and every aspect of Nyingma thought and impulse. From the Dzogchen point of view, the ground operates as the basis for both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, both suffering and liberation, both impure and pure appearances *and* simultaneously functions to effortlessly establish an individual in perfect Buddhahood. As such, Longchenpa fruitfully encourages his readers to practice day and night in a

¹⁸⁸ *yul rnams ngos stong chu zla lta bu la/ blo yang zhen stong 'dzin med shar ba na/ gzung 'dzin gnyis med yul sems 'brel med pas/ ci bzhin rtsol bral rdzogs pa chen po'i ngang, (700).*

¹⁸⁹ *gang byung grogs su 'char ba'i rang bzhin la/ phyogs med bde ba chen por lhun gyis grub/ de ltar shes te bgrod pa'i sa med par/ gdod ma'i gzhi la mngon par byang chub 'gyur, (701).*

three-fold process: (1) rest in the genuine state and continually reflect on the resemblance of phenomena to the *moon in water*, (2) practice the preliminaries including guru yoga and pray to see phenomena in the *likeness of water moons*, and finally (3) to consider the *water-moon-like* nature of dreams so as to dwell in total evenness even during the dream-state. Longchenpa writes:

Having realized that state, abide there.
 Without stirring, consider the way in which [things] are like water moons
 Whatever appears does not truly exist,
 Things are flimsy and frail.
 You of fortunate birth, accustom yourself thoroughly.¹⁹⁰

Just as before, practice the preliminaries—
 Pray to see things like the moon in water.
 For the main part, think that whatever appears
 Are just the same as water moons and
 Settle into equanimity.¹⁹¹

At night, practice just as before
 But instead notice that [dreams] are like water moons.
 Do not conceive of anything [as real], but
 Dwell in the state of total evenness.¹⁹²

The metaphor of the *moon's reflection in water*, or rather the *reality* it entails, comes to pervade every aspect of a Dzogchen practitioner's life from dream-state to waking conscious. To see appearances as the *same as water moons*, emerges as a defining figurative expression which simultaneously grounds the Nyingma world-view into the 'Buddhist conceptual system,' while inundating the Buddhist experience of the world within the ontology of emptiness and pure appearances. Like the other seven metaphors of illusion, the *moon in water* emerges as an example of the internal structuring of experience from a Buddhist point of view and is thereby transformed into the expanded implications of Dzogchen ontology—both mundane and liberatory.

Likewise, in describing the path toward liberation, Longchenpa encourages his readers to practice the preliminaries and specifically, to pray for one's teacher to aid them in seeing all things *like the moon's*

¹⁹⁰ *de ltar rtogs nas ngang der gnas pa ni/ mi gyo chu zla lta bu'i bsgom pa ste/ cir snang bden med 'al 'ol phyam phyam du/ skal bzang skye bos rab tu goms par bya*, (702).

¹⁹¹ *sngon 'gro sngar bzhin chu zlar gsol btab la/ dngos gzhi gang snang dngos de chu zla dang / 'dra ba nyid du bsams la mnyam par gzhas*, (702).

¹⁹² *mtshan du sngar bzhin khyad par chu zla'i nyams/ gang la'ang 'dzin med phyam gcig ngang du gnas*, (704).

reflection in the water. The preliminaries include prayers of refuge, bodhicitta, and methods of purification, leading up to *bla ma 'i rnal 'byor*, or *guru yoga*—a practice which emphasizes devotion to a spiritual master. The notion of wisdom-transmission from guru to disciple is relevant here, and takes the idea of metaphors to a whole new level. In fact, the *very nature of mind*, symbolized by the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra described above, is believed to require ‘pointing out’ from a teacher to a disciple. Just as the metaphor of the *moon in water* directs the reader to the *see* things the way they are, the teacher is believed to transmit the nature of mind and the phenomenal world to a student of genuine devotion. The practice of visualizing the guru on top of one’s head while praying fervently to understand the nature of reality in terms of the *moon’s reflection in water* and so forth, is said to generate a strong enough connection to the mind of the guru, so that the mind of his or her disciple merges entirely with their teacher. However, this is not to say the student’s mind merges with some conventional person. The lama is believed to be the very embodiment of the ultimate nature of reality—an emanation body (Skt. *nirmanakāya*) radiantly shimmering down from the ultimate sphere of *dharmakāya*.

Furthermore, seeing one’s self and the world through the metaphor of the *moon’s reflection*, provides a link to experience the broader sacred outlook of the Nyingma, where pure appearances arise in the *ocean-like* nature of mind upon realizing the primordially empty nature of self and objects. While nothing new is added and nothing taken away, a new kind of awareness expansively transforms and the stainless appearances of natural mind emerge. Describing the fruition of the path Longchenpa states:

Swiftly, *mind itself* will embrace the everlasting universal monarch.
 Through seeing whatever appears in such a way,
 Any hold on appearances is liberated.
 With limpid clarity, rays of light like the moon’s reflection in water will dawn
 You who are endowed with supreme fortune,
 May you meditate upon *this*, with total sincerity.¹⁹³

Again, Longchenpa evokes the agentive case when describing the strength and power of similitude such as the resemblance of appearances and the moon’s reflection. In this verse however, appearances return

¹⁹³ *myur du sems nyid rgyal po'i gtan srid zin/ gang snang bltas pas der snang 'dzin pa grol/ dangs gsal chu zla lta bu'i 'od gsal 'char/ 'di ni skal mchog ldan pas rab sgoms shig*, (704).

full circle to their natural ‘effortless presence’ which ‘arise primordially’ as the *likeness of form* ‘within the center of a profound and limpid ocean.’ This is reminiscent of a statement made by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche where he described the vivid play between the moon’s reflection, the moon itself, and the space which holds them both. Rinpoche explains that, in terms of the metaphor of the moon, the pure expression of the moon’s reflection in the water is *nirmanakāya* while the moon itself is the *sambhogakāya* (the enjoyment body akin to a subtle body of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas). The *space* which holds them both then, is the *dharmakāya*; the inconceivable un-manifested body of ultimate nature. In this regard, the notion of appearances—pure or impure—instills the sense that all aspects of reality are held within *dharmatā*—ultimate sphere of reality.

Connecting back to my earlier statement regarding the shifting language of Dharma instigated by Dölpopa, Longchenpa uses the phrase *rgyal po'i gtan srid* which I translate here as ‘the everlasting universal monarch.’ The term *gtan srid*, carries the connotation of something permanent and on-going. And *rgyal po*, often translated as ‘victorious one’ as an epitaph for the Buddha also associated with the Indian ideal of a universal ruler. The idea of a *cakravartin*, or ‘one who turns the wheel’ like an unobstructed charioteer, was adopted early on in Buddhism as the Buddha himself was said to either become a great sage or a great *cakravartin* who brings peace to all the continents of the world. Interestingly, Longchenpa routes back to the Buddha himself, putting it plainly that the state of the Buddha, or universal monarch *is* ‘everlasting’ and achievable. After a series of verses that explain the empty yet primordial nature of appearances and the ground, Longchenpa cites the final fruition of the dharma as a ‘completion’ (Tib. *zin*) marked by the embrace of the everlasting result of Buddhahood—the universal monarch—by the *mind itself* (Tib. *sems nyid*).

Whatever appears, though it may be characteristic of either *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, are thoroughly established in primordial nature. It is merely *how* things are perceived that characterizes appearances as pure or impure. By way of metaphor, through seeing the resemblance of appearances and reflections, an individual establishes their mind within the resonate field of *dharmatā*—wherein no thing is existent or non-existent, and nothing is accepted or rejected. In a return to the fundamental basis, the whole

primordial sphere of self and sacred world are established within the indivisible unity of pristine awareness and the vast expanse. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche puts it, just as Longchenpa, or rather, *Longchen Rabjam* (*infinite vast expanse*) is one and the same with the teachings—"when the person and the dharma are mixed as one, the person is Dzogchen and the dharma is Dzogchen."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *Primordial Purity*, 15.

Conclusion: The Divine Bird

Thus, this great Omniscient One appeared in the world
As the headwater of the river of teachings concerning natural great perfection,
The source of a hundred thousand springs.¹⁹⁵

Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam: Lineage and Legacy

Near the end of his life, it is said that while giving an empowerment to a large number of students, Longchenpa fell ill. His students urged him to rest fearing that his life-force was weakening. Longchenpa however, was insistent upon completing the empowerment. Nyoshul Khenpo writes in *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, that at age fifty-six Longchenpa instructed his principle students to set out offerings and to leave him alone affirming that his time to pass had come. His students however, requested to stay to which Longchenpa agreed. Nyoshul Khenpo writes:

‘Since I am getting ready to ease off this broken-down, illusory body, don’t make a fuss. Stay if you will, but rest in meditative equipoise!’ He adopted the dharmakāya posture and passed into the primordial state of resolution. At that time, the clear sky was filled with canopies of rainbow light and a rain of flowers fell. Wild roses and other flowers began to bloom. Some people experienced the stable realization of utter lucidity.¹⁹⁶

While there are various renditions describing the signs that occurred when his mind “dissolved into the primordial state,” along with the manifestation of sacred objects and relics that appeared after his body was taken to the funeral pyre, Longchenpa’s biographers all agree that his passing was not without miraculous signs indicating his spiritual accomplishment.¹⁹⁷ As is evident in the above quote, what is particularly intriguing is the *signs* or rather, the sense of *utter lucidity* experienced by his principle disciples at the time of his passing. Interestingly, the nineteenth century Nyingma master, Patrul Rinpoche writes something similar about the very words of Longchenpa in his “Prayer of Praise.” He states, “It is a unique treasury of realization, the timeless awareness realized by the lineage blessings...having aroused devotion, when one examines and understands the words and their underlying meaning, for as long as one

¹⁹⁵ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 161.

¹⁹⁶ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 131.

¹⁹⁷ Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 164.

studies noble works like these, how could one's mind possibly stray from the sublime experience of the direct perception of utter lucidity."¹⁹⁸

As highlighted in Patrul Rinpoche's praise, from the traditions point of view, Longchenpa is placed within a long line of spiritual descendants reaching as far back into primordial time with Buddha Samantabhadra and all the way up until the present day. Lineage is in fact more than a series of historical accounts according to the Nyingma. Likewise, although the process of identifying historical figures, accumulating and documenting data has been one of the methods for the Nyingma to authenticate and preserve their tradition, the concept of *lineage* is far more rich and complex. In fact, the notion of lineage from the Nyingma point of view cannot be severed from some of the more indispensable aspects of Tibetan Buddhist ontology. The very outlook of Buddhism, especially Vajrayāna, with its emphasis on past and future lives, the presence of primordial Buddhas, and the acceptance of enlightened masters or emanation bodies (Skt. *tulkus*) whose very presence in this world stand as living embodiments of the Buddha—provides a critical perspective on the Nyingma worldview. Seen from the eyes of a Nyingma practitioner, a living teacher is said to *be* the very living Buddha not merely due to a historical or ancestral link to the man Siddhārtha Gautama, but due to a more subtle yet unbreakable *connection*. A connection which suggests transmission in ways that go beyond conventional forms of communication.

The Nyingma in fact explain that the Dzogchen tradition derives from three unique yet altogether inseparable lineages of transmission: (1) the mind lineage of the Conquerors beginning with Buddha Samantabhadra who taught the doctrine without words or symbols, (2) the symbol lineage of the Vidyādhara (those who abide constantly in pure awareness) conferred through direct empowerment by Garab Dorje, and (3) the hearing lineage of ordinary beings taught by Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Śāntaraksita.¹⁹⁹ The notion of symbolic transmission of non-ordinary wisdom, already present within the Nyingma corpus, provides further reason to remark upon the profundity of metaphorical language; in its

¹⁹⁸ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 151-153.

¹⁹⁹ Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (New Haven: Yale University Press), 332.

ability to transform according to the times and the needs of sentient beings, and more so, in its capacity to transform those very individuals who *hear* the words of great masters such as Longchen Rabjam. As such, metaphorical language imbued and blended with varying elements of the Buddhist doctrine both esoteric and exoteric from Abhidharma to Madhyamaka and beyond is perfectly aligned with the method of symbolic transmission at the very heart of the Dzogchen teachings.

That said, it is not an exaggerated claim to say that Longchenpa is largely responsible for the survival of the Dzogchen teachings today. Even Nyoshul Khenpo writes with reference to Longchenpa, “the fact that the Dzogchen tradition has not waned, but has continued to flourish throughout the world up to the present day is due entirely to the powerful force of kindness shown by this king of the dharma.”²⁰⁰ Throughout the ages, through numerous episodes of social and political upheaval from class discord, internal warfare, and foreign invasion alongside some of the more positive effects of time such as the influx of new cultures and ideas and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to foreign landscapes, the Nyingma tantras and Nyingtik cycles continue to flourish within a living tradition to this day. From the traditions point of view, its transmission has remained unbroken in a series of successive exchanges from teacher to student since primordial time with no beginning. That said, when hearing about the notion of lineage and of blessings of the teacher even from contemporary Nyingma practitioners, the overall message indicates a quality of connection that pierces the heart.

Open Questions: Metaphor, Devotion, and Transmission

Throughout *Finding Rest in Illusion*, Longchenpa reminds his readers that the path demands consistency of practice and contemplation, confidence in the empty nature, and devotion. In this regard, he strikes a different tone compared to Madhyamaka. Although Madhyamaka may be able to reach the limits of thought, an authentic master is the catalyst for complete freedom from mental elaborations: “when the blessings of a teacher penetrate your heart, it’s like the sun that rises in a cloudless sky...such

²⁰⁰ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 158.

realization manifests to none but those whose hearts are touched by blessings of a master of a thousand skillful means.²⁰¹

Lineage is therefore critical according to the Nyingma tradition. Not necessarily as merely a means to prove and validate the Dzogchen teachings, but for them to persist in a practical manner. But as indicated earlier, the concept of ‘lineage’ is far more complex and extensive compared to the conventional notions of descent and genealogy. For when you take the notion of primordial Buddhas into account, the very structures of time and origin seem to collapse all at once into a vast and infinite timeline radiating out in all directions. For even Kunkhyen ‘the Omniscient’ Longchenpa received the Nyingtik teachings through a series of revelations and *gter ma* discovery from the eighth century master and scholar Vimalamitra. Likewise, Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798) revealed the Longchen Nyingtik, a mind *gter ma*, upon experiencing pure visions of Longchenpa nearly five hundred years later. It is indeed fascinating to consider the ways in which the Nyingma lineage draw out the succession of the teachings, relying upon an entirely different mode of thinking about the nature of reality, time, space and possibility.

From the Nyingma point of view, what allows a person to arrive at the result of the luminous nature of mind begins with *guru yoga* and confidence in the nature of the ground as opposed to mere conceptual knowledge. Accordingly, to them and supported with references from Madhyamaka reasoning, the reach of intellect can only go so far and philosophical tenet systems, preferences and biases only entail mere intellectualism, not genuine experience. Through devotion and an aspiration to understand the nature of reality, it is said that the blessings from the lineage masters enter the heart and mind of a disciple, lifting them up toward their natural heritage—buddhanature.

Likewise, *words* are merely half of the picture. The other half is *meaning*. However, from the Nyingma point of view, and certainly for many other Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions, *meaning* inhabits many levels. For example, on one hand the metaphor of the *moon’s reflection in water* can be understood intellectually; phenomena can be understood in terms of their appearing yet non-intrinsic

²⁰¹ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 233-235.

nature on a broad level while still lacking complete understanding. Along those lines, it could aid a person mentally and emotionally to realize that there is no reason to get so caught up in illusory appearances. From the tradition's points of view however, the point of these metaphors is to gain a glimpse into the *empty nature* of reality—a *truth* that is co-extensive with *primordial purity*.

According to Patrul Rinpoche, what is revealed in the words of Longchenpa is “the Omniscient Guru’s enlightened mind” itself.²⁰² Furthermore, “...to hear even a single word from the works of the Omniscient Guru, which reveal what is beyond ordinary consciousness, is to effortlessly experience meditative absorption.”²⁰³ In this way, Longchenpa’s words, are potentially more than black ink on white paper. With the right effort and conditions, namely faith and devotion, Longchenpa himself suggests the possibility of seeing “the light that blazes from the sun.”²⁰⁴ Words themselves become vehicles for transmission, orienting listeners to new experiences through which the whole person is transformed inwardly and outwardly. Whether a person transforms entirely to the level of Buddhahood or not, the Buddhist metaphors of illusion have the potential to operate on levels of human experience that do indeed transform the way in which a person perceives and relates with their self and the world. When taken to heart, the conceptual structures derived from seeing self and the world in the manner of the *moon in water*—appearing yet empty—instill not just a disjointed idea but an imbedded view that applies to a person’s inner experience of thoughts, feelings, and consciousness as well as outward relationships, presence, and behavior. In this manner, metaphor serves as a conduit for sharing ideas, cultures and worlds altogether. They are “containers for meaning” that expand into every dimension of human life.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, just as metaphor has the potential to bring about a transformation in perception and cognition, it is possible that the very words of Longchenpa echo a reality unbeknownst to casual onlookers, but pointed-out through signs and symbols, through metaphor—to “those with eyes...born

²⁰² Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 149-151.

²⁰³ Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 149-151.

²⁰⁴ Longchen Rabjam, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 235-239.

²⁰⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, 11.

from supreme devotion to a teacher.²⁰⁶ The level of intimacy between teacher and student is often described in the life stories of great Buddhist masters such as Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche, Yeshe Tsogyal, Sera Khandro, and the famous Kagyu master Milarepa to name a few. While their stories take on unique twists depending on the various aspects of their lives such historical eras, gender, and personality, the reigning quality of their life stories indicate the indispensable importance of devotion. The very word for *devotion* in Tibetan (*mos gus*), is described not in terms of *mere faith*. Rather, it is inclusive of a deep level of *respect* combined with a sense of *longing*; longing not for something or someone, but a longing to be united with one's very nature. Again, the lama is regarded as the very embodiment of the Buddha stemming from a lineage of primordial Buddhas. Nonetheless, the mind of the lama, like the mind of the Buddha, is said to be the very mind of the disciple—the untouched stainless *nature of mind*.

In this way, it is worth considering the role of language, specifically figurative language, in the process of transmission altogether. While 'meaning' is often attuned to the idea of 'making sense' of things, the tradition speaks of a different kind of potency linked with meaning. As described in the pages above, the level of meaning that is being spoken of according to the tradition indicates a kind of experience that moves beyond concepts altogether. Still, included within the status of conventional reality, *words* possess a strength of their own—to express and reveal the ineffable—while nonetheless, what they invoke is beyond anything say-able. Perhaps what is left untold can only bring about more curiosity, more questions, and more reasons to try to understand. Perhaps the very notion of metaphor and transmission can therefore remain as simply an open question.

And so, as Longchenpa makes clear throughout his *Finding Rest in Illusion*, despite all efforts to describe such infinitude through metaphors, similitude, examples and so forth, for anyone who has ever stared curiously into a deep and far-reaching ocean, no words can truly describe how vast and mysterious it really is. If you really want to know the ocean therefore, you just have to go and see it for yourself. Still,

²⁰⁶ Longchen Rabjam, *Finding Rest in Illusion*, 235.

it helps to have someone point you in the right direction, otherwise you might end up in a dense forest when you meant to arrive at the shore looking out into an immaculate *infinite expanse*.



Figure 2. ‘Longchenpa’s Stupa’ containing relics of Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam is said to have the power to liberate upon seeing (Tib. *mtshong grol gyi sku gdung mchod rten*). This reliquary stupa is located in Chimpu Hermitage in the mountain above Samyé where Longchenpa practiced and Jigme Lingpa is said to have had his visionary experience of Longchenpa. Photo courtesy of Namkhai Naldjor and the Naldjor Institute for Movement and Tibetan Yoga

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