

Introduction

The Philosophical Grounds and Literary History of Zhentong

KLAUS-DIETER MATHES AND MICHAEL R. SHEEHY

Though the subject of emptiness (*sūnyatā*, *stong pa nyid*) is relatively well established in English-language texts on Buddhism, it is usually presented only as the emptiness of lacking independent existence or, more literally, the emptiness of an own nature (*svabhāva*, *rang bzhin*). However, the general reader of English literature on Buddhism may not be aware that such an understanding of emptiness reflects a particular interpretation of it, advanced predominantly by the Sakya, Kadam, and Geluk orders, which has exercised a particularly strong influence on the dissemination of Buddhist studies and philosophy in the West. In Tibetan discourse, this position is referred to as *rangtong* (*rang stong*), which means that everything, including the omniscience of a Buddha, is taken to be empty of an own nature. It is this lack of independent, locally determined building blocks of the world that allows in Madhyamaka the Buddhist axiom of dependent origination. In other words, rangtong emptiness is the a priori condition for a universe full of open, dynamic systems. The union of dependent origination and emptiness—the inseparability of appearance and emptiness—sets the ground for philosophical models of interrelatedness that are increasingly used in attempts to accommodate astonishing observations being made in the natural sciences, such as wave-particle duality or quantum entanglement.

Throughout the long intellectual history of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, one of the major questions that remains unresolved is whether a systematic presentation of the Buddha's doctrine requires challenging rangtong as the exclusive mode of emptiness, which has led some to distinguish between two modes of emptiness: (1) *Rangtong* (*rang stong*), that is, being empty of an own nature on the one hand, and (2) *Zhentong* (*gzhan stong*), that is, being empty of everything other

than luminous awareness or buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*). In later Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, when such tensions emerged, the issue was not so much about a possible justification for this distinction on the basis of certain philosophical scriptures, but rather competing hermeneutical schemes that consistently interpret the entire corpus of what was accepted to be the words of the Buddha.

While proponents of zhentong (*zhentongpas*) underline the necessity of this “empty of other emptiness,” the followers of rangtong (*rangtongpas*) oppose it. Rangtongpas insist that one must follow the seventh-century Indian Buddhist scholar Candrakīrti’s lead in taking the second turning cycle of teachings, which he defines as exclusively emphasizing rangtong emptiness, to be the underlying intention of any positive statement about the ultimate. Zhentongpas do not consider themselves in direct opposition to Candrakīrti but follow a strategy of inclusivism. Within their system, rangtong is understood to be a necessary basis for a correct realization of zhentong. Even though they repeatedly describe ultimate truth or reality as possessing qualities that are not empty of their own nature, it is critical to realize that these are beyond mental fabrications or reifications that are empty of an own nature as in the rangtong system.

Zhentongpas thus argue that Candrakīrti must have tacitly admitted something more than the mere nominal existence of everything (rangsong). In fact, MacDonald observes that for the Mādhyamika as a yogin, the final goal and state is not nothingness but transcendent knowing or wisdom (*jñāna*).¹ Moreover, one can discern in the *Lokātitastava* that Nāgārjuna (fl. 200 CE) indirectly accepts something more real behind the seeming, when he says in verse 7ab: “If a name and its object were not different, one’s mouth would be burned by [the word] fire.”² It should also be noted that the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, which lends support to Madhyamaka, recognizes the ordinary factors of existence (*dharmas*) as buddha-qualities (*buddhadharmas*) for those who are trained in the “true nature of dharmas” (*dharmatā*).³ In other words, all factors of existence, inasmuch as they are a mentally created misperception, need to be established as rangtong. This leads to a nonconceptual realization of their inconceivable and ineffable true reality that is zhentong in the sense of being empty of any reification that would be “other” to it.

ZHENTONG SOURCE LITERATURE

Literary sources for zhentong are cited by Tibetan authors in their multifaceted exegetics as coming from the canon of certain Indian Mahāyāna sūtras, that is, the so-called *Essence Sūtras* or *Sūtras on the Definitive Meaning*, along with their *śāstras* or scholastic commentarial treatises, and Tibetan authors also cite Buddhist tantra. By the time Tibetans began to receive Indic Buddhist textual traditions, two major doctrinal shifts had occurred in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism: (1) the Madhyamaka teaching that all factors of existence (*dharma*)—which according to Abhidharma consist of an own nature (*svabhāva*)—are devoid of any such thing,⁴ and (2) the Yogācāra⁵ interpretation of emptiness as being based on the three

natures (*trisvabhāva*, *rang bzhin gsum*),⁶ that is, the imagined (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), dependent (*paratantrasvabhāva*), and perfect natures (*pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*). The current state of research still does not allow precise dates for these two phases of development, but the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*, which lends doctrinal support for the Madhyamaka shift, must have already been in circulation at the time of Nāgārjuna (fl. 200 CE). The *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*, which contains the Yogācāra interpretation of emptiness, has been dated to about 300 CE by Schmithausen.⁷

Parallel to this development, there emerged a group of sūtras, known as the Tathāgatagarbha sūtras. Again, it is difficult to provide dates, but according to Mitrikeski, the *Śrīmālādevī Sūtra* must have been already around at the beginning of the third century CE, while the compilation period of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is estimated to be even earlier than that.⁸ Zimmermann takes the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*⁹ to be the earliest exposition of the buddha-nature teaching in India.¹⁰

The Sanskrit term *tathāgatagarbha* is mainly taken as a *bahuvrīhi* compound referring to all sentient beings, whose nature (*garbha*) is a *tathāgata*, that is, a buddha. That means that everybody has already a fully grown buddha within.¹¹ Even though this doctrine shares with Yogācāra a positive description of the ultimate that lends support to zhentong, the two systems differ considerably in their respective presentations of fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*, *gnas yongsu gyur pa*). The majority of Tathāgatagarbha sūtras describe a primordially complete buddha within that will be disclosed; however, in Yogācāra, one's buddhahood must be generated from the two potentials: the *dharmakāya* from the naturally present potential (*prakṛtisthagotra*, *rang bzhin gnas pa'i rigs*), and the form *kāyas* from the acquired potential (*samudānītagotra*, *yang dag pa blang ba'i rigs*).¹²

The two doctrines of original Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha were merged in the Maitreya works.¹³ While the *Ratnagotravibhāga*¹⁴ underwent a systematic Yogācāra-reinterpretation of the buddha-nature doctrine,¹⁵ the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* show influences of buddha-nature thought.¹⁶ The resulting variety of Indian doctrines that attribute positive qualities to the basis of negation, which is mostly equivalent with the ultimate, lends support to various forms of zhentong.

The differences between the Jonangpas and Shakya Chokden (1428–1507) can be mainly understood by comparing the original buddha-nature doctrine to its Yogācāra interpretation.¹⁷ In the former the basis of emptiness is something permanently (in the sense of transcending time) ultimate and primordially endowed with all buddha qualities. In the latter, it is the dynamic principle of a naturally present potential that causes a buddha's *svābhāvīkākāya* or *dharmakāya*. This is most clearly elaborated in Tāranātha's (1575–1635) *Twenty-One Differences with Regard to the Profound Meaning* (*Zab don nyer gcig pa*), a short text that compares the views of Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen (1292–1361) and Shakya Chokden in twenty-one points. It was translated and discussed by Mathes in 2004.¹⁸

Notwithstanding these differences, Yogācāra and buddha-nature theories were eventually subsumed under the Buddha's third turning of the Wheel of Dharma as described within the Yogācāra doxography of the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*.¹⁹ The

relevant sūtra passage utilizes the metaphor of the Buddha's dharma wheel, which turns without effort like the wheel in front of the emperor (*cakravartin*). The Madhyamaka and Yogācāra / buddha-nature interpretations of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras are assigned to the second and third dharma wheels, respectively.

The initial turning comprises the teaching of the Four Noble Truths for those who were genuinely engaged on the *śrāvaka* path.²⁰ The second turning refers to the emptiness of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, as commented in the analytical Madhyamaka works of Nāgārjuna.²¹ It is described as follows: "Then the Illustrious One turned a second wheel of dharma for those who were genuinely engaged in the Mahāyāna. It is more wonderous still, because of the aspect of teaching emptiness, beginning with the lack of an own nature of phenomena, and beginning with their absence of production, absence of cessation, quiescence from the start, and being naturally in a state of *nirvāṇa*."²² The third turning is defined by the same formula as that of the second turning, with two exceptions: it is meant for followers of all *yānas* and offers, in addition to the second turning, fine distinctions (*rnam par phyeba dang ldan pa*). The context of this sūtra passage makes it clear that they refer to the Yogācāra interpretation of Prajñāpāramitā emptiness in terms of the three natures (imagined, dependent, and perfect natures). In view of this distinction the third turning has definitive meaning (*nītārtha*, *nges don*) (as opposed to the first two) for it helps, in the eyes of the Yogācāras, to avoid a nihilistic interpretation of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras.²³

These three Wheels of Dharma categorize the entire Buddhist canon of the sūtras. Most Tibetans, however, did not follow the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*'s attribution, or at least exclusive attribution, of definitive meaning to the third turning. As is discussed and explored by contributors in this volume, the Tibetan hermeneutic enterprise sought to decipher which set of sūtras represented the definitive view of the Buddha and then reconcile the doctrinal paradoxes and tensions therein. In so doing, second turning sūtras are equated with rangtong, while third turning sūtras are equated with zhentong, giving rise to the textual foundations of the rangtong / zhentong distinction, and the discourse that ensued in Tibet.

Within the Tibetan commentarial tradition, there are three, to some extent, overlapping sets of sūtras that are cited as background for the zhentong literary tradition.²⁴ They share in common positive descriptions of the ultimate, such as the natural luminosity of mind or buddha-nature. In addition to these core Mahāyāna sūtras, the Indic śāstra commentarial literature that is most frequently cited within zhentong exegetical works is the *Five Maitreya Works* (*Byams chos lde lnga*). Attributed to the future Buddha Maitreya, these five treatises comprise a systematic summary and interpretation of the three sets of sūtras mentioned earlier that are relevant to zhentong. The first text, the *Ornament of Realization* (*Abhisamayālamkāra*) summarizes the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras in a way compatible with Yogācāra and buddha-nature thought. It is followed by the *Ornament of Great Vehicle Discourses* (*Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*), which groups mainly Yogācāra topics into twenty-one chapters. The three remaining *vibhāgas* are an analysis (*vibhāga*) of different subject matters. The *Analysis of the Jewel Family* (*Ratnagotravibhāga*)

is the standard Indian treatise on buddha-nature and buddhahood. The *Analysis of the Middle and Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga)* defines a “Yogācāra middle way” on the basis of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Finally, the *Analysis of Phenomena and Their True Nature (Dharmadharmatāvibhāga)* is a Yogācāra work, which distinguishes between the ordinary phenomenal world (*dharmas*) and the true nature of these phenomena (*dharmatā*).

In all Maitreya works except the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, whose topic is Prajñāpāramitā, we find a synthesis of Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha models of reality. As this synthesis avoids the flaws common to Yogācāra tenets, namely, that a considerable group of sentient beings is completely cut off from liberation or that a dependently arising mind exists on the level of ultimate truth,²⁵ zhentongpas could defend this synthesis as a teaching that asserts definitive meaning. Embracing buddha-nature doctrine helps to explain away the notion of a completely cut-off potential in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, since it can be pointed out that everybody is a buddha within, or at least has the potential to become a buddha. The problem of an ultimately existing mind can be solved by restricting the existence of the dependent nature, which is the mind in Yogācāra, to the level of relative truth. This move also allows for including the dependent within the *Ratnagotravibhāga*’s adventitious stains that cover buddha-nature, which is then identified with the mind’s perfect nature, or suchness, an equation supported by *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* IX.37.²⁶ This finds further support from Asaṅga, who explains buddha-nature in his commentary on *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.148 in terms of the Yogācāra concept of luminosity, a quality of the perfect nature.²⁷ In the final analysis²⁸ of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the closely related *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, the luminous perfect nature is taken to be empty of adventitious stains. In other words, it is empty of the imagined and dependent, inasmuch as the latter is false imagining (*abhūtaparikalpa*), the term used instead of the dependent nature in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*.

The final version of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*—Takasaki and Schmithausen identified older layers of this text²⁹—was translated by Ratnamati into Chinese in 508 CE.³⁰ Schmithausen³¹ dates the oldest strand with its original buddha-nature doctrine to the beginning of the fourth-century CE, namely, the time when the doctrinally close ninth chapter of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* was composed. The later strands of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* are mostly commentaries exhibiting a systematic Yogācāra interpretation, that is, taking buddha-nature only as a dynamic potential from which the dharmakāya of a buddha emerges. They are doctrinally and probably also chronologically close to the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*.³²

Both the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* and *Ratnagotravibhāga* were ignored in India up to the eleventh-century CE. Things changed, however, when Maitrīpa (986–1063) brought tantric Mahāmudrā teachings from his teacher Śavarīpa into mainstream Mahāyāna. The aforementioned synthesis of Yogācāra and buddha-nature theory provided good doctrinal support for Maitrīpa’s enterprise. He used the experiential terms of Yogācāra to describe the nonconceptual realization of a Madhyamaka emptiness that radically transcends all forms of reification.³³ Traditional accounts further underline the important role Maitrīpa played in the

transmission of *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* and the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*. Maitrīpa rediscovered and taught these two texts to *Ānandakīrti and Sajjana. In cooperation with Sajjana, the Tibetan scholar Ngok Loden Sherab (1059–1109) translated the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* and its *vyākhyā* into Tibetan.

Loden Sherab explained buddha-nature in terms of nonaffirming negations (*prasajyapratishedha*, *med par dgag pa*), that is, as the rangtong emptiness of mind. That means that anything that appears as inherently existent during the investigation of one's mind is simply negated, without implying the existence of anything else, or another mode of existence. With such an understanding, Loden Sherab founded what is known as the “analytical tradition” (*mtshan nyid lugs*) of interpreting the Maitreya works. The corresponding “contemplative tradition” (*sgom lugs*) was founded by a disciple of Drapa Ngonshe Kawoche, known as Tsen Kawoche (b. 1021). He requested Sajjana teach him the Maitreya works as pith instructions since he wanted to make these works his “practice [of preparing] for death” (*chi chos*). Sajjana taught him all five works of Maitreya with Lotsāwa Zu Gawe Dorje acting as the translator,³⁴ and gave special pith instructions on the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*. This is the popular account given in Go Lotsāwa Zhonnu Pel's *Blue Annals*.³⁵

Maitrīpa's teacher at Vikramaśīla, Jñānaśrimitra (ca. 980–1040),³⁶ however, already knew the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* and *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* when he composed his *Sākārasiddhiśāstra*³⁷ and *Sākārasaṃgraha*.³⁸ A commentary on the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, transmitted by the Nartang abbot Kyoton Monlam Tsultrim (1219–1299), the *Instructions on the Supreme Continuum* further suggests that the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* had not been lost before Maitrīpa.³⁹

The third turning gives numerous positive descriptions of ultimate reality in teachings on the luminosity of awareness and buddha-nature while also making a clear-cut distinction between this positive ultimate and the adventitious stains of a suffering mind. These traits are not only found in the Maitreya works. Proponents of zhentong, or proto-zhentong in early Tibetan intellectual history, had been pointing out that the commentaries on the Buddha's third turning also include Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Hymns* and all Mahāyāna exegetes accept that this collection was composed by Nāgārjuna. In his *Dharmadhātustava* or *Praise to the Source of Buddha Qualities*, Nāgārjuna thus explains that the fire of wisdom only burns the adventitious defilements, but not the luminous mind:⁴⁰

When one puts [a piece of cloth] tainted by various stains over a fire, the cloth is purified as the fire burns the stains away. Likewise, luminous mind is tainted by stains arisen from desire, and wisdom burns these stains away but not the luminous [mind]. Those sūtras taught by the Victorious Ones in order to reveal emptiness—all eliminate defilements but do not diminish this [*dharmadhātu*].⁴¹

This supports a hermeneutic that takes the third turning more literally, as Nāgārjuna clearly restricts the discourses on rangtong emptiness to the spiritual defilements. Zhentong writings frequently cite Nāgārjuna's *Dharmadhātustava* as well as his

other hymns of praise in contrast to Nāgārjuna's *Collection on Reasoning* where he unequivocally relays the *via negationis* of the Madhyamaka of the second turning.⁴²

To sum up, the canonical sources for zhentong are the *Five Maitreya Works*, Nāgārjuna's hymns along with the sūtra discourses of the third turning referred to as *Essence Sūtras* or also *Sūtras on the Definitive Meaning*.⁴³

Candrakīrti's critique of the underlying Yogācāra hermeneutic of the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra* is opposed by explaining the three natures in a way that is compatible with Madhyamaka and buddha-nature theory. Zhentongpas also point out that their preferred mode of emptiness is not the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*'s inferior "emptiness of the one from the other" (*itaretarāsūnyatā*), but the "great emptiness of ultimate meaning, which is the wisdom of the Noble Ones" (*paramārthārya-jñānamahāsūnyatā*). In line with zhentong, the latter is explained as empty of all faults inherent in views and the related mental imprints. From a zhentong point of view, Candrakīrti's strategy of ascribing "Mind-Only"⁴⁴ and buddha-nature theories provisional meaning on the basis of the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* could be questioned on the grounds that this sūtra's understanding of emptiness is not rangtong but based on the Yogācāra theory of three natures. This is most evident in the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*'s introduction to the list of seven types of emptiness, "The illustrious one said this: 'Emptiness—what is called emptiness—Mahāmati, is a word for the imagined nature. Again, Mahāmati, since [you people] obstinately cling to the imagined nature, we [must] talk about emptiness, nonarising, nonduality, and the nature of essencelessness.'⁴⁵

ZHENTONG PHILOSOPHY IN TIBET

The most prominent proponent of zhentong, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen opposes an exclusive rangtong interpretation of emptiness. In his eyes, this common mode of emptiness does not account for the emptiness of the *unchanging* perfect nature (*nirvikāra-pariniṣpanna*, *gyur ba med pa'i yongs grub*),⁴⁶ which is not empty of its own nature. Emptiness in terms of the unchanging perfect nature refers to the absence of the momentary, unmistaken (*aviparyāsa*, *phyin ci ma log pa'i*) perfect nature as well as the imagined and dependent natures, the underlying relationship between the basis of negation and that which is negated being zhentong.⁴⁷ Dolpopa's basis of negation is the ultimate, which must be realized as being free from mental fabrications.⁴⁸ This means that the object of negation also includes the extreme of ontological existence. Ultimate or true existence means for Dolpopa that the realization of the dharmakāya or ultimate body of reality is genuine (*don dam du bden*).⁴⁹ Relative truth is taken to be empty of a true own nature, while the ultimate is not empty of such an own nature. For instance, in his *Sun That Clarifies the Two Truths*, Dolpopa writes:

Any object of consciousness, that which is, from its own side, empty of a true own nature, is the defining characteristic of relative truth. Any object of the genuine wisdom of the Noble Ones, that which is, from

its own side, not empty of its respective own nature, is the defining characteristic of the ultimate.⁵⁰

In other words, for Dolpopa relative truth is rangtong and ultimate truth zhentong. This zhentong definition is similar to the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*'s great emptiness that is the ultimate meaning, which is the wisdom of the Noble Ones, and mainly profits from a particular understanding of the central Yogācāra concept of the three natures as found in Vasubandhu's *Extensive Commentary*, the *Bṛhatṭīkā*.⁵¹ The more traditional Yogācāra formula of the dependent nature being empty of the imagined nature, as found in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, must then be taken only as a distinction between the real and imputed on the level of relative truth. The *Madhyāntavibhāga* thus retains a central value for Dolpopa, as he adduces from this important Maitreya work the Yogācāra explanation of sixteen forms of emptiness. The second-to-last emptiness summarizes the first fourteen as the nonexistence of the personal self and phenomena, and thus differs from the last one, which is the true existence of this nonexistence.⁵² According to Dolpopa, this establishes a separate mode of emptiness, namely, zhentong.

In all fairness to Dolpopa's reasoning, it should be noted that in the second part of the first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* a positively understood emptiness takes the central role that dependent nature enjoys in the common model of the three natures.⁵³ This replaces or rather extends the traditional Yogācāra formula of three natures so that the imagined and dependent natures now fall into the category of adventitious stains, which fits Dolpopa's zhentong definition.⁵⁴ For Dolpopa, as Michael Sheehy explains in his chapter, zhentong emptiness was framed not only as the perfect philosophical teaching but as dharma for the Perfect Eon that is reflective of a cosmological vision of Buddhist time.

Though Dolpopa was probably the most influential proponent of zhentong, the forebearers of a rangtong / zhentong distinction can be identified in a variety of Indian texts and early Kadam manuscripts.⁵⁵ Positive descriptions of the ultimate are mainly justified by a master's direct access to the luminous nature of mind, as taught in the various traditions of Mahāmudrā or Dzokchen. As David Higgins shows in his chapter in this volume, from the eighth through the eleventh centuries, Nyingma authors employed the concept of **bodhigarbha* (*byang chub snying po*), as opposed to the term buddha-nature, in the early exegesis of Dzokchen. Dolpopa gained his decisive zhentong understanding through his practice of the sixfold yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) during a meditation retreat on Kālacakra. Thus, it was his practice that allowed him to speak of the real and the true nature. Systems that include descriptions of realization found doctrinal support in the third turning cycle of teaching, which is not only based on the doctrine of emptiness but also distinguishes, as we have seen, between the imputed and the real—that is, phenomena and their true nature or adventitious stains and buddha-nature.

Of particular interest for the history of zhentong are the prototypes of it that can be identified in texts written and/or transmitted by Kadam masters at

Nartang Monastery in south central Tibet. As explored by Tsering Wangchuk in this volume, writings by the Kadam master Chomden Rikpai Raldri (1227–1305) cast a positive interpretation of buddha-nature, citing sources from both sūtras and tantras. Inheritance of the zhentong lineage is further complexed by one of Rikdrel's root teachers, the Eighth Abbot of Nartang Monastery, Kyoton Monlam Tsultrim. In two works by Kyoton, the *Instructions on the Supreme Continuum on the Great Way* and the *Guidance Based on the Analysis of Phenomena and Their True Nature*, textual transmission lineages record a succession of masters that include the translator Lotsāwa Zu Gawai Dorje and Tsen Kawoche.⁵⁶ Both of these masters studied with the ever-elusive eleventh-century Paṇḍita Sajjana in Kashmir. Sajjana figured prominently in the transmission of the Maitreya works by interpreting the third turning to be a teaching of definitive meaning, precisely because the distinctions between the real and imputed, and so forth, are necessary for upholding zhentong. As expressed by the Jonang scholar Kunga Drolchok (1507–1566) in his *Lineage History of the One-Hundred-and-Eight Instructions*:

Sajjana, the paṇḍita from Kashmir, made the very significant statement that the Victorious One turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. The first turning concerned the Four Noble Truths; the middle turning the lack of defining characteristics; and the final turning careful distinctions. The first two did not distinguish between the real and the imputed. During the ultimate ascertainment of the final turning, [the Buddha] taught by distinguishing between the middle and the extremes (*madhyāntavibhāga*) and by distinguishing between phenomena and their true nature (*dharmadharmatāvibhāga*).⁵⁷

The particular transmission linked to Sajjana via Tsen Kawoche interprets the *Five Maitreya Works* positively, emphasizing the effulgence of luminosity and the buddha-nature they reveal. This became the touchstone hermeneutic for the zhentong philosophical and contemplative tradition. Though Tsen Kawoche's writings are no longer available, fortunately, Kunga Drolchok preserved one pith instruction on zhentong by this master in his anthology, *The One-Hundred-and-Eight Instructions of the Jonang*. As Kunga Drolchok notes in his brief preface, this instruction is based on an old notebook by Tsen Kawoche called the *Iron-Hook of the Lotus*, giving us a reference to an early literary source for zhentong.⁵⁸ This short pith instruction on zhentong brings together the three natures in a manner that was later identified as being in harmony with zhentong as made explicit within the writings of Dolpopa and later Jonangpa authors. Here is the latter part of this concise text, the only surviving work by Tsen Kawoche, the *Instructions on the Zhentong View*:

Although classified as three natures without an own nature, if you analyze—since there are no fixations and there is nothing to fixate on besides the mind—only the phenomenal quality of the dependent

nature and the phenomenal actuality of the perfect nature are free from defilements. They are the identical ultimate actuality of phenomena that is spontaneously present.

In this way, the imagined nature is devoid of an own nature, like a hare's horns. The dependent nature is devoid of the imagined nature, like an illusion. The perfect nature is devoid of both the imagined nature and the dependent nature, like space. Distinctions between the imagined and the dependent are relative, not ultimate. The perfect, the true nature of phenomena is the ultimate. This is the Great Madhyamaka: free from extremes without being in any way either identical or different in essence from the phenomenal quality of relative reality.⁵⁹

Tsen Kawoche's instruction combines here the traditional Yogācāra emptiness—the dependent being devoid of the imagined, with the *Br̥haṭṭikā* emptiness—the perfect being devoid of the imagined and dependent. For the Jonangpas, however, a further step was still needed, namely, the restriction of the ultimate to the invariable perfect nature that is devoid not only of any imagined or relational elaborations but also the unmistakable perfect nature. In any case, Tsen Kawoche had set the course for subsequent zhentong interpretations of the three natures.

Apart from minor discrepancies in the lineages between Tsen Kawoche and Kyoton, the lineage records match with Tāranātha's *Supplication to the Profound Zhentong Madhyamaka Lineage*.⁶⁰ This links zhentong thought to an important master of the mainstream thirteenth-century Kadam tradition. Kyoton's *Instructions on the Supreme Continuum* equate buddha-nature with self-arisen wisdom and the dharmakāya, while presenting the four perfections of the dharmakāya as a teaching of definitive meaning.⁶¹ In his *Repository of Wisdom* (*Ye shes kyi 'jog sa*) as well, Kyoton claims that the nature of mind is self-arisen wisdom, a buddha. Of particular interest in this text is Kyoton's explanation that self-arisen wisdom is nothing other than thoughts when their luminous nature is realized; this should be understood in contrast to the self-awareness of the Mind-Only tenet that one realizes appearances are appearances of thought.⁶² In other words, this zhentong prototype is clearly distinguished from the tenet of Mind-Only.

Moreover, in Kyoton's *Instructions on Madhyamaka*, which are said to be meditation instructions by Atiśa, the final state of nirvāṇa is not only described negatively as the nonappearance of all phenomena but also taken to be luminosity that is free from all mental fabrications.⁶³ If such teachings were transmitted by Kadampas at Nartang, it is possible that such prototypes of zhentong were transmitted from Sajjana to Dolpopa or other masters associated with zhentong.

With Dolpopa and his immediate disciples in the early to mid-fourteenth century, zhentong became a source of controversy and polemic in Tibet. As Dolpopa's teachings attracted a wide audience among intellectuals, many of the philosophical giants of the day, including Buton Rinchen Drub (1290–1364), Remdawa Zhonnu Lodro (1349–1412), and their disciples, composed polemical works to counter

Dolpopa's view. Dorje Nyingcha's contribution elaborates a text, *The Lamp That Illuminates the Expanse of Reality*, by one of Dolpopa's fourteen main disciples, Garungpa Lhai Gyaltzen (1319–1402/03), which is a response to critiques of the Jonang philosophical presentation of zhentong. Garungpa sets his hermeneutic to resolve which of the Buddha's teachings are definitive. Relying on the logic that the Buddha himself answered this question in the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*, he argues that this sūtra is the basis for solving such a problem. In applying the maxim that teachings delivered by the Buddha in his third turning are definitive, Garungpa treats buddha-nature and statements made in tantras to be definitive as well. Garungpa's text is of interest not only because it preserves an early Jonang defense, but also because it preserves arguments made against the Jonang presentation of zhentong by others, most notably Tsongkhapa's (1357–1419) mentor Remdawa.⁶⁴

Some zhentong masters, such as Shakya Chokden, diverge considerably from Dolpopa. In his chapter, Yaroslav Komarovski details Shakya Chokden's zhentong perspective that except for the *dharmadhātu* (*chos dbyings*) or source of buddha qualities, no conventional phenomena are established by valid cognition, which amounts to saying that none of them exist. Shakya Chokden's position, therefore, is that whether they accept the actual dharmadhātu or not, all Madhyamaka systems share the same view that no other phenomena exist apart from it. In the case of Shakya Chokden's zhentong, this position entails that whatever is subsumed under the category of the dharmadhātu is automatically accepted as existent in reality. In the case of rangtong systems, however, this position entails that even that which is subsumed under the category of the dharmadhātu does not exist. While Dolpopa's basis of negation is an independent ultimate beyond space and time, Shakya Chokden defines his basis of negation as the dependent nature that exists on a relative level. Subsequently, the ultimate truth is taken to be nondual wisdom that does not transcend momentariness. For Tāranātha this constitutes the main difference between Shakya Chokden and Dolpopa.⁶⁵ These two presentations of zhentong must be distinguished from more moderate presentations, such as the ones of the Seventh and the Eighth Karmapas, which admit a rangtong mode of emptiness for both the adventitious stains of relative truth as well as the ultimate nature of mind. Nonetheless, zhentong is made explicit when a contemplative practitioner with an immediate experience of the ultimate nature must distinguish the latter from the adventitious stains of mind, which do not reflect how the nature of mind truly is.

In alignment with Shakya Chokden's view of emptiness are several hierarchs of the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. As Klaus-Dieter Mathes makes evident in his chapter, the Kagyu presentation of zhentong is sparse and differs considerably from the Jonang presentation of zhentong. A critical difference is that for Kagyu exegetes both the basis of emptiness (*stong gzhi*) and its object of negation (*dgag bya*) are taken to be empty of an own nature, that is, rangtong. An exception is Mikyo Dorje's (1507–1554) *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentary, where the young Eighth Karmapa claims with reference to *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.155c that the qualities of dharmatā are not empty of an own nature (*rang gi ngo bo*), which means in this

context that these qualities are inseparably connected with buddha-nature. This does not require an inherent existence of either buddha-nature or its qualities, though. Apart from this instance, Mikyo Dorje endorses zhentong only as the absence of adventitious stains from natural luminosity or buddha-nature, while everything, including buddha-nature is rangtong only. The First Karma Trinle (1456–1539) likely had such a moderate zhentong view in mind when he described the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339) and the Seventh Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso (1454–1506) to be zhentongpas. Other Kagyu hierarchs, perhaps most notably the Second Zhamarpa Kacho Wangpo (1350–1405), endorsed zhentong in terms of conventional reality. Explained by Martina Draszczyk in her contribution, the Second Zhamarpa's text, *A Dharma Discourse Clarifying Emptiness from the Perspective of Those Who Have Entered the Supremely Profound*, provides a comparison of rangtong / zhentong. Pointing out that the mind is not merely essenceless, but coemergent with wisdom, Kacho Wangpo emphasizes the ever-present luminous nature of mind. In fact, when referring to the ultimate, he is careful not to reify the nature of the mind and its qualities stating, "when one is not supposed to hold on to phenomena as emptiness, what need is there to mention clinging to them as having characteristics such as permanence, etc." Following this, the Eighth Karmapa Mikyo Dorje explicitly took issue with what he framed to be a Jonang substantialist view of buddha-nature as an ultimate permanent entity.

Throughout the sixteenth-century, more than a generation after the height of the rangtong / zhentong polemics of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, new writings on zhentong continued to be created while views were modified and reinterpreted, including by authors already mentioned—Shakya Chokden, the First Karma Trinle, and the Seventh and Eighth Karmapas. Besides these authors, modern scholars have thought that this was a blackout period for writings on zhentong and that Jonangpa authors did not compose works on zhentong after Dolpopa's disciples up to Tāranātha. Though there is certainly a scarcity of zhentong literature that survives from the sixteenth century, we know from a recent discovery inside Tibet that Kunga Drolchok—the Sakya and Shangpa Kagyu master who was the twenty-fourth throne-holder at Jonang—did, in fact, compose at least one work on zhentong, which was a concise instruction text titled *Profound Points of the Zhentong View*.⁶⁶ This finding not only fills a lacuna at this critical juncture in the literary history of zhentong but also serves as a reminder of how much of the Tibetan literary archive remains inaccessible or is forever lost.

After Dolpopa, the most prolific author on zhentong was Tāranātha, who spent much of his early career reviving the arts and literature of the Jonang tradition and constructing its citadel monastic seat at Takten Puntsok Ling. When these efforts were threatened by local political conflict, Tāranātha began to write extensively on zhentong in order to preserve the Jonang tradition. Tāranātha knew that Dolpopa's zhentong view was not only controversial in the mainstream scholastic circuits, but that it had been publicly denounced from the throne at Jonang by Orgyen Dzongpa, a previous holder of the monastic seat.⁶⁷ After a decade of tireless revival efforts, by 1604 Tāranātha was faced not only with preserving the reputation

of Jonang but with protecting its monastic seat from the imminent danger of being attacked by the armies who were fighting in the political wars between the regions of Jang and Tsang in southern Tibet. As Tāranātha recorded in his autobiography, during a moment of utter despondence, he went to meditate at the Great Stūpa of Jonang. Disheartened by the warfare and troubles all around him, Tāranātha prayed to Dolpopa for reassurance and clarity. Dolpopa appeared to him in a vision and encouraged Tāranātha to persevere. This led to a succession of visions and dreams of Dolpopa, during which Tāranātha recorded in his autobiography that he gained the realization of Dolpopa's true intent and vision of zhentong. To express his understanding and explicate zhentong, he composed the versified text, *Ornament of Zhentong Madhyamaka*.⁶⁸

Tāranātha also composed numerous concise works on zhentong that continue to be studied within the contemporary Jonang scholastic curriculum. In addition to these short seminal works, including *Essence of Zhentong* and *Ascertaining the Two Systems: An Entrance into the Definitive Meaning*, there was his multivolume masterpiece, the *Supreme Vehicle of Zhentong Madhyamaka*, which was compiled by his students up to his death in order to record his commentary on the central points of zhentong philosophical thinking. After Tāranātha's passing in 1635, however, his project to revive the Jonang and preserve Dolpopa's zhentong philosophy of emptiness fell into disarray. By 1650, fifteen years after Tāranātha's death, Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery was confiscated by the Ganden Potrang central government of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (1617–1682), and the Jonang philosophical studies curriculum was converted to Geluk. However, as is evident from the Fifth Dalai Lama's account, Jonang monks continued to teach zhentong in the mountain hermitages above Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery and in its vicinity until the monastery was officially converted in the year 1658.⁶⁹ This persistence to study and transmit zhentong after the monastery was confiscated became a further reason for the Gandenpa authorities to target zhentong. In his autobiographical reflections on this historical moment, and why the curriculum required conversion, the Fifth Dalai Lama writes:

As is clear, not only is the curriculum enormously important for the monastic community, but the most worthwhile scholastic curriculum is extremely rare. According to the tulku of Takten, there was a naïve conviction [at Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery] that was the reason for a partiality to zhentong. By completely denigrating the followers of the protector Nāgārjuna, many beings blinded themselves and were led to the lower realms where they are prevented from being saved.⁷⁰

With the conversion of the Jonang scholastic curriculum, the printing press at Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery was closed, and zhentong books were banned.⁷¹

Though the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were a dark period for authorship on zhentong, particularly under the Ganden Potrang's sphere of influence in central Tibet, the transmission of zhentong continued in Kham and

Amdo. Having established a presence in the Amdo region of eastern Tibet since the Jonangpa master Ratnaśrī (1350–1435) had established Choje Monastery in the Dzamtang valley, the Jonangpa sought refuge in that region.

Tāranātha's disciple Lodro Namgyel (1618–1683) traveled from Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery to Dzamtang where in the year 1658 he established Tsangwa Monastery adjacent to Choje Monastery, creating a monastic enclave for the Jonangpas in Dzamtang.⁷² While disciples of Tāranātha were sequestered to the far eastern frontier of the Tibetan plateau, the Jonangpas began to rebuild their monasteries in the Dzamtang valley and adjacent areas in Amdo. Xylographs were recarved to print the collected writings of Dolpopa and Tāranātha, and the scholastic curriculum with a focus on Zhentong Madhyamaka was reinstated in their newly established monasteries.

Perhaps the greatest influence, however, in the history of zhentong during this period was the eighteenth-century Nyingma polymath Rikzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755) from Katok Monastery in Kham. His efforts were motivated by his considerable interest in the Jonang and allied traditions as distinct lines of Buddhist tantric teaching in Tibet. Tsewang Norbu sought out zhentong transmissions all across Tibet in an effort to preserve these teachings, which included his failed attempt to unlock the library at Takten Puntsok Ling Monastery in 1727. His efforts, coupled with those of his colleague and close friend, Situ Pañchen Chokyi Jungne (1699–1774), sparked a revival of interest in zhentong literature among Tibetan intellectual circles in Kham.⁷³

Contemporaneously, several authors continued to expound on zhentong in central Tibet. Among these authors was the unconventional Geluk tulku and Nyingma yogin Lelung Zhepai Dorje (1697–1740), who wrote several brief treatises on zhentong. As Matthew Kapstein points out in his chapter, also concerned about zhentong was Lochen Dharmaśrī (1654–1718), who, along with his elder brother Terdak Lingpa (1646–1714), was the cofounder of the premier Mindroling branch of the Nyingma. In response to the entreaties of his contemporary, Dorje Drak Rikzin who was the head of the Jangter lineage and of the important Nyingma monastery at Dorje Drak, Lochen Dharmaśrī composed in 1708 what appears to be the first commentary on the preeminent Nyingma synthesis of the system of the Buddhist vows, the *Ascertainment of the Three Vows* by Ngari Pañchen Pema Wangyel. In this context, and given, in particular, Mindroling's close association with the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Ganden Potrang government, it is surprising to find that Lochen Dharmaśrī did not quietly ignore the whole matter of zhentong because it was so contested and condemned by the Great Fifth and his court. Nevertheless, in the section of the text dealing with the vows of the bodhisattva, and the progression along the path of the six perfections that this entails, there is a relatively detailed amplification of the single line of the root text that reads, "One practices the profound wisdom of audition, reflection, and contemplation."⁷⁴ Remarkably, it is here that Lochen Dharmaśrī inserts a brief but lucid account of the rangtong / zhentong distinction, elaborating a synopsis of the path that allows us to see just how he believed this distinction to operate within the Nyingma system.⁷⁵

By the late nineteenth century, a revivification of zhentong thought had emerged from the circles of Tsewang Norbu's influence. The prolific Nyingma scholar affiliated with the tradition of Tsewang Norbu's home, Katok Monastery, the First Katok Getse Tsewang Chokdrub (1761–1829) famously advocated the Zhentong Great Madhyamaka in the context of explaining Nyingma expositions of Mahāyāna doctrine.⁷⁶ Other inheritors of Tsewang Norbu's as well as Situ Paṅ chen's vision to revive zhentong were Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye (1813–1899) and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–1892). As Marc-Henri Deroche so rightly notes in his chapter about the Rimé discourses on emptiness, throughout the course of Tibetan intellectual history, zhentong constituted both a major sectarian marker as well as a crucial point for eclecticism. In the case of Kongtrul and Khyentse's Rimé project, zhentong was assimilated as a unifying concept to emphasize the shared identity of the various religious traditions of Tibet.⁷⁷ Considering how the history of zhentong thought had caused such fervent debate and sectarian discord among the orders of Tibetan Buddhism, and how it had been persecuted under the rule of the Ganden Potrang government, their interpretation of zhentong was meant to be exceptionally inclusive. Purposing zhentong as a unifying philosophical platform suggested both a counterstance to the normative Geluk-dominated discourse as well as an invitation to impartiality. In addition to Deroche's discussion, Klaus-Dieter Mathes elaborates on differences in Kongtrul's presentation of zhentong in comparison with exemplary Jonang and Kagyu exegetes.

However, discords in the rangtong / zhentong discourse continued through the turn of the twentieth century when the Nyingma luminary Mipam Namgyel Gyatso (1846–1912) sought to synthesize and reconcile these seemingly disparate visions of emptiness. Mipam's preferred stance was an anti-standpoint, an absence of elaborations with regard to the four extremes (*mtha' bzhi spros bral*)—a position that resonates with Nāgārjuna as well as Longchen Rabjam's (1308–1363) elucidations of the absolute. Douglas Duckworth clarifies in his chapter here that, appropriating claims of zhentong discourse, Mipam posits emptiness to appear as it exists—that is, to appear in accord with reality. Based on the fact that an appearance of emptiness undermines the Madhyamaka model of two truths that distinguishes a conventional appearance from ultimate emptiness, Mipam adopted a Yogācāra model. In so doing, he asserted that nondual unity is ultimate truth while dualistic appearances are relative truth. Within this restrained context, Mipam aligns with zhentong.⁷⁸ Dorji Wangchuk suggests in his chapter that Mipam's philosophical approach of indivisible union (*yuganaddha, zung 'jug*) is a key to understanding his interpretation and reconciliation of Indian Mahāyāna doctrines in confluence with Dolpopa's zhentong view and Tsongkhapa's rangtong view. This unifying philosophy seems to be based on the fundamental assumption that a discord of philosophical views among various persons and factions would only give way to a concord of insight when they mutually envision ultimate reality. It is only then that ideological differences, and the conflicts that arise therein, come to be naturally resolved. It is at this point that awakened buddha-beings and siddha adepts meet and are of a single mind.

An inheritor of Mipam's thought and an author who was concerned with presenting the philosophical nuances of zhentong was the influential Nyingma master and scholar from Zhechen Monastery in Kham, Khenchen Gangshar Wangpo (1925–1959). Unlike Dolpopa or Shakya Chokden, Khenpo Gangshar does not present zhentong against the backdrop of the three nature theory but rather situates the rangtong / zhentong distinction within a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika framework. In similar fashion to Longchen Rabjam, Khenpo Gangshar insists that everything from material form up to omniscience is rangtong. He presents the two truths as appearance and emptiness in terms of a valid cognition that analyzes for the ultimate abiding nature. In the context of a conventional valid cognition, however, which looks into the mode of an appearance, the two truths are defined in terms of the way things appear versus the way things truly are. When the abiding nature is perceived as it truly is, awareness continues, albeit in a mode that is beyond the duality of ordinary perception. That is, for Khenpo Gangshar, it is only phenomenologically that the rangtong of *samsāra* and zhentong of nirvāṇa need to be distinguished.⁷⁹

At the same time that Jamgon Kongtrul and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo were writing about zhentong and Mipam was composing his *Ketaka Gem, Beacon of Certainty*, and the *Lion's Roar of Zhentong*, Jonang scholarship on zhentong was reemerging in Amdo. In the chapter by Michael Sheehy, pivotal figures in the revival of Jonang scholarship on zhentong during this period are brought forth, including Dzago Geshe Lozang Chokdrub Gyatso, Ngawang Tsoknyi Gyatso (1880–1940), and Khenpo Lodro Drakpa (1920–1975). Inspired by the Rimé movement, as Sheehy demonstrates in his chapter, these figures sought to reclaim the intellectual heritage of the Jonang. Lozang Chokdrub Gyatso's life gives us a window into the historical influences of Geluk scholasticism on the revival of zhentong, at least through the lens of one scholar. Assimilating his Geluk training at Drepung Monastery, he creatively presents a distinct doxography of Zhentong Madhyamaka based on what had become a standardized textbook framework for studying Buddhist and non-Buddhist tenet systems within a Geluk curriculum.⁸⁰

With Ngawang Tsoknyi Gyatso, a master from Dzamtang, his lenient, if not somewhat compromised rendering for the Jonang of the essence (*ngo bo*) of buddha-nature has an exegetical style that is influenced by Geluk presentations. For Khenpo Lodro Drakpa, in alignment with the mainstream Jonang proponents Dolpopa and Tāranātha, the essence of buddha-nature is not dependent arising, while Ngawang Tsoknyi Gyatso compromises this position by asserting that even the essence of buddha-nature is dependent arising. In his *Great Exposition on Zhentong*, Khenpo Lodro Drakpa looks to realign zhentong philosophical thinking with mainstream Jonang presentations. He does so by systematically explaining the vital points for understanding the zhentong view as articulated by Dolpopa in his *Mountain Dharma*. Unlike Dolpopa's synthetic presentation, however, he deciphers salient differences between sūtra zhentong and tantra zhentong. In so doing, Khenpo Lodro Drakpa and the contemporary Jonang scholastic tradition

that follows him both reclaim Dolpopa's vision while creatively reimagining the myriad formulations of zhentong.

NOTES

1. MacDonald, "Knowing Nothing" 165.
2. *Lokātīstava* 7ab, see Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana* 130: *saṃjñārthayor ananyatve mukhaṃ dahyeta vahninā* /.
3. See *Samādhirājasūtra* XXXII.8ab (SRS 195), where phenomena (*dharmas*) are in reality buddha-qualities (*buddhadharmas*): "All dharmas are buddha-dharmas [for those] who are trained in dharmatā" (*sarvadharmā buddhadharmā dharmatāyāṃ ya śikṣitāḥ*).
4. While Ābhidharmikas attribute *svabhāva* to conditioned *dharmas* on the grounds that they do not depend on parts for their existence, Nāgārjuna claims that the dependent origination of *dharmas* is incompatible with their possession of *svabhāva*. See Burton, *Emptiness Appraised* 90.
5. *Yogācāra* is the name of a Mahāyāna system, literally, the "One Whose Conduct Is Yoga." Maintaining an idealist position, it is also known as Vijñaptimātravāda ("the position that [everything] is mental representation only"), or *sems tsam* in Tibetan ("mind only").
6. Sometimes also referred to as the three characteristics (*trilakṣaṇa, mtshan nyid gsum*).
7. Schmithausen, "Yogācāra" 819.
8. Mitrikeski, "Nāgārjuna and the *Tathāgatagarbha*" 158–159.
9. The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* belongs to the set of sūtras on buddha-nature, called *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* (not in italics and in the plural).
10. Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*.
11. Zimmermann 43–45.
12. Mathes, *Direct Path* 12–13.
13. Mathes, "gzhan stong Model."
14. Better known under its ornamental title *Mahāyānottaratantra, Theg chen rgyud bla ma*, or simply *Rgyud bla ma*.
15. The *Ratnagotravibhāga* consists of different layers, of which only the later ones show *Yogācāra* influence (see the discussion later in this chapter).
16. See also Mathes, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*.
17. It should be noted that the Nyingma master Lochen Dharmashri (1654–1717) also distinguishes a buddha-nature-based zhentong from a *Yogācāra*-based zhentong. See Mathes, "Presenting a Controversial Doctrine" 115.
18. Mathes, "Twenty-One Differences." We thank the editors of the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* for permission to reprint this essay in the present volume.
19. In his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, Asaṅga adduces the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja Sūtra*, in which a similar set of three teaching cycles is compared to a threefold cleansing process of a *vaidūrya* stone. This establishes, in the eyes of Go Lotsāwa Zhonnu Pel (1392–1481), the superiority of the third turning, consisting in this case of the buddha-nature doctrine (Mathes, *Direct Path* 216–234).
20. SNS VII.30 (85_{11–13}): . . . *nyan thos kyi theg pa la yang dag par zhugs pa rnam la 'phags pa'i bden pa zhi'i rnam par bstan pas chos kyi 'khor lo . . .*

21. It should be noted that both the *Chapter Requested by Maitreya in the Twenty-Five-Thousand Stanza Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Five-Hundred Stanza Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* are both considered zhentong textual sources, and that not all the content in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras is considered to describe rangtong, at least by some Tibetan exponents of zhentong.

22. SNS VII.30 (85₁₇₋₂₃): *bcom ldan 'das kyis chos rnams kyi ngo bo nyid ma mchis pa nyid las brtsams / skye ba ma mchis pa dang / 'gag pa ma mchis pa dang / gzod ma nas zhi ba dang / rang bzhin gyis yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa nyid las brtsams nas theg pa chen po la yang dag par zhugs pa rnams la stong pa nyid smos pa'i rnam pas ches ngo mtshar rmad du byung ba'i chos kyi 'khor lo gnyis pa bskor te / . . .* The translation mainly follows Powers, *Wisdom of the Buddha* 139–141.

23. This is clear from the context of the seventh chapter of the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*. See Mathes, “Ontological Status” 327–331.

24. Ngakwang Lodro Drakpa (1920–1975) identifies the primary texts that comprise this scriptural tradition as follows: (1) *Maitreyapariṣcchā Sūtra in the Pañca-viṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (contained in Tohoku catalogue [hereafter, Toh.] no. 9); (2) *Pañcaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Toh. 15); (3) *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra* (Toh. 106); (4) *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Toh. 107); (5) *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Toh. 44, text no. 45); (6) *Avatamaṣaka Sūtra*, common and concordant discussions (Toh. 44); (7) *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* (Toh. 258); (8) Sections within the *Ratnakūta Sūtra*, including the *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda Sūtra* (Toh. 45–93); (9) *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (Toh. 142); (10) *Suvarṇaprabhā Sūtra* (Toh. 556); (11) *Dhāraṇīśvararājapariṣcchā Sūtra* (Toh. 147, listed under *Tathāgatamahākaraṇānirdeśanāmamahāyāna Sūtra*); (12) *Tathāgataguṇajñānācintyaṇiṣayāvatāra Sūtra* (Toh. 185); *Aṅgulimāliya Sūtra* (Toh. 213); (13) *Mahāmegha Sūtra* (Toh. 232); (14) *Ratnamegha Sūtra* (Toh. 231); (15) *Mahābherihārakaparivarta Sūtra* (Toh. 222); (16) *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (Toh. 121–122); (17) *Praśantaviniścayasamādhi Sūtra* (Toh. 129). Ngag dbang, 79. In addition to these core sūtras, two sets of ten sūtras are regularly cited within zhentong writings and are regarded to be the canonical source literature for Zhentong Madhyamaka. This first set of ten sūtras is the *Essence Sūtras* according to Dolpopa's *Zhu don gnang ba* (Stearns, *Buddha from Dolpo* 178): (1) *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* (Toh. 258); (2) *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (Toh. 142); (3) *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda Sūtra* (Toh. 92); (4) *Mahābherihārakaparivarta Sūtra* (Toh. 222); (5) *Aṅgulimāliya Sūtra* (Toh. 213); (6) *Mahāśūnyatā Sūtra* (Toh. 291); (7) *Tathāgatamahākaraṇānirdeśa Sūtra* (Toh. 147); (8) *Tathāgataguṇajñānācintyaṇiṣayāvatāra Sūtra* (Toh. 185); (9) *Mahāmegha Sūtra* (Toh. 232); (10) *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (Toh. 121–122). The second set of ten sūtras is called *Sūtras on the Definitive Meaning*: (1) *Five Hundred Stanza Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Toh. 15); (2) *Chapter Requested by Maitreya* (contained in Toh. 9); (3) *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Toh. 44, text no. 45); (4) *Praśantaviniścayasamādhi Sūtra* (Toh. 129); (5) *Ratnamegha Sūtra* (Toh. 231); (6) *Suvarṇaprabhā Sūtra* (Toh. 556); (7) *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra* (Toh. 106); (8) *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Toh. 107); (9) *Jñānālokālaṃkāra Sūtra* (Toh. 100); (10) *Buddhavaṣaṣaka Sūtra* (Toh. 44).

25. According to Common Madhyamaka reasoning, anything arising in dependence cannot exist ultimately. See Mathes, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* 168–171.

26. MSA IX.37 (40₁₃₋₁₄): “Even though suchness is undifferentiated in all [living beings], in its purified form it is the state of the Tathāgata. Therefore all living beings have the ‘nature’ (*garbha*) of the [Tathāgata]” (*sarveṣāṃ aviśiṣṭāpi tathatā śuddhim āgatā / tathāgatavṇam tasmāc ca tadgarbhāḥ sarvadehinaḥ //*).

27. RGV I.148 (71₅₋₆): “Its nature being unchangeable, sublime, and pure, suchness is illustrated by a piece of gold” (*prakṛter avikāritvāt kalyāṇatvād viśuddhitāḥ /*

hemamaṇḍalakaupamyam tathatāyām udāhṛtam //). The commentary on this verse is as follows (RGVV 71₇₋₈): “Although the mind is accompanied by limitless phenomena that are defilements or suffering, it itself does not undergo change on account of its natural luminosity. This is why it is called suchness, for it will never become something else, any more than sublime gold will” (*yac cittam [tad?] aparyantakleśaduḥkhadharmānugatam api prakṛtiprabhāsvaratayā vikāraṃ na bhajate [?]^a kalyāṇasavarṇavad ananyathā^b bhāvārthena tathatety ucyate /*), *Ratnagotravibhāḡavyākhyā*.

^aJohnston edition: *-vikārānudar̥ter ataḥ*; ^bJohnston edition: *ananyathā-*. As for the corrections, see Schmithausen, “Ratnagotravibhāḡa” 156.

28. It should be noted that neither the *Ratnagotravibhāḡa* nor the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāḡa* make direct use of three-nature terminology.

29. See Takasaki, *Study on the Ratnagotravibhāḡa*, and Schmithausen, “Ratnagotravibhāḡa.”

30. See Mathes, *Direct Path* 1–2.

31. Personal communication.

32. There is also a commentary on the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāḡa* by Vasubandhu, of which a Sanskrit fragment has survived. For an edition, translation, and analysis of this commentary, see Mathes, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāḡa*.

33. See Mathes, *A Fine Blend*.

34. See Mathes, *Direct Path* 25–33.

35. Roerich, *Blue Annals* 347.

36. See Tatz, “Maitrīgupta” 698.

37. The *Dharmadharmatāvibhāḡakārikā* (ll. 18–19 of the Tibetan translation) is quoted in *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvalī*, 432.10–13, while *Ratnagotravibhāḡa* I.9 is summarized in *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvalī* 478.11.

38. The verses II.95c–II.97b (*Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvalī*, 537.4–7) are nearly identical with *Ratnagotravibhāḡa* I.151–52.

39. See Mathes, “Pith Instructions” 304–306.

40. In contextualizing Nāgārjuna’s *Chos dbyings bstod pa* within the corpus of Jonang literature, Seyfort Ruegg writes in “Le *Dharmadhātustava*” 463: “Et l’école tibétaine des Jo nañ pa est effectivement allée jusq’ à opposer la *svabhāvaśūnyatā* (*rañ stoñ*), qui est enseignée par les traités scolastiques (*rigs tshogs*) de Nāgārjuna et qu’ils considèrent comme une Vacuité de destruction (*chad stoñ*), à la *śūnyatā* «véritable»—c’est-à-dire la Vacuité des seuls facteurs relatifs et hétérogènes à l’Absolu (*gžan stoñ*)—enseignée dans les hymnes (*bstod tshogs*) de Nāgārjuna. Ainsi, selon les Jo nañ pa, l’enseignement des Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra et du *rigs tshogs* relative au *rañ stoñ* «nihiliste» est intentionnel (*ābhīprāyika*) et de sens indirect (*neyārtha*), et c’est la théorie du *gžan stoñ* des Sūtra du troisième Cycle enseignant le *garbha* (*sññ poi mdo*) et du *bstod tshogs* qui est de sens direct et certain (*nītārtha*).”

41. The attribution of the *Dharmadhātustava* to Nāgārjuna has been uncontested throughout Tibetan intellectual history. DhS 20–22: *agnīśaucaṃ^a yathā vastraṃ malinaṃ vividhair malaiḥ / agnimadhye yathākṣiptaṃ malaṃ dagdhaṃ na vastratā // evaṃ prabhāsvaraṃ cittaṃ malinaṃ rāgajair malaiḥ / jñānāgninā malaṃ dagdhaṃ na dagdhaṃ tat prabhāsvaraṃ // śūnyatāhārakāḥ sūtrā ye kecid bhāṣitā jinaiḥ / sarvais taiḥ kleśavyāvṛttir naiva dhātuvināśanam //*.

^aSeyfort Ruegg, *Dharmadhātustava* 466, has *agnih śaucaṃ* and translates: “Le feu étant purété . . .” which is syntactically problematic.

42. Nāgārjuna’s *Collection on Reasoning* (*Rigs tshogs*) includes six logical works on Madhyamaka: (1) “A Precious Garland of Advice for a King” (*Rājaparīkathārātñā-*

vali, *Rgyal po la gdam bya bar in po che'i phreng ba*); (2) "Reversing Objections" (*Vigrahavyāvartanikārikā*, *Rtsod pa bzlog pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*); (3) "Seventy Verses on Emptiness" (*Sūnyatāsaptatikārikā*, *Stong pa nyid bdun cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*); (4) "Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning" (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikārikā*, *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*); (5) "The Elegantly Woven Scripture" (*Vaidalyasūtranāma*, *Zhib mo rnam par 'thag zhes bya ba'i mdo*); (6) "The Root Verses on the Madhyamaka" (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'u*). These six works on logic are contrasted to Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Hymns* (*Btsod tshogs*) that includes the *Dharmadhātustava*. On these two collections, Seyfort Ruegg, *Dharmadhātustava* 448–449, and Seyfort Ruegg, *Madhyamaka School* 34–35. For Dolpopa's writings on unraveling Nāgārjuna's intent, see Dolpopa ('Dzam thang), *Ri chos* 252–261.

43. In later zhentong literature, this is commonly referred to as *sūtra zhentong* (*mdo'i gzhan stong*). See the chapter on Khenpo Lodro Drakpa by Sheehy in the current volume for further discussion.

44. In his attempt to discredit the Mind-Only teaching and in the process also the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, Candrakīrti refers in his auto commentary to the *Madhyamakāvātāra* (MA VI.95) to a verse in the second chapter of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS II.123), which demonstrates for him the intentional character of "mind-only": "Just as a physician provides medicine for the sick, so the Buddhas teach mind-only to sentient beings" (LAS, 49₂₋₃; *āture āture yadvad bhiṣag dravyaṃ prayacchati / buddhā hi tadvat sattvānāṃ cittamātraṃ vadanti vai //*). This verse indeed suggests that the mind-only teaching is being given with a purpose. But according to Yogācāra hermeneutics, the ability to discern a purpose does not entail that a statement has provisional meaning. Moreover, the following verse (LAS II.124), which has not been quoted by Candrakīrti, sheds a different light on the issue: "[This mind-only teaching] is an object neither of philosophers nor of the Śrāvakas. / The masters (i.e., the Buddhas) teach [it] by drawing on their own experience" (LAS, 49₄₋₅; *tārkikāṅām aviṣayaṃ śrāvakāṅām na caiva hi / yaṃ deśayanti vai nāthāḥ pratyātmagatigocaram //*). In other words, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* takes mind-only as something that can only be experienced by the Buddhas.

45. LAS, 75₁₋₅; *bhagavān etad avocat / sūnyatā sūnyateti mahāmate parikalpitasvabhāvapadam etat / parikalpitasvabhāvābhiniveśena punar mahāmate sūnyatānutpādābhāvādvayaniḥsvabhāvābhāvāvadīno bhavanti /*. For a detailed discussion, see Mathes, "Gzhan stong Model" 195–198.

46. The Jonangpas exclude from the perfect nature the unmistakable (*aviparyāsa*) wisdom cultivated on the path. The perfect nature thus is restricted to its unchangeable aspect (*nirvikāra*), since in an absolutely permanent and atemporal buddhahood or buddha-nature (both are ontologically the same for the Jonangpas) there is no room for it (see Mathes, "Twenty-One Differences" 288).

47. Dolpopa, *Jo nang ri chos* 150: "Since it has been said that the dharmatā [or] perfect [nature], which is empty of the imagined and dependent, ultimately exists, the ultimate is well established as being *gzhan stong* only" (*kun btags dang gzhan dbang gis stong pa'i chos nyid yongs grub don dam du yod par gsungs pa'i phyir don dam gzhan stong nyid du legs par grub po /*).

48. Dolpopa, *Jo nang ri chos* 446–447: "The dharmakāya is free from mental fabrications throughout beginningless time. Because of recognizing it as being free from mental fabrications, it is truly established" (*chos sku de ni gdod nas spros dang bral / spros dang bral ngo shes pas bden par grub /*).

49. Dolpopa's definition of ultimate truth in *Jo nang ri chos* 258: "Ultimate truth means that it is true ultimately, and not on the level of apparent [truth]" (*don dam bden pa gang yin pa de don dam du bden gyi kun rdzob tu bden pa ma yin*).