

---

# THE ART OF IMAGINATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF *PRAMĀṆA* AND *SAMAYA*:

## Normative Epistemology and Tantric Ethics in Early Philosophical Vajrayāna

Dominic D. Z. Sur, Utah State University

---

Keywords: *Vajrayāna*, *Buddhism*, *philosophy*, *tantra*, *epistemology*, *samaya*

**Abstract:** *The practice of Vajrayāna is predicated on a worldview different from that which frames classical Buddhist teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths. While classical theory and praxis are structured by the inexorability of dissatisfaction, suffering, and the like, the theory and practice of Vajrayāna is, on the other hand, organized around the tantric view of purity. Buddhist thinkers in Tibet, most especially those associated with Tibet's Nyingma (rnying ma) or Old School of Buddhism, have produced a rich and understudied current of tantric philosophy advancing the authority, validity, and rationality of the tantric view. To wit, this paper, the first in a series on philosophical Vajrayāna, examines the text, Establishing Appearance as Divine (Snang ba lhar bsgrub pa) by Rongzom (fl. 11th–12th c.). It is our earliest documented instance of a Tibetan “tantric pramāṇa”—that is, an approach characterized by the philosophical integration of exoteric philosophical thought and esoteric ritual and ideology. As such, and in contrast to more narrowly focused studies of Tibetan ritual or Tibetan philosophy, this paper details the form, content, and context of Rongzom’s tantric pramāṇa or epistemological discourse in terms of both classical epistemology and Buddhist Tantra. This study thus sheds light on the relationship envisioned between ritual and philosophy in traditions of Vajrayāna. In concluding remarks, after a survey of the role of pramāṇa in Vajrayāna practice traditions, this paper argues that, in classic vāda-śāstra style, the purpose of Establishing Appearance as Divine is less about the supposed perspicacity of propositional and epistemological logic and “right view” than it is about authorizing the ideology behind a practical epistemology of samaya.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 19th-century reforms associated with Ju Mipham, Nyingma philosophy has emphasized its traditional use of normative epistemological discourse (*pramāṇa*) in the service of validating the tantric view of primordial or timeless purity.<sup>1</sup> Mipham traces this practice to *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Snang ba lhar bsgrub pa*), a short commentary, attributed to the translator Rongzom (*rong zom* fl. 11th–12th c.), on a ninth-century work ascribed to Padmasambhava that systematizes material drawn mostly from the 13th chapter of the premier scripture of the Nyingma, *Secret Essence Tantra* (*Guhyagarbha Tantra*).<sup>2</sup> Mipham’s own text on Nyingma views, *Precious Beacon of Certainty* (*Nges shes rin po che sgron me*), describes the Old School practice of setting tantric *pramāṇa* to the task of validating the inseparability of the two truths qua primordial purity as the distinctive provenance of Old School Vajrayāna philosophy, a practice traced to *Establishing Appearance as Divine*:



Naturally occurring gnosis itself is the epistemological warrant  
 Accessing the coalescence of one truth, the way of things;  
 Apart from ignorance alone,  
 There exists nothing to be rid of—just ignorance;  
 For that reason, this approach to *pramāṇa*  
*Establishing* the nature of all *appearance as divine*,  
 Of the tradition of early translations alone,  
 Is the lion’s roar of good explanation  
 Of the all-knowing Rongzom *paṇḍita*.<sup>3</sup>

An 11th- or 12th-century work, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* was composed in a time when Buddhist Tibet was animated by a ferocious absorption of and interest in the knowledge and cultural cachet associated with (1) esoteric rituals of Vajrayāna and (2) normative Indian logico-epistemology (*tshad ma*, *pramāṇa*). Tibetan authors married the two trends, thus yoking classical Indian logic and epistemology to the task of warranting, validating, and authorizing—which need not be the same thing as proving something in a way that is logically obvious or adjudicating it as rationally undeniable—the Vajrayāna worldview.<sup>4</sup>

## THE BUDDHIFIED WORLDVIEW OF VAJRAYĀNA

The worldview animating Vajrayāna meditation is different from the typical karma-saṃsāra-mokṣa worldview structuring most classical Buddhist doctrines.<sup>5</sup> In Vajrayāna, for example, instead of conditioning and suffering driven by the three poisons of ignorance, attachment, and aversion, what is considered to be the underlying dynamic of being is the omnipresence of awakening and sentience as an expression of timeless awareness or primordial gnosis. Reality is rooted in awakening, not suffering. The body, the mind, and the world along with its resources are presented differently as well. In Vajrayāna practice, rather than a world of suffering to be rid of, one sees oneself in the form of a buddha,<sup>6</sup> in a buddha’s environment filled with a buddha’s resources, and acting as a buddha.<sup>7</sup> In the early Dzokchen (*rdzogs chen*) of Rongzom, the ordinary dualistic mind—and everything it experiences, whether positive (virtuous, pure, etc.) or negative (nonvirtuous, impure, etc.)—is not impure and karmic but pure and buddhic. Such a “tantric view of purity” is key for the practice of Vajrayāna.<sup>8</sup>

Rongzom contrasts Vajrayāna, meaning “indestructible” or “adamantine vehicle” of the tantras, with a “dialectical vehicle” (*mtshan nyid theg pa*, *lakṣanayāna*) of the sūtras that includes *śrāvaka*, *pratyeka*, and nontantric bodhisattva paths.<sup>9</sup> Vajrayāna, known also as “the vehicle of secret mantra” (*gsang sngags kyi theg pa*, [\**guhya*]*mantrayāna*<sup>10</sup>), is sometimes referred to as “the resultant vehicle” (*’bras bu’i theg pa*, *phalayāna*) in contrast to “the causal vehicle” (*rgyu’i theg pa*, *hetuyāna*) of exoteric Mahāyāna,<sup>11</sup> the latter phrase emphasizing the fact these traditions are steeped in path models predicated upon causality as a means for religious fulfillment (transformation).<sup>12</sup> In contrast, when Vajrayāna is described as “the resultant vehicle” by virtue of its supposedly superior methods (the tantric view of purity sometimes counted among them<sup>13</sup>), it is gesturing toward so-called taking the result—the perfection of Buddhahood and, as it were, *how things look from there*—“as the path” (*’bras bu lam khyer*).<sup>14</sup>

As is well known, Vajrayāna is supposed to be transmitted and practiced in secret. This is because *inter alia* it is easy to misunderstand.<sup>15</sup> Misunderstanding, here, does not just impede practice. Practice of Vajrayāna based in misunderstanding brings profound metaphysical harms to oneself and others.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, many traditional Tibetan presentations (e.g., *lam rim* literature) stipulate a systematic and rational understanding of a variety of path models as a vital prerequisite for success on the path.<sup>17</sup> To avoid the metaphysical harm derivative of incorrect practice, classical Tibetan exegesis exhorts the cultivation of a rationalistic comprehension of the whole of the presentation of Buddhist practice<sup>18</sup> with Vajrayāna as the culmination.<sup>19</sup> However, some traditions, lineages, or teachers may deny any soteriological role for logic;<sup>20</sup> still, others organize the path around the clarifications of logic and supposed perspicacity of epistemology.<sup>21</sup> This may also lead to a rationally derived sectarian conviction in the supremacy of the Buddhist religion.<sup>22</sup>

For those emphasizing the integration of logico-epistemology along the path, “mere belief,” the “faith” (*dad pa*, *śrāddha*) of religion, may be insufficient for success in practice. Meditative realization of emptiness may be necessary yet insufficient for awakening—that is, an incomplete approach to the path.<sup>23</sup>

The tension between faith and reason is notable in Buddhism. In the broadest terms, Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy grapples, on one hand, with the emphasis on developing a profound faith (*dad pa*, *śrāddhā*) and confidence or trust (*vid ches*, *pratyaya*) in the Buddha’s teachings, such as the doctrine of emptiness (*stong nyid*, *śūnyatā*), which points toward an ineffable and nonpropositional reality that is, by definition, beyond the propositions ascribable via reason. On the other hand, texts, authors, and traditions have also emphasized rationality as a means to realize that reality.<sup>24</sup> Resolution of this tension in classical terms may position faith as the inspiration to engage the path and reason as a tool critical to its completion. Both, then, are ultimately seen as provisional, based in culture (i.e., convention), and ultimately jettisoned in the face of the innate purity, said in tantras like *Secret Essence* (*Guhyagarbha*), to be at the root of all perceptible appearances (*snang ba*).<sup>25</sup>

This problem is particularly meaningful in the context of Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* epistemology. For the so-called Prāmāṇika,<sup>26</sup> rationality (*rigs pa*, *yukti*) is synonymous with rational validity or reasoned argument (*rigs pa*, *nyāya*);<sup>27</sup> rationality only applies to the empirical (*don mthong ba*, *drṣṭārtha*) and does not apply to the metaphysical (*don ma mthong ba*, *adrṣṭa*), which is considered the province of scriptural or verbal authority (*āgama*). Thus, Eltschinger writes, Dharmakīrti and his Indian followers “sharply contrast *yukti* and *āgama*, reason(ing) and scriptural/verbal authority” and treat “proper scriptural objects” as being beyond either perception of inference.<sup>28</sup> Thus, scriptural and verbal authority, rather than rationality, adjudicate metaphysical claims. In a circular turn, however, the Prāmāṇikas presumed that the validity of verbal and scriptural statements, too, must be assessed (*parīkṣā*, *vicāra*) via reasoning because, as per the classical position, neither scripture nor statements are authoritative in and of themselves. Their reliability (*bslu ba med pa*, *avisamvāda*) “concerning transempirical matters is to be inferred, or, better perhaps, transferred” when empirical matters are rationally established as reliable; and when a scripture is taken as reliable, that comes down to a rational assessment—even if the subject is metaphysical.<sup>29</sup> This philosophical procedure is due, in part, to the fact *pramāṇa* discourse is pan-Indian in context (i.e., used by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike). It becomes necessary because, in that context, a non-Buddhist will not be expected to assent to the authority of Buddhist

scriptural statements without putatively neutral criteria, such as culturally acceptable chains of conceptual association leading to some supposedly inevitable state of affairs obvious to all parties (i.e., reasoning).

The issue becomes more complicated when the scripture is esoteric and largely disinterested in the empirically based observations structuring the classical logic that govern inferences concerning, say, smoke on a mountain pass or the fact a given thing is a product. In this case, there is a tension between scholastic rationality and the esoteric claims in tantra. For example, if there are no empirical statements one can use to adjudicate a scripture's reliability with respect to nonempirical claims, such as asserting that reality is divine, what criteria can be used to determine whether or not the claims are reliable and achievable in practical terms?<sup>30</sup> For the historian of Buddhism Ronald Davidson, the use of epistemological logic in the tantric context is a public performance meant to shift an audience's center of allegiance of authority from the disembodied and distant personage of the Buddha to the physically present body of the tantric master.<sup>31</sup>

The complete and genuine practice of Vajrayāna requires, though, a totalizing divine vision of beings in the world and all the stuff composing it.<sup>32</sup> As we see below, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* does not assert a requirement for the rational comprehension of the Buddhist teachings writ large or the realization of emptiness in the classical sense—or even the idea that the esoteric view of purity can be logically established with the same certainty as, say, inferential knowledge of fire on a mountain pass. Instead, it asserts the reality and validity of the tantric commitments (*samaya*) to pure view that are taken by all those initiated into Tibet's highest practices, Vajrayāna. That pure view, in favor of seeing reality as buddhic and nirvanic in nature, is a different perspective than what is advocated in nontantric path models, where the recognition of the impermanent and dissatisfying nature of corrupt samsaric phenomena instigates their rejection and abandonment (cf. the fourth Noble Truth). The tantric view is focused on the timeless perfection of all phenomena and their buddhic nature. Such a view primes exercitants for the Vajrayāna practice style grounded in and authorized by the Vajrayāna worldview, which is structured by the tantric view of purity.

## ON THE TANTRIC COMMITMENT TO THE ENDURING IMAGINATION OF PURITY

In his *Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments* (*Dam tshig mdo rgyas*),<sup>33</sup> Rongzom connects faith in the dharma and a pure view of the teacher, which are *attitudes* not forsaken by insiders even when one's life is at stake, to a set of 13 root commitments shared between exoteric and esoteric Mahāyāna.<sup>34</sup> The practice of the tantric view of purity is an art of the imagination, initially. Its practice is not unlike an acculturation, assimilation, and enframing, which along with *bodhicitta*, is the root of Vajrayāna's ethical commitment. In the resultant vehicle of Vajrayāna, one practices the fruit of the path—that is, being awakened—which is initially rooted in the imagination and motivated by compassion. The following passage from his *Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments* begins by summarizing the primacy of guarding in this context. This guarding is key to success in practice and realized through engagement with tantric authority and authoritative scripture (*lung*), the guru's ad hominem pith instructions (*man ngag*), and rationality that is ideally guided by a direct intellect or “forthright imagination” (*blo gzu bo*), which is a type of imagination attuned to the view of primordial purity.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, rather than any supposed

perspicacity of logical representation, tantric logic is organized around the confidence it bestows, confers, or otherwise empowers upon the insider with respect to pure view.<sup>36</sup> In *Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments*, it states:

In sum, in this [Vajrayāna] practice of enjoining deity to one's ordinary body, speech, and mind, being based in *bodhicitta* is the bedrock (*rdo gzhi*) of all *samaya*, as is commonly known in both *kriyā* and yoga [systems of tantra]. Thus, it is proclaimed in [*The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi, Vajrapāṇyabhiṣeka Tantra*] scripture itself that [these] are established through pith instructions, scripture, and reasoning.<sup>37</sup>

The through line connecting the three tantric *pramāṇa* or epistemological warrants of the Vajrayāna to divine appearance is set out in an Indian tantra, *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi*,<sup>38</sup> which states that what makes the guru's pith instruction a reliable (*mi bslu ba*) *pramāṇa* is the successful outcome that occurs as a result of practicing said instructions to the letter—that is, in accordance with the guru's instructions:<sup>39</sup>

If one asks: what, in that context, is pith instruction? In this case, it concerns a Buddhist master and a student. When the student, with a qualified Buddhist master, practices [the master's] pith instructions to the word (*tshig bzhin*), the [pith instruction] is a *pramāṇa* or “valid knowledge warrant” (*tshad ma*). That *pramāṇa* is pith instruction.<sup>40</sup>

Teaching on rational dharma pertains to either dharma of scripture or dharma of manifest realization, both of which are qualified by reasoning.<sup>41</sup> When we ask about epistemological warrant (*tshad ma, pramāṇa*), here, *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi* identifies teachings that stick over time—proclamations of the Awakened One composed from words whose meanings are not significantly changed over time—that are therefore incontrovertible epistemological warrants for the world of pure, naturally timeless divinity and, in this context, considered dharma of scripture.<sup>42</sup> Manifestly realized dharma, on the other hand, is manifest realization, direct perception, and the attainment of the fruit of what is called *reality* (*chos nyid, dharmatā*).<sup>43</sup> This type of teaching, Rongzom writes, is formed under the influence of the discourse on valid direct perception. And the reality fabricated in direct perception under the power of discriminating insight is also described vis-à-vis the reasoning of reality and the reasoning of causal reality:<sup>44</sup>

And the practice of the yoga that causes the attainment of that reality, which is proclaimed to be rational, is a *pramāṇa* vis-à-vis reasoning. This teaching, the essence of the path, is asserted to be within the [purview of the] reasoning of causal reality and the reasoning of dependence. And that reality is actually divinity.<sup>45</sup>

There is no proper vessel for the tantric teachings devoid of a firm basis in *bodhicitta*. A practice, such as deity yoga, is an ethical practice when animated by *bodhicitta*.<sup>46</sup> In support of this view, Rongzom cites *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi* to explain the critical incorporation of compassion at the junction of pure view and ethics in the practice of tantra.<sup>47</sup>

In [*The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi*] Tantra itself, it is taught:<sup>48</sup>

Śāntamati, at the time of practicing *bodhicitta*, the door to secret mantra practice lies in one's [imagining] oneself embodied in divine form. If imagined with certainty, [divine] pride will arise; and whether on the go, standing, or seated, it will manifest. When imperturbable, [such a pure view of oneself as divine] qualifies the ethical discipline.<sup>49</sup>

Having centered the link between tantric ethics, *bodhicitta*, and the divine pride associated with the practice of pure view—imagining everything as divine—Rongzom cites *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi* (in language buttressing its authority in matters of tantric ethics) on how such a practice plays out in the perception of the exercitant. And he uses a notable term here: “pure (lucid) imagination” or “pure (vivid) intellect.”<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, whenever a type of pure (lucid) imagination merges the three doors [i.e., ordinary body, speech, and mind] with divine buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind, any movement of limbs is *mudrā* and any utterance is mantra. That alone is proclaimed as the grounding of ethical discipline, for it is proclaimed [in *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi Tantra*]:<sup>51</sup>

Mañjuśrī, in that case, a son or daughter of good lineage seeing the *maṇḍala*, generating of *bodhicitta*, skilled in the method of compassionate mind and the secret mantra teaching of the way of syllables, should think about this in the following manner: there is no imagination outside speech; there is no speech outside of imagination; the imagination as such is speech and speech per se is imagination; there is no divine form outside the imagination. The imagination as such is speech; speech per se is imagination—and divine form as such is imagination and speech per se is divine form, as well.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, it is conviction in the view that ordinary phenomena and awakened phenomena cannot in reality be separated that constitutes the attainment of a pure imagination, so-called.<sup>53</sup>

When possessed of pure imagination, all images at all times are [pure]: one's own body is perceived as equivalent to divine form; one's speech is perceived as equivalent to divine speech, and one's imagination is perceived as divine imagination, [all of which] pertains to a meditative state of equipoise.<sup>54</sup>

As is stated in *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi*, there is nothing else to the practice of secret mantra but the triad of divinized bodily movement (i.e., *mudrā*), divine speech (i.e., mantra), and divine mind (i.e., the tutelary deity or *devatā*), each of which correlates to a valid epistemological warrant (e.g., scripture as buddha-body, pith instructions as buddha-speech, and tutelary deity as dialectic rationality).<sup>55</sup> In this context, there are two types of divinity. The first is the fruit of the essence, which is called the realization of reality; the second is the fruit of ripening, a category governed by convention only (*tha snyad du ltung ba*; literally: “falling into convention”).<sup>56</sup> As Rongzom states:

Both what is governed by convention and what is the essence of convention are proclaimed to be imagined, etc., which is explained in great depth. In short, in order to penetrate reality, in the method in which the ripening of all various phenomenal features imagined is called the divinity associated with the essence of the fruit, reality is called the divine fruit of the essence such that the incontrovertibility of reality and the means to attain it is proclaimed to be *pramāṇa*.<sup>57</sup>

In this context, the result consists in the realization of the divine fruit of the essence (*'bras bu'i ngo bo'i lha*), which is taught to transcend the scope of worldly direct perception and logical inference.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the *pramāṇa* in the secret mantra approach to the path are described as three types: sublime scripture, sublime pith instruction, and sublime reasoning. These three are incontrovertible with respect to the manifest realization of reality and thus the label *pramāṇa* is established. The sublime object of reasoning in the secret mantra approach to the path is taught to transcend ordinary direct perception and inference, though it is authorized in scripture and by reasoning.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, it is the core of good practice in Vajrayāna to rid oneself of ordinary conceptions about oneself. In the tantric context, one “abandons” the ordinary body in initially imagined divinization. In generating divine pride as a consequence of one’s ethical commitment to remaining in the pure view, the pure vision of primordially pure reality associated with the pure imagination of secret mantra practice is itself a salvific disclosure of reality.<sup>60</sup> With this context in mind, we can more fully appreciate the argument advanced throughout *Establishing Appearance as Divine*.

## THE TANTRIC THESIS OF PURITY

Attributed to the 11th-century translator Rongzom,<sup>61</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* is composed as a short *vāda-śāstra* style essay.<sup>62</sup> As such, it is composed as the type of scholastic-style debate associated with the (later) *pramāṇa* tradition.<sup>63</sup> It stands out as the earliest Tibetan-authored tantric *pramāṇa* text.<sup>64</sup> Not unlike typical *vāda-śāstra*, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* is organized around a primary philosophical position (*dam bca'*, *pratijñā*), which is stipulated at the top of the text as its probandum (*grub par bya ba*, *sādhya*). All subsequent argumentation is, in some measure, evidence or argument in support of authorizing the tantric thesis in logico-epistemological terms, in the tantric context, as we shall see below.

Unlike typical *pramāṇas*, concerned for the most part with forming logical inferences for ordinary but obscured phenomena, such as the presence of fire beyond the line of sight based on the presence of smoke, *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s tantric *pramāṇa* concerns a logical and epistemological authorization of a view espousing tantric purity.<sup>65</sup> In short, everything, whether good or bad, is nothing but awakening. That being the case, there need not be—in fact, cannot be—any effort that produces divine reality; it is always already here and now. The first sentence of *Establishing Appearance as Divine* asserts the tantric thesis:

In the system of the *vajra* vehicle of secret mantra, it is proclaimed that [subject:] all worldly and transcendent phenomena, without distinction, [predicate:] are primordially perfected<sup>66</sup> as the *maṇḍala* of *vajra*-like buddha-body, -speech, and -mind and, as such, [(dis-)analogy:] not akin to something practiced or achieved in the here and now.<sup>67</sup>

Found throughout Rongzom's writings<sup>68</sup> and Old School philosophical Vajrayāna more broadly, the tantric thesis is rooted in discourse around the Old School's premier scripture, *Secret Essence Tantra*. This position prima facie contradicts the path structure associated with the Four Noble Truths, where work along the path rids oneself of suffering and its causes in order to attain an end to suffering. If the five psychophysical aggregates are buddhas (i.e., primordially pure and beyond suffering)<sup>69</sup> and not instances of samsaric suffering, that would contravene the traditional teaching in which aggregates are identified as sources of suffering.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the idea of being already and always perfect rhetorically collapses the path-fruit structure<sup>71</sup> insofar as *being already and always perfect* means there is nothing to be cultivated and brought to fruition (i.e., through practicing the path). This is the reason for the disanalogy: it is "not akin to something practiced or achieved in the here and now."<sup>72</sup> Finally, inasmuch as ordinary conceptions and articulations of body, speech, and mind are instances of conventional truths and the "indestructible" (*vajra*) perfect "abode" (*maṇḍala*) of buddhified aggregates as deities are ultimate truths, the fact all of it is encompassed—for us—as illusory mere appearance<sup>73</sup> collapses the conventional-ultimate binary in any significant ontological or epistemological sense.<sup>74</sup> This collapse thereby structures the tantric view of the inseparability of the two truths, which is only consummated in the Dzokchen approach to the tantric path<sup>75</sup> and which is only debated in the context of mere appearance.<sup>76</sup>

Rongzom's imagined interlocutor instigates *Establishing Appearance as Divine's* philosophical evaluation of the tantric thesis by pointing to the untenable idea of positing primordial perfection in terms of causally produced (i.e., karmic) phenomenological appearance. It contradicts the teaching so well-known in *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā)* teachings that the illusory is empty of reality. That is, anything that does not exist as it appears is, in the end, unreal in any significant sense. How could something that is illusory be considered perfect?

To that [thesis], one could object: "all these phenomena appearing within the experiential domain of sentient beings are not as they appear. They are fictions and, for that reason, not suitable as primordially perfected."<sup>77</sup>

Without equivocation, Rongzom centers the idea of mere appearance. Not only is mere appearance all there is for us to argue about, but all appearance is fiction. Fictions are all we have to talk about. Moreover, the philosophical discourse used in different doctrinal orientations shapes the reality experienced vis-à-vis mere appearance differently.<sup>78</sup>

To that, it is said that not only are they [i.e., mere appearances] just fictions (*'khrul ba*), but there are no other phenomena whatsoever to set forth and demonstrate besides the confusions (*'khrul ba*) of sentient beings. These phenomena, known as *confusing* [or *fictive*] appearances (*'khrul snang*), are it!<sup>79</sup> That being the case, non-Buddhists imagine a self of persons that exists permanently. Some Vaibhāṣikas assume the existence of the person is characterized by impermanence. Some Vaibhāṣikas, along with the Sautrāntikas,



negate the self but insist upon the existence of phenomena such as the empty aggregates and so on. Yogācāra asserts the existence of the characteristics of dependent phenomena that are empty of the imagined, the existence of which is qualified by emptiness. Madhyānikas assume that, ultimately, all phenomena are free from extremes, such as existence and nonexistence, such that conceptual elaborations are totally eliminated. And in the secret mantra approach [to the path], the two types of truth are inseparable, primordially perfected, and so on. Sentient beings set forth and debate their individual views based on the character of shared perceptible appearances; and that is the reason they are not debating about the existence of [some] subject matter other than [illusory] appearance.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, everything that appears in our experience—“phenomena”—is a fiction. In contrast to path models such as that espoused in exegetical writings on *Perfection of Wisdom*, in which the wisdom of insight into reality replaces the clinging of ignorance to unreal illusions, the tantric view jettisons such dualist paradigms.<sup>81</sup> There is no nonfiction element conjured to replace the fiction element, thereby bringing about an awakening element. Rather, everything is fictive appearance; there is nothing we can describe as experience in the mind that is not a fiction; the mind is a realm of fictive appearance only; and the path does not consist in replacing a fiction with a nonfiction in the ordinary mind. Perfection, in this context, is an allusion to the emptiness structuring the very possibility of the existence of anything. It has never been produced, so it is unadulterated by fabrication:

Therefore, all these phenomena that appear pertain to nothing more than confusion/fiction. Further, it is not the case that some nonfiction is established when the fictions are eliminated. Fictions *are* perfected since they are [already and always] totally pure in terms of their essential nature. Since that is so, all phenomena are primordially manifestly complete and perfect.<sup>82</sup>

If a thoroughgoing illusionism seems hard to swallow in the philosophical sense, Rongzom recognizes that and proceeds to double down—to use a popular gambling phrase—on the primacy and supremacy of perceptible illusory appearance. The distinction between a sentient being suffering in saṃsāra and an awakened being in buddhahood are basically the same in both being empty illusions. Therefore, any distinction posited between them constitutes an act of the imagination.<sup>83</sup>

The interlocutor rejects this position in hermeneutical terms, suggesting Rongzom has misinterpreted the import of the teachings. Behind the response is the presumption that because the subject is characterized by its phenomenal attributes (*mtshan ma*), those characteristic signs *must* characterize *some-thing*; there must be some foundation—a bottom—obviating Rongzom’s reductive philosophical fall into a view that wipes away elements animating the soteriological thrust of the classical Buddhist worldview.

Here, one might point out: “although [the tantric thesis is] proclaimed in that manner in scripture, uncertainty about whether it is meant literally or it has some underlying purport means that while it is possible to prove the essential purity of phenomena (*chos*), it is illogical [to assume] that the nature of this subject (*chos can*) appearing as a phenomenal sign is itself primordially perfect. On such a view as that, there would be no basis at all for afflicted states of mind or conditioned existence. There is also no reasoning that would establish such a philosophical position as that!”<sup>84</sup>

There are several points to note here. First, the interlocutor intimates Buddhist hermeneutics and suggests the possibility of reading the tantric thesis as a purely provisional statement, contra Rongzom. Second, the interlocutor’s remark stipulates a classical view espoused in Abhidharma, Perfection of Wisdom, and Madhyamaka texts<sup>85</sup> wherein one of three types of concentration known as the “doors to liberation” (*rnam par thar pa’i sgo*, *vimokṣamukha*) pertains to an absence of any and all phenomenal signs. This meditative state, called “the signlessness” (*mtshan ma med*, *animitta*), corresponds to a pacification of suffering. Here, “signless” refers to a state of peace.<sup>86</sup> Thus, for the interlocutor, the idea that illusion is perfection is absurd since it collapses the classical path-fruit binary structuring the worldview and soteriology behind the Four Noble Truths. Third, a parallel in the Tibetan shows the juxtaposition between “perceived objects” or “phenomena,” which are qualified by natural purity (*ngo bo nyid kyis dag pa*) that is their ultimate nature and the subjectively inflected “object possessor” or “subject” to whom characterized objects appear (*chos can mtshan mar snang ba*). Having framed initial objections against the tantric thesis in terms of pure against impure, thereby complaining about the collapse of the binary structure of the Four Noble Truths, Rongzom launches a discussion about the scope of dialectical philosophy and reasoning in adjudicating the tantric thesis.

## THE SCOPE OF DIALECTICS IN ADJUDICATING PURITY

In the first in a series of passages that follows next, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* offers a nuanced assessment of the role of insight derived from modes of rationality, such as dialectical logic. In short, being sentient is to naturalize one’s experience. In other words, a sentient being naturally assents to the reality of her own experience, which is based in phenomenological appearances that are shaped, at least for philosophers, by the doctrinal or philosophical orientations they embrace. With the nuance, if not equivocation, that sometimes typifies Rongzom’s qualifications, he sets “the significance of the deep and the profound” (*zab cing rgya che ba’i don*), what we call the ultimate truth of things, beyond the reach of our imagination,<sup>87</sup> which includes the jurisdiction of the intellect. Nevertheless, the fact insight does not penetrate the ultimate does not mean there is no place for insight on the path. Yet the soteriological cap on the reach of insight allows Rongzom to assert the primacy of a mode of awakening that need not be organized around rationality. This mode is faith. Faith steeped in the confidence in the validity and authenticity of the scriptural tradition and pith instructions of one’s lineage and guru respectively can convey one to the profound depths of the ultimate truth. In the preceding passage, *chos* qua ultimate object is juxtaposed with *chos can* qua conventional subject. Also, of note here is a shift in juxtaposition. Instead of “phenomena” (*chos*), Rongzom correlates reality (*chos nyid*) with “objects” (*don*)<sup>88</sup> in a way that lends his analysis to the following explanation of reasoning. He writes:

From time immemorial, sentient beings have assumed the validity of the objects appearing within their experience and have offered intellectually confused proofs and refutations [about them], even though dialectics are incapable of proving what is of deep and profound significance. Nevertheless, reality being inconceivable does not mean there is no technique for penetrating [that deeper significance] by means of discriminating awareness. That being the case, it is entirely unproblematic if the devout, accessing [what is of deep and profound significance] through faith alone and having presumed scripture and the teacher's pith instructions to be valid, access [the deep and profound] with confidence.<sup>89</sup>

There are clear limits on the efficacy of attempts to generate insight. Dialectical logic and intellect more broadly, governed as they both are by convention, cannot reach the profound depth of ultimate truth, which lies beyond the jurisdiction of language and ideas. That does not mean, however, that we cannot use insight to dive to some significant depths.<sup>90</sup>

The next passage in *Establishing Appearance as Divine* presents the fourfold logic (*rigs pa rnam pa bzhi, yukti-catuṣṭayam*), which have been the subject of a previous study.<sup>91</sup> The four types of logic are (1) the reasoning of reality (*chos nyid kyi rigs pa, dharmatāyukti*), (2) the reasoning of causal efficacy (*bya ba byed pa'i rigs pa, kāryakāraṇayukti*), (3) the reasoning of dependence (*ltoṣ pa'i rigs pa, apekṣāyukti*), and (4) the reasoning of valid proof (*'thad pa sgrub pa'i rigs pa, upapattisādhanayukti*).<sup>92</sup> The Buddhist roots of the fourfold logic are in the Yogācāra-oriented, *Discourse Unraveling the Intent (Saṃdhiniromocana Sūtra)*,<sup>93</sup> a work labeled “the quintessentially hermeneutical scripture of the Mahāyāna.”<sup>94</sup> By and large, this work is a classic of Yogācāra thought from the third century and crucial to Sanskrit and Tibetan elaborations of esoteric Buddhist philosophy.<sup>95</sup>

## ON THE SCOPE OF TANTRIC PRAMĀṆA

Having contextualized logic and asserted its limited scope and, further, gestured toward the supremacy of faith as a method for awakening, *Establishing Appearance as Divine*'s presentation of the fourfold logic begins by contextualizing classical Buddhist notions of dialectical thinking and the generation of the wisdom of insight. Just because intellectual insight cannot penetrate the depths of reality, that does not mean there is no role for insight in penetrating the depths of reality—that is, “reality being inconceivable does not mean there is no technique for penetrating [the depth and profundity of reality] by means of discriminating awareness.”<sup>96</sup> What role, then, can insight play in establishing the tantric view of purity—that persons and the world are the *maṇḍala* of *vajra* body, speech, and mind itself?

To that, we respond as follows: In secret mantra, the logic setting forth the so-called three types of *pramāṇa*—scripture, pith instructions, and reasoning—in this context, does not contravene the object delimited in a being's discriminating insight based in sublime scripture and pith instruction vis-à-vis the [reasoning of] dependence, activity, or reality.<sup>97</sup>

In the context of the reasoning of reality, which is invoked through pointing toward the ultimate in recognized conventional terms, a type of analogy can prove the tantric thesis. For those for whom the reasoning of reality—that is, the invoking of conventional descriptions of the ultimate—

suffices, the other three types of logic are rendered moot because they are couched in the validity of samsaric conventions and causal conditions. In the simplest terms, just as all worldly and transcendent phenomena are qualified by pure emptiness and thus already perfect *in reality*, so too are the ordinary aggregates a *maṇḍala* of *vajra*-like buddha-body, -speech, and -mind because all phenomena, at their very bottom, are qualified by pure emptiness that is an absence of solid reality, which is an illusion.

What if someone argues it [i.e., the primordial purity of all phenomena qua *maṇḍala*] is not logically established [and therefore] there could be no arriving at [the truth or reality of] it? To that [charge], as well [we say], it is provable in accordance with those [scripture and pith instructions insofar as they are taken as valid], too.<sup>98</sup>

The word “those” (*de dag*) refers to things and words: the Dzokchen scripture and the pith instructions of one’s tantric guru. The argument goes: those with faith in the teaching who have accepted scripture and pith instructions as authentic arrive at what is of deep and profound significance by virtue of their faith alone.<sup>99</sup> Key to this argument is the insider presumption—vowed pledge or commitment—of a pure view.

Those for whom Dzokchen scripture and the guru’s pith instructions are valid and authentic, the tantric thesis asserting the primordial purity of reality is provable through the reasoning of reality, which is said to be the chief type among the fourfold logic evoked through recourse to explicit description of ultimate truth:

The reasoning of reality proves that phenomena are perfected as the *maṇḍala* of *vajra* buddha-body, -speech, and -mind. As it states in sūtra: “form is empty of its own nature. Why? Because that is its nature.” All phenomena consist in purity by nature. Therefore, the reality of phenomena is devoid of any impure quality. Thus, purity of one’s own ordinary body, speech, and mind is one’s own reality, as well; and that purity is perfected. That is why ordinary body, speech, and mind—distinguished in terms of their [ultimate] purity—should be identified [as] the *maṇḍala* of *vajra* buddha-body, -speech, and -mind itself, inseparable [from], without conceptual decoration [with respect to], and completely [inter]penetrating [with, pure buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind].<sup>100</sup> In that way, when proving something in terms of the reasoning of reality, the other three types of reasoning are superfluous. This is because [the reasoning of reality] is the basis of the [other] three, and because it is the main one of them.<sup>101</sup>

The force of this argument rests less on detached, objective rationality than it does upon one’s commitment to the view of emptiness. For those who do not or cannot initially accept the direct pointing toward the ultimate that is the reasoning of reality, they may still infer the tantric thesis by virtue of the reasoning of causal reality. Here, we find two correlations based in common observations in the Vajrayāna world: (1) medicine works; likewise, (2) so does the practice of Vajrayāna.

Others could ask, as well: “Since that reality has not been established for us, are the other types of reasoning needed?” Those can also be established. To wit, the reasoning of causal

activity causes comprehension [of a] cause by means of the thing's effects [i.e., what it does]: just as the observation that medicine brings about vitality and poison brings about death pertains to a comprehension of an agent in terms of its activity, so too does the observation that whosoever meditates upon [body, speech, and mind] as the *maṇḍala* of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind obtains the accomplishment of pure body, speech, and mind prove, via the reasoning of causal activity, that all perceptible phenomena have the nature and power of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind.<sup>102</sup>

The first correlation amounts to the reasoning of causal reality because it is rooted in an observation that medicine heals, which amounts to an inference based in the observation of the work (i.e., healing) of a cause (i.e., medicine). The correlation here is structured around the presumption of necessary relations obtaining between cause and effect, specifically in the context of the activity of an agent: medicine is associated with vitality (positive and tending toward the pure) and poison with disease (negative and tending toward the corrupt). This establishes a clear relationship between an agent (medicine or poison) and its activity (bringing about vitality or death). The second correlation of the analogy extends this correlation structure from the therapeutic powers of medicine to the therapeutic powers of Vajrayāna practice. Just as physical substances as causes have predictable effects, so too do Vajrayāna practices. To be clear, however, the analogy is not *Vajrayāna is like medicine*. The analogy is that *your knowledge that reality is primordially pure is based in your presumption of the efficacy of Vajrayāna practice* (i.e., what tantric meditations, such as deity yoga, do to a person), *not unlike the way your knowledge of medicine is construed in your understanding of what medicine does or what it causes*, knowledge of which is based in the observation of results produced—that is, Buddhists observe realized beings and infer the veracity of Buddhist practices. In this sense, knowledge of *x* is based in *y*. Meditation on the *maṇḍala* of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind is a mode of agency, and the activity consists in the accomplishment of budda-body, -speech, and -mind. The analogy warrants the inference that primordial purity, which is described here in terms of recognizing all perceptible phenomena possess “the nature and power of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind qualifying all apparent phenomena,” is based in the common presumption among insiders that the practice works because phenomena are empty and are therefore pure.<sup>103</sup> The force of this analogy is rooted in the presumed supremacy of Vajrayāna vis-à-vis the common perception—or perhaps we should say presumption—that deity yoga works. Dedicated and trained practitioners achieve awakening and its attendant visionary experiences of the self and the world as consisting in the primordially perfect elements of buddha *maṇḍalas*.

Since both the reasoning of reality and the reasoning of causal activity depend on the veracity of Buddhist teachings, both types of logic attempt inferences that are based in the intentions of people who want to practice the Buddhist path and therefore both types amount to so-called scripturally based inference rather than inferences made through the force of objective reality. Rather than being a classical *pramāṇa* focused on common but obscure conventions and structured in an outward-facing orientation (as a pan-Indian debate style), the force of scripturally based logic—the criteria structuring the validity of the tantric inference—is only accepted by insiders.<sup>104</sup> In the Indian Buddhist context, the validity of such “scriptural inference is in no way” given in the force of fact or *vastubala-pravṛtta*, the objective:

Scriptural inference, as is amply mentioned in Dharmakīrti and his commentators, depends upon *abhyupagama*, “acceptance,” and that in itself is probably sufficient to show that it is not objective. At any rate, as if that were not enough, they explicitly tell us that it is not objective and not certain.<sup>105</sup>

According to *Establishing Appearance as Divine*, however, the primordially pure power and nature of phenomena are not simply inferred on the basis of scripture without any recourse and basis in fact. The factual force that is brought to bear in such arguments, however, may be so subtle as to not be immediately recognized as such. An inference, though, may be formed via the reasoning of causal reality. Here, the object of inference—the primordial purity of phenomena, such as the aggregates, faculties, and so on—is recognized *after* having it explained through recourse to an analogy about a precious jewel unrecognized *as* a jewel. This analogy suggests that reality, like an unappreciated gemstone, contains extraordinary qualities that need be disclosed or revealed by means of recognition, reverence, and an understanding of how the world works. This perspective asserts a deeper engagement with the ordinary and a recognition of its inherent value (i.e., pure divinity) as extraordinary. The tantric thesis

is not validated by [conceptual] proof alone without relying upon the force of fact.<sup>106</sup> Just as someone who has found a precious jewel, but has hitherto made no occasion for using it, may not recognize it as such. And having set it aside as insignificant and not seen its qualities, later someone with knowledge of jewel types may point it out. Because of that, having cleaned it up and honored it, the extraordinary qualities emerge from the jewel from that point on. Like the determination of it as an actual jewel by means of observation of its function [i.e., the way it works in the world as a valued object; the value/significance (cf. Tibetan *don*; Sanskrit *artha*) it *evinces/causes/brings about*], if the ordinary body, speech, and mind are not recognized and revered as divine, their qualities will not be observed; and when recognized and revered as such, qualities are observed within [the body qua] basis itself for that reason.<sup>107</sup>

Primordially pure reality, like a precious jewel and modern, unpegged financial currencies, has value only insofar as it is recognized externally. Yet that value has an inherent worth that may not be immediately apparent without a preceding direct experience or insight. In this way, there is a direct connection between the emergence of the truth, veneration, and recognition. This is not unlike the way Vajrayāna practice can be seen as a recognition and veneration of oneself as divine (i.e., deity yoga).

*Establishing Appearance as Divine* presents the reasoning of dependence, in which effect is understood by means of cause, in terms of Yogācāra: all phenomena—everything in our experience—comes down to phenomenological appearance rather than some external reality. Thus, even the primordial purity of reality comes down to mental appearance (i.e., the mind qua apparent object) understood as a result (i.e., caused). The reasoning of dependence participates in a sliding scale of reality. In this context, the authenticity of any apparent object is greater to the degree that it is perceived as primordially pure. The more primordially pure a perceptible object appears, the more real or authentic it is.

The reasoning of dependence (*ltos pa'i rigs pa*) also establishes it. In those cases, the cause of a thing brings about the realization of its effects. That establishes production. In dependence upon a seed, there is a sprout.<sup>108</sup> It is used to validate conventions: the convention “bad” is validated in dependence upon the convention “good.” Similarly, all perceptible phenomena are phenomenal appearances of mind as such (*sems nyid kyi rnam par snang ba*). Thus, all pure and impure dimensions of experience are mental effects generated in dependence upon mental causes. Therefore, all pure and impure dimensions of experience are mental outcomes (“effects”) generated via karmic predisposition; both are established as authentic. As to designating which one is mistaken and which is un mistaken, that is established by the reasoning on dependence. Thus, it is certainly to be realized that the pure domain of experience is the authentic perceptible appearance.<sup>109</sup>

Summing up the presentation—and *pramāṇa*, or the reasoning of logical proof, has thus far been omitted—*Establishing Appearance as Divine* declares that successful use of the reasoning of reality, causal reality, and dependence nullifies the requirement for *pramāṇa* logic. The logic and discourse used by Prāmāṇikas has itself a smaller scope than Buddhist notions of causality and reality, which encompass the proper function of all reasoning of logical proof.<sup>110</sup> Also notable is Rongzom’s characterization of the reasoning of logical proof as coarser by comparison to classic *pramāṇa* reasoning because the latter only shows evidence (e.g., “there’s smoke, so . . .”); it does not directly disclose (e.g., scripture, pith instructions, and the above three reasonings).<sup>111</sup> Thus begins the framing of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s presentation of *pramāṇa* in which Rongzom shows his mastery of the subject while reiterating for his audience the relative coarseness of the *pramāṇa* mode of discourse relative to authentic tantric *pramāṇa* of scripture, which in some sense is what this argument is all about: scripture’s authenticity and primacy on the path.

For those of inferior faculties, the reasoning itself is [required] to be established in advance to assess the meaning it constructs through the introduction of (i) a logical subject of an inference (*chos can, dharmin*), (ii) something to prove [about that commonly accepted subject]<sup>112</sup>—the predicated] property to be proved (*bsgrub bya, sādhyā*), a comparison via (iii) analogical example (*dpe, upamā*); and the determination (*nges pa*) of (iv) pervasion relations (*khyab pa, vyāpti*) [obtained between inferential reasons (*hetu*) and the property predicated (*sādhyā*)], [including] counter-pervasion relations (*ldog khyab, vyatirekavyāpti*), [all of which are elements that] must obtain. Yet, questions [may linger, such as when it is said]: “inasmuch as that alone is proof for some people and insofar as there are some for whom no confidence comes about through validation via the reasoning of logical proof itself, prove it [differently—via scriptural proof]!”<sup>113</sup>

The following scripturally based syllogism is, we read, formulated in a way satisfying to proponents of tantric *pramāṇa* and classical *pramāṇa*. It offers a structural analog that Rongzom will unpack below in a complex discussion based in arguments around the differences in the perceptions of humans and hungry ghosts. Found in a quatrain of classical Mahāyāna poetry from *Ornament of the Light of Awareness That Enters the Domain of All Buddhas* (*Viṣayāvatārajñānālokaṇkāra Sūtra*), it states:

Eternally unborn phenomena are *tathāgata*,  
 All phenomena have similarities with the *sugata*;  
 Yet, the intellectually immature fix on features,  
 Wandering in a world of phenomena that do not exist.

In that context, the logical argument is that “eternally unborn phenomena are *tathāgata*.” The logical subject of the syllogism is “all phenomena.” The comparison via analogical example is “like the *sugata*.” As for the probandum, “all phenomena are *tathāgata*” is to be proved . . . That being the case, on this view, the proof is this: [the subject,] all phenomena [the predicate] are *tathāgata* [i.e., consist in suchness] because [the reason] eternally unborn phenomena are *tathāgata* [i.e., consist in suchness]<sup>114</sup> like [the example] the bliss-gone ones (*sugata*) of the three times.<sup>115</sup>

An instructive ethical tension plays out here in the epistemological context. The syllogism uses scripture as criteria to validate a metaphysical claim based in the theoretical presumption that emptiness and pure appearance are two sides of the same coin. It is not so much based in the veracity of an empirical convention as in conventional instability under deconstructive analysis. Recall that scriptural inference is a pseudo-inference, with force only insofar as there is “acceptance” (*khas len*, *abhyupagama*) on behalf of both parties concerning the argument’s underlying validating criteria—that is, *sarvadharmāsūnyatā tathāgatā*. This is the point on which the force of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s argument turns. For the proponent of the view that emptiness is the way things are, particularly for someone with *samaya*, the validity and authority of this scriptural syllogism cannot be nullified by appeal to contradictory logic or contrary conventional direct perception, the validity of which turns on *not* asserting (*khas mi len*) pure view that is at the center of *samaya* via such a syllogism even given direct perception of legitimate conventions.<sup>116</sup> Unlike the Indian context, in which *pramāṇa* discourse was typically based in outward-facing pan-Indic criteria, the force of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s argument is based in common insider stipulations such as *samaya*. In this way, tantric *pramāṇa* turns in new avenues of inter-Buddhist discourse and exchange in the renaissance era.<sup>117</sup>

*Establishing Appearance as Divine* subordinates the *pramāṇa* of direct perception to tantric *pramāṇa* on the basis of the Buddhist presumption that the empty appearance of primordial purity is more soteriologically potent than any direct perception of social constructions. Thus, on this view, since conventions are the purview of ordinary beings and the primordially pure pertains to the jurisdiction of sublime beings, the former is the province of the intellectually immature (*byis pa’i blo can*) and therefore more coarse by comparison, though, as we learn, both are mere appearance.<sup>118</sup> Taking that logic to its end amounts to insisting that the difference between buddha and sentient being is a mere appearance.<sup>119</sup> Rongzom leans into the efficacy of analogical styles of validating this view:

While one may assume phenomena to be perfect in nature due to [their absence of] essence, one could question whether or not there is a rational logical proof that proves the *maṇḍala* of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind at the level of mere appearance. That, too, is provable (*bsgrub par bya*)—that is, it is provable in an instant or provable in progressive stages. For those with minimal obsessive fixation on their own perceptions, understanding



comes about by means of instantaneous proof. For them, it is proved primarily through analogy.<sup>120</sup>

At this point, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* begins a graded series of analogy structures, not because they are *Establishing Appearance as Divine*'s inferential argument, but because of what they each show—offer an analog—about the way scriptural authorization is structured and processed. The first compares perception of a stream and how that perception differs between humans and hungry ghosts. It sets a stream of water qua appearance as analog in comparing perception (and the role of approach to the path, forthright imagination, and so on) in the analogy's function as an instantaneous proof for those with minimal fixation and obsession with their apparent realities. The reality and substance of a stream's appearance in the mind is due, in part, to gross factors such as embodiment, including physiology; and to subtler factors, such as karmic dispositions. That the stream can be perceived differently by different beings due to such varying conditions is indicative of its emptiness.

In the first member of an extended analogy structure, a pervasion relation—a flawless connection (*skyon med 'brel ba*) obtaining (“is determined”; *nges pa, niścaya*) between a reason (*rgyu mtshan, hetu*) and the probandum, including the counter-pervasion relations—is exemplified as the operation of an instantaneous proof, which only works in the minds of persons for whom fixation on and obsession with phenomena (i.e., what appears in the mind) are minimal.<sup>121</sup> Critically, these persons have a forthright imagination. That is, they naturally assent to the dialectical train of thought analyzing reality in which *the purer* an appearance is, *the truer or more real* it is. The analogy also plays on language with intimations of tantric empowerment via the term for “control over” (*dbang ba*):

In that case, hungry ghosts see a stream of water as pus, though some of them also heard humans see [the stream as] water. *Some*<sup>122</sup> among hungry ghosts *contend* in that context<sup>123</sup> that pus is the actual reality and that the water is a wholly imagined form (*kun brtags pa'i gzugs*). For others, *the argument is*: pus is an impure appearance, and *for that reason*, the water seen by humans<sup>124</sup> is itself something authentic. *Because of that, they have said*: “Friends, this pus filling the stream commonly perceived by hungry ghosts like us is seen as water alone by humans. If those empowered to use water,<sup>125</sup> having dedicated it, make a gift of it [to hungry ghosts], it appears as just water to hungry ghosts as well and exists as a resource. *Thus, it is not unlike* [what you have heard vis-à-vis the dedicated] water we have obtained at various times in the past.”

When establishing the connection [in the context of an instantaneous proof], the above constitutes a proper pervasion relationship.<sup>126</sup>

We see this rhetorical structure again below—that is, the flawless connection is obtained when *x* is a case in point, the argument is *y*, and for that reason *z*—on that basis of which, *such-and-such*: *a* and *b*. In that next step, an analogy models a pervasion relation criterion that shifts the argument from the impure view dominating the world of hungry ghosts to the pure view dominating the world of *yogins* wherein “realization” corresponds to seeing the divine *maṇḍala* of reality.<sup>127</sup> Notably, faithful devotion plays out here in epistemological contexts; gaining information from a

presumably trusted source—that is, a scripture, one’s guru, or rational analyses—comprises an important element of an argument only some accept. Realization, in this context, corresponds to experiencing the divine *maṇḍala* structuring pure reality.<sup>128</sup> Conversely, the rejection of these *pramāṇas* is indicative of a lack of refinement and attunement to the truth of purity due to karmic obstruction, and so on:

The statement—[just as] “when those empowered with water dedicate and make a gift of it, all the water that is itself present in experience *is* just water, like the water we have heard about again and again”—establishes proper and definite pervasion relations here.

Same with respect to these appearances of ordinary physical bodies and environmental resources commonly perceived by people. Some have heard that completely pure beings see them as a divine *maṇḍala* [i.e., buddha-bodies and buddhified resources]; that it is taught in the secret mantra approach to the path that [apparently ordinary physical bodies and environmental resources] are the divine *maṇḍala* itself. Based on that, some among them assume ordinary body and resources to be the genuine reality while the divine vision is something wholly imagined, and so on. Some assume that, since the perception of ordinary body and resources is impure, then in accordance with what is seen by pure beings and exalted in the secret mantra approach to the path, they assume that divinity is itself the reality of things.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, they have declared: “Friends, these objective appearances of ordinary physical bodies and resources that are common perceptions for people like us are the divine *maṇḍala* itself. If those empowered to practice in the pure domain of experience<sup>130</sup> make a gift of [their] yogic attainment [of seeing appearances as divine], then for people too, these experiences will be present in perception and experienced as divine. Hence, it is similar to in the past when some among people like us—those for whom, from time to time, yogic attainment arose—attain divine realms of experience.”<sup>131</sup>

A prime criterion undergirding the conceptual connections between the overarching parts of this argument—that is, acceptance of the idea that there is such a thing as yogic attainment and that it can be gifted to, or otherwise conferred upon, another in such a way as to affect or effect their reality—is deeply tantric. It is part and parcel of a worldview in which the ritual called “empowerment” confers a perfection that cannot be intellectually constructed but can be ritually initiated.<sup>132</sup> Sublime divinity is available within the profane world, as is well known. The power behind empowerment concerns purification, perfection, and maturation.<sup>133</sup> One hears this idea discussed in terms of ripening a potency (*ye shes*) within the mind stream of trainees. We see it in the idea that touching particular objects within a Vajrayāna regime can offer sudden flashes of pure vision. It is not uncommon to read of saints whose awakening was conferred (“gifted”) in initiation:<sup>134</sup>

The proof stated here that is the determination of pervasion relations [for this tantric *pramāṇa* is as follows]: “If those with control over [or initiated into or empowered within] the pure domain of experience make a gift of their yogic attainment,<sup>135</sup> *then* everything that is present as a resource within the divine domain of experience is divinity itself [for the

recipient], *just as* it is the divine domain of experience for someone with yogic attainment. [Thus,] when those empowered to practice in the completely pure realm of experience make a gift of their yogic attainment, this domain of experience is present as a resource within the divine realm of experience.”<sup>136</sup>

Before turning to progressive (i.e., noninstantaneous) inferences of purity, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* takes aim again at the idea that the above “instantaneous” logic validating primordial purity could be undermined by direct perception of correct conventions (i.e., impure saṃsāra). Such refutation, however, is impossible on the tantric view because direct perception is shaped in toto via karmic obscuration.<sup>137</sup> Yet it is not the case they have no role at all. Just as coal may seem valueless before becoming recognized as precious, so too can profound insights emerge even amid flawed perceptual faculties. Here, the author uses this compelling imagery to underscore the importance of patience, openness, and reliance on credible guidance on the path to an instantaneous inference of primordial purity, which evolves based on the percipient’s openness and the kindness of teachers. In this passage, manifesting a realization of primordial purity of reality is analogized to the recognition of a precious metal:

[The proof,] moreover, is not undermined by direct perception,<sup>138</sup> which is tainted by karmic obscuration [ex hypothesi]. For example, it is similar to compassion having stirred the gods to offer gold to a destitute woman in the world in the past, which [initially] appeared [to her] as coal. *Similarly*, for those who have a connection of karma and compassion, the appearance [of gold] gradually emerges<sup>139</sup> and, in this way, that destitute women can perceive and then put to use just a little bit of the gold the fire god (Agni) offered to her.<sup>140</sup>

There are those who must realize the divinity of appearance in progressive stages. They are fixated on the import of ordinary logic and rationality. Thus, primordial purity is not established in their perspective. Since the audience may not initially accept the thesis of primordial purity, the argument must begin somewhere else:

If their own perceptions are not initially established as being true, then those who are exceedingly obsessed with their own perceptions will not engage with the basis itself.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, with people like that, establish their ideas first, then, gradually introduce them to different philosophical perspectives.<sup>142</sup>

The proponent of the tantric view then centers illusory appearance with regard to any percept acceptable to the audience—for example, water or pus—such that a common substrate becomes acceptable. Both water and pus are reducible to phenomenological appearance. In this way, a common quality—both being fluid—is foregrounded as an acceptable subject of inquiry. Thus, both water and pus qua appearance correspond to a common perception of fluidity.<sup>143</sup> This connection is required to establish pervasion relations. Once mere appearance is centered with respect to both water and pus, the two are rendered as “similar” or “comparable,” by virtue of common basis and inasmuch as they are subject to forthright imagination. In this way, and in accordance with the sliding scale of reality, it can be progressively inferred that water is *more real*

than pus.<sup>144</sup> On this view, all appearances may be seen as signs of primordial.<sup>145</sup> To be sure, the same basis may appear in diametrically opposed ways:

Accordingly, what appears to ordinary beings moving through conditioned existence, even from the point of view that all phenomena are nothing but illusory appearance—these apparent bodies and objective resources composing body, speech, and mind that are naturally dissatisfying—are not only features of a world giving rise to afflictive states, though. They are features of awakening embodying the completely pure field and domain composing buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind, like what appears for pure beings; and it is declared that apparent divinity for those who have attained sublime yogic accomplishment, just as a vase, pillar, and the like for ordinary sentient beings, are mental images. Thus, any and everything whatsoever—appearing as divine for some and appearing as vases, [pillars,] and the like, for others—is mental appearance, entirely appearance in character.<sup>146</sup>

Just as fluidity can be accepted as the common basis for different appearances (water and pus), there is a common locus between sentient beings and awakened ones. Both are conceived on the basis of bodies, resources, and domains of experience. They are comparable by virtue of being reducible to perceptible appearance as such. Insofar as a comparable or shared commonality is accepted by parties to the debate, the presumption of their shared basis in mere appearance obtains.<sup>147</sup> The logic of forthright imagination obtains, too, since both are reducible to mental perceptions, which are entirely appearance in character.<sup>148</sup> “Likewise, it is proclaimed that even appearances associated with meditation, the all-encompassing sense fields and the like, mastered forms, being instances of forms in the phenomenological field<sup>149</sup> [i.e., imagined], are not said to pertain to the character of a thing” in the world.<sup>150</sup> Although sentient being and buddhahood are basically the same in the deepest sense, impure appearance is confusing by nature (i.e., causes suffering), and that nature is an unreal fiction:

After having first established that [suffering and awakening] are comparable, the reality of suffering should then be refuted. Since appearances of freedom [e.g., awakening] and worlds of freedom [i.e., *maṇḍalas*], are pure, they are not fictions. That which is mistaken pertains to that which is impure; and the impure is confused. This pervasion [relation] is comparable. The following ought to be realized with certainty, “the pure and the confused should be seen like that, as well. Thus, according to this very logic of definite pervasion relations, the appearance of the ordinary is confused—an appearing fiction. Divinity is an appearance that is unmistaken—an appearance of the unmistaken.”<sup>151</sup>

A question steeped in obviating creeping solipsism arises about the scope of pure appearance: Is purity merely a “subjective” quality of gnosis? On this view, if things are only pure from a given perspective (i.e., from a buddha’s point of view), can purity comprise a totalizing metacategory? Perhaps, the interlocutor wonders, purity is subjective in scope; it is only something in the gnostic awareness, like an ingredient composing the gnosis of an awakened one. If so, can we really say purity applies to all appearances, for everyone? As the interlocutor puts it, “when appearance is divine, since [it is just] one’s own appearances that become [divine], the character of common

appearance does not [become divine].”<sup>152</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* says no. Just as the appearance of fluidity is the acceptable criterion—the common basis for inquiry and exchange between the hungry ghost seeing pus and the human seeing water—apparent bodies and resources—whether an ordinary body in *samsāra* or an enjoyment body (*slong spyod sku, sambhogakāya*) in a *maṇḍala*—comprise an acceptable basis upon which one can logically assert an argument differentiating sentient beings and buddhas, both of which appear due to causality, even a resource such as a *vajra maṇḍala* or a triad of buddha-body, -speech, and -mind:

Just so, for hungry ghosts, appearance as pus derives from comparable individual karma and appearance as water also derives from comparable individual karma.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, it is not tenable to declare different bases.<sup>154</sup> For both, the common appearance of fluidity is non-mistaken. Thus, because of that, it is logically possible [for both parties] to take the river as the logical subject of a syllogism. If that, too, is refuted, because the appearance of pus itself is one’s own appearance, then no logical subject of a syllogism that is established for both proponent and opponent [in a debate] could be found. Likewise, in common perception, in both the appearance of impure aspects of body, speech, and mind and in the pure appearance of vajra buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind, a body-speech-mind triad qualifies the field and resources.<sup>155</sup> Both are [respectively] correct common perceptions. Given that is the case here, positing appearance as the logical subject is tenable.<sup>156</sup>

Pure appearance and the perception thereof are both rooted in karma. Not only does this position make the epistemology of mere appearance easier to argue,<sup>157</sup> but also it relegates any discussion of the perception of purity *ex hypothesi* to the conventional because it is derivative of habitual tendencies associated with the two types of mental fixation. Positive habitual tendencies appear as extraordinary buddha attributes, such as the major and minor marks of a *nirmāṇakāya* buddha. What is more, habitual tendencies derived from ultimately false views of the self cause one’s ordinary mind stream, which one identifies with oneself (*bdag rgyud*) to appear different from the divine continuum (*lha rgyud*)—that is, to appear as if the two exist as things that are in reality objectively separate though they are not.<sup>158</sup> While there is an opportunity here for Rongzom to discuss the content and scope of awakening as a gnostic state, he is clearly uninterested in saying anything more than (i) we can speak meaningfully about awakening and purity and gnosis and (ii) that these are in the end beyond words and ideas grounded in worldly convention. Using words and languages to describe buddhahood is like trying to imagine a new color beyond those of the visible light spectrum:

It is the habitual tendency toward linguistic expression that causes characteristic marks to appear differently.<sup>159</sup> The nature of production derives from habitual tendencies associated with the limbs of conditioned existence.<sup>160</sup> The complete exhaustion of all habitual tendencies is not even the appearance of the completely pure domain of experience. That the existence or non-existence of an awakened one’s pure worldly gnosis exists should be analyzed in a similar manner, though it is an unimaginable phenomenon.<sup>161</sup>

Before abruptly ending, having set a clear epistemological limit on awakened gnosis vis-à-vis conceptual knowledge, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* leans into classical Mahāyāna teachings in which consciousness is described as luminous (read: pure) and indestructible (read: primordial), citing perhaps *The Condensed Points of Perfection of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpāramitā-pindārtha*, attributed to Dignāga) and *Discourse on the Stem Array* (*Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*).<sup>162</sup> Rongzom also gestures toward his elite audience of literati by presuming they follow his hermeneutical logic, adding, “although unnecessary, more citations could be offered [to justify] what is well-known in the secret mantra approach to the path.”<sup>163</sup> As the latter Wittgenstein declared, “explanations come to an end somewhere.”<sup>164</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s explanation—it is not, strictly speaking, presented as an airtight logical argument—ends abruptly here, summing up his argument that the primordial purity of reality can be authorized in the context of *pramāṇa* on the basis of correctly posing a commonly acceptable subject predicate. While careful not to offer any avenue for obvious hypostatization, Rongzom takes the time to reiterate that all the things we speak and think about are situated within a context that collapses in awakening, where words and ideas fail to be either literal or precise.<sup>165</sup> He offers one more example of a syllogism—a flawless proof—authorizing the tantric view regardless of its ontological and epistemological negation in typical terms:

Summarizing what is being validated, it is declared: “for as long as everything is separated into appearances such as space and time<sup>166</sup>—perceived in association with completely pure bodies and resources or completely impure bodies and resources [that endure in spacio-temporal terms]—then, since they pertain to experience of a single moment in the ground consciousness [*hetu*], there is no primordium that is<sup>167</sup> an attainable quality capable of being attained [*pratijñā*]<sup>168</sup>—just as, by example, the properties of space are not affirmed in space [*udāharana*].”<sup>169</sup> This [syllogism], too, is a flawless proof.<sup>170</sup>

The text ends with an admission of the difficulty of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s stated task:

Proving fictive experience to be authentic in that way is not without problems under the power of appearance itself. If the intelligent establish [the divinity of appearance] in this very manner, it will not in fact be impossible to prove purity by nature (*sādhya*). Dharmabhadra composed *The Great Establishing Appearances as Divine*. May it be virtuous!<sup>171</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

In the classical mode of *vāda-śāstra*, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* opens with the tantric thesis stating that all people, places, and things—everything imaginable—is characterized by a sort of innate purity constituting the Vajrayāna ideal of innate perfection:

According to the system of the vajra vehicle of secret mantra, all worldly and transcendent phenomena are primordially perfected as the *maṇḍala* of vajra-like buddha-body, vajra-

speech, and vajra-mind and, as such, not akin to something brought about in the here and now.<sup>172</sup>

The remainder of *Establishing Appearance as Divine* is dedicated toward offering validation in logical terms that authorizes the view of Vajrayāna. An objection follows: it is inconsistent (*mirung, ayogyatā*) to assert, among other things, that worldly phenomena, which are proclaimed to be illusory, are primordially perfect. A complex reason is offered: (i) All views have their own particular philosophical focus or perspective;<sup>173</sup> (ii) in Vajrayāna, it is the inseparability of the two truths, which, in stipulating the illusory nature of all phenomena, requires the collapse of the pure-impure binary that structures the view of the critic; and (iii) the pure (e.g., buddha) and impure (e.g., sentient being) being the same in consisting in empty appearance means that their only difference is in terms of their mere appearance by force of the imagination.

Rationalist analogical descriptions (*dper brjod pa, udāharaṇa*) are given, with the first being the reasoning reality. In short, phenomena consist in purity by nature. Therefore, the reality of phenomena is devoid of any impure quality.<sup>174</sup> Thus, purity of one's own ordinary body, speech, and mind is one's own reality as well, and that purity is perfected. The force of empirical fact is brought to bear on rationalist arguments in favor of the view of purity.

An extensive application of analogs (*nye bar sbyar ba, upanaya*), which is situated in the context of a critique of the scope of dialectical logic, begins in hermeneutic terms that facilitate the author's presentation of instant and progressively validated scriptural inferences. For the audience amenable to validating the tantric thesis of the purity, including the philosophical fundamentality of mere appearance, a verse from Mahāyāna sūtra metaphorizing phenomena qua emptiness as buddha-nature will suffice. Key here is the stipulation of the sūtra's validity and authority, which signals the intra-Buddhist nature of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*'s discourse. Buddhists who deny the validity of the tantric thesis may accept the validity of the sūtra's statement. In what follows, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* models the acceptance of scripture to show that the tantric thesis, though offering a different perspective than that found in most nontantric Mahāyāna sources, is authorized in Buddhist terms.

As mentioned above, the compelling force of these arguments is not found *prima facie*. The legitimacy of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*'s argument is not obvious. This is not an argument aimed at non-Buddhists, that much is obvious from the criteria employed throughout. Although so-called scriptural inference is offered in more than one form (and rhetorical order), that does not constitute a true inference. Rather, it is a pseudo-inference "precisely because it bears upon facts to which we have no access other than testimony in scripture":<sup>175</sup>

We accept scriptural inference, not because it is a genuine *pramāṇa*, but rather to be able to engage in the spiritual path. As Dharmakīrti had put it, "because there is no other way" . . . scriptural inference is an inference because of the thought of people who want to engage themselves on the spiritual path; it is not an inference objectively.<sup>176</sup>

Dharmakīrti himself emphasizes the crucial importance of scripture in our lives despite its problematic logical status, stating that "a person cannot proceed without relying on the validity of scripture."<sup>177</sup> When we recall that Prāmāṇika discourse restricts argument to the truth of a proposition and requires that one accept (at least provisionally) the existence of that proposition's

*pakṣadharmā*, which in the extended argument is, strictly speaking, the common basis for dispute—that is, fluidity, mere appearance, forthright imagination in which *the purer, the truer*, and so on—it becomes clear *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s logic is most obviously amenable to those stipulating the validity of Vajrayāna teachings, even when they are contravened by ordinary convention. *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s argument is at its strongest, in fact, in daring Prāmāṇika philosophers with Vajrayāna *śamaya* to deny the view of purity espoused in the tantras in favor of a lower path model.

This is not to say Rongzom has not proved anything. With typical nuance (some may say equivocation), Rongzom states in conclusion that, given the wide horizon of acceptable forms of rationality, the logical validation of illusions as primevally pure and divine in nature, though not without its own theoretical problems, is possible. The acme of tantric *pramāṇa*, here, is formed less as an outward-facing attempt at establishing what is a logically inevitable epistemological warrant than as an inward-facing presentation authorizing a Vajrayāna view, which is in fact warranted vis-à-vis the fruits of a constant practice committed to the enduring imagination of primordial perfection qua deity and sublime environs. While this may not satisfy a non-Vajrayāna Prāmāṇika epistemologist,<sup>178</sup> it would be a mistake to conclude that Rongzom simply dismisses the idea that the tantric view can be proven—or that *Establishing Appearance as Divine* does not in fact present a proof authorizing a view. Rather, in thinking along with *Establishing Appearance as Divine*, the horizon of what constitutes proof—the criteria forming a warrant—is stretched such that a teacher’s efficacious instructions, put into practice properly, is a warrant and so too is an efficacious practice of yoga. Rongzom’s argument works to show how, in the end, proof of the tantric view of purity is not necessarily logical in the sense of empirically based rationality attempting to deduce some logically undeniable and inevitable conclusion obvious to all. Rongzom’s tantric *pramāṇa* is not just like Dharmakīrti’s, though there are significant analogs, such as how centering the Buddha as a *pramāṇa*, as per Dharmakīrti’s *Compendium of Valid Cognition (Pramāṇavarttika)*, is like centering the local guru’s efficacious pith instructions in practice as *pramāṇa* with recourse to *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi Tantra*. While this may not prove the tantric thesis beyond a doubt to outsiders who do not stipulate the veracity and authority of the Buddhist teachings, especially Vajrayāna, it does make more sense when we recall that this type of *vāda* literature is traditionally less concerned with being right about a point disputed between two parties, such as whether or not there is fire on the mountain pass, than it is about persuading a party of the authority of a presentation, which includes a style of argument and subsequent conclusion. In her *Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion*, Esther Solomon writes:

*Vāda* is primarily meant for the discernment of truth or the real nature of the thing under investigation and imparting the truth as one understands it to the other party; that is to say, in *vāda*, there is no consideration of victory or defeat.<sup>179</sup>

It is helpful to recognize *Establishing Appearance as Divine* as this type of *pramāṇa-vāda* text, which provides “a widely accepted and interscholastic framework for the exploration of a variety of different philosophical views.”<sup>180</sup> The compelling nature of its argument, moreover, is specifically tantric and implicit within the text. As shown above, at the center of Rongzom’s



conception of an ethical practice of Vajrayāna lies the forthright imagination in which one assents to the view *the purer, the truer*. This is not simply an ideological injunction. This is at the core of the deepest commitments to practice Vajrayāna. The key to practice is envisioning oneself and the world as divine. Done properly, what begins in the art of the imagination constitutes a *pramāṇa* via the efficacy of ethical tantric practice refined through the teacher's pith instructions.<sup>181</sup>

## WORKS CITED

*Primary Source Bibliography*

- Buddhaguhya/Buddhagupta. “Slob dpon sangs rgyas gsang bas mdzad pa’i lam rim chen mo.” In *Bka’ma rgyas pa*. TBRC W19229, 23, 7–136. Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama. 1982–1987.
- Drodul Dorjé (gro ’dul rdo rje) and Zenkar Thupten Nyima (gzan dkar thub bstan nyi ma). *Snga ’gyur rgyud ’bum rin po che phyogs bsgrigs*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- Mkhan po Bkra shis rdo rje, Mkhan po O rgyan rig ’dzin, Mkhan po Dpal bzang dar rgyas, and Slob dpon ma Karma dbyangs can. *Snang ba lhar sgrub pa’i tshul la brtag pa*. Bylakuppe, Mysore: Snga ’gyur rnying ma’i zhid ’jug lte gnas khang (Ngagyur Nyingma Research Centre), 2018.
- Rong zom. *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung ’bum*. Vols. 1–2. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- Rong zom. *Gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i tshul las snang ba lhar bsgrub pa rong zom chos bzang gi mdzad pa*. In vol. 1 of *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung ’bum*, 557–568. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- Tsongkhapa, Jé. *Byang chub lam rim che ba*. Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985.

*Secondary Source Bibliography*

- Apte, Vaman Shyivaram. *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Revised edition. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1992.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Translated from Pali*. Vol 1. Boston: Wisdom, 2000.
- Brunnhölzl, Karl. *A Compendium of the Mahāyāna: Asaṅga’s Mahāyānasamgraha and Its Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*. Vol 1. Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2018.
- Buswell, Robert, and Donald Lopez. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Clifford, Terry. *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984/2017.
- Conze, Edward. *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, with the Divisions of the Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.
- Cozort, Daniel. *Highest Yoga Tantra: An Introduction to the Esoteric Buddhism of Tibet*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1986.
- Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins. *Tantra in Tibet*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1977.
- Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins. *Deity Yoga*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1981.
- Dalton, Jacom Paul. *Conjuring the Buddha: Ritual Manuals in Early Tantric Buddhism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023.
- Davidson, Ronald. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Davidson, Ronald. “Masquerading as Pramāṇa: Esoteric Buddhism and Epistemological Nomenclature.” In *Dharmakīrti’s Thought and Its Impact on Indian and Tibetan Philosophy—Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Dharmakīrti and Pramāṇa*, edited by Katsura Shoryu, 25–35. Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997/1999.

- Davidson, Ronald. *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Dorje, Choying Tobden, and Gyurme Dorje. *The Complete Nyingma Tradition: From Sutra to Tantra*. Vols. 1–2, *Books 15 to 17: The Essential Tantras of Mahayoga*. Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2016.
- Dreyfus, Georges. *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. Translated by Gyurme Dorje with Matthew Kapstein. Boston: Wisdom, 1991.
- Ehrhard, Franz-Karl. “‘Flügelschläge des Garuḍa’: Literar- und ideengeschichtliche Bemerkungen zu einer Liedersammlung des rDzogschen.” *Tibetan and Indo-Tibetan Studies* 3. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990.
- Eltschinger, Vincent. “Dharmakīrti.” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 64, no. 253 (2010): 397–440. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23961185>.
- Eltschinger, Vincent. *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics Studies on the History, Self-understanding and Dogmatic Foundations of Late Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014.
- Eltschinger, Vincent. “Buddhist Esoterism and Epistemology: Two Sixth-Century Innovations as Buddhist Responses to Social and Religio-political Transformations.” In *Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy*, edited by Eli Franco, 171–273. Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 2013.
- Gentry, James. “What Color Is Your Buddhahood? Vision and Vacuity in Tibetan Old School Accounts of Awakened Cognition.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44 (2021): 119–207.
- Germano, David. “The Seven Descents and the Early History of Rnying ma Transmissions.” In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, edited by Helmut Eimer and David Germano, 225–263. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Germano, David. “The Shifting Terrain of the Tantric Bodies of Buddhas and Buddhists from a yoga Perspective.” In *The Pandita and the Siddha: Tibetan Studies in Honor of E. Gene Smith*, edited by Ramon N. Prats, 50–84. Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1995.
- Gray, David B. “Bodies of Knowledge: Bodily Perfection in Tantric Buddhist Practice.” *Religions* 12, no. 89 (2021).
- Guenther, Herbert. *The Matrix of Mystery: Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1984.
- Hideomi, Yaita. *Three Sanskrit Texts from the Buddhist Pramāṇa-Tradition: The Hetuvidyā Section of the Yogācārabhūmi, the Dharmottara ṭippa naka, and the Tarkarahasya*. Narita: Naritsan Shinshoji Monograph Series of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2005.
- Higgins, David. *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)*. Vienna: Association for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2013.
- Kapstein, Matthew. *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Boston: Wisdom, 2001.
- King, Richard. *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999.

- Klein, A. C., and T. Wangyal. “Preliminary Reflections on ‘The Authenticity of Innate Awareness’ (*gTan tshigs gal mdo rig pa’i tshad ma*).” *Asiatische Studien* 49, no. 4 (1995): 769–792.
- Klein, Anne C. “Authenticity, Effortlessness, Delusion and Spontaneity in *The Authenticity of Open Awareness* and Related Texts.” In “New Horizons in Bön Studies,” edited by Samten G. Karmay and Yashuiko Nagano, special issue, *National Museum of Ethnological Survey Report* 15 (2000): 193–223.
- Klein, Anne C. “Bön rDzog chen on Authenticity (*pramāṇa, tshad ma*): Prose and Poetry on the Path.” In *Changing Minds: Contributions to the Study of Buddhism and Tibet in Honor of Jeffrey Hopkins*, 133–53. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2001.
- Klein, Anne Carolyn, and Tenzin Wangyal. *Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bön, and the Logic of the Nonconceptual*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Köppl, Heidi I. *Establishing Appearances as Divine: Rongzom Chözung on Reasoning, Madhyamaka, and Purity*. Boston: Snow Lion, 2008.
- Lamotte, Etienne. *La Somme du grand véhicule d’Asaṅga (Mahāyānasamgrāha)*. 2 vols. Louvain-la-Neuve: Université de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1973.
- La Vallée-Poussin, Louis. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās (Mādhyamikasūtras) de Nāgārjuna Avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti*. Bibliotheca Buddhica IV. Germany: Froff & Co., 1970.
- La Vallée-Poussin, Louis. *L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu: Traduction et Annotations*. Vols. 1–6. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1971.
- Lindtner, C. *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.
- MacDonald, Anne. *In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One: Volume I: Introduction, Manuscript Description, Sanskrit Text Volume II: Prasannapadā, Tibetan Text*. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015.
- Martin, Dan. “Beyond Acceptance and Rejection? The Anti-Bön Polemic Included in the Thirteenth-Century Single Intention (*Dgongs-gcig Yig-cha*) and Its Background in Tibetan Religious History.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25, no. 3 (1997): 263–305.
- Martin, Dan. *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer, with a General Bibliography of Bon*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1872.
- Nagatomi, Masatoshi. “Mānāsa-Pratyakṣa: A Conundrum in the Buddhist Pramāṇa System.” In *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honor of Daniel H. H. Ingalls*, 243–260. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980.
- Padmasambhava. *A Garland of Views: A Guide to View, Meditation, and Result in the Nine Vehicles, with Commentary by Jamgon Mipham*. Translated by Padmakara Translation Group. Boston: Shambhala, 2015.
- Patrul Rinpoche. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher: kunzang lama’i shelung*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Preisendanz, Karin. “Text, Commentary, Annotation: Some Reflections on the Philosophical Genre.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5 (2008): 599–618.
- Powers, John. *Wisdom of Buddha: The Saṃdhiṇiromocana Mahāyāna Sūtra*. Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995.

- Ruegg, D. S. *The Life of Bu-ston Rinpoche, with the Tibetan Text of the Bu ston rNam thar*. Serie Orientale Roma, XXXIV. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966.
- Ruegg, D. S. *A History of Indian Literature: The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*. Edited by Jan Gonda. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1981.
- Ruegg, D. S. “Does the Mādhyamika Have a Thesis and Philosophical Position?” In *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, edited by B. K. Matilal and R. D. Evans, 229–237. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986.
- Ruegg, D. S. *Three Studies in the History of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Philosophy: Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought, Part 1*. Vienna: Arbeitskreis Für Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2000.
- Ruegg, D. S. “The Indian and the Indic in Tibetan cultural history, and Tsoñ kha pa’s Achievement as a Scholar and Thinker: An Essay on the Concepts of Buddhism in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2004): 321–343.
- Saccone, Margherita Serrena, and Péter-Dánial Szántó. *Tantra and Pramāṇa: A Study of the Sāramañjarī*. Naples: UniorPress, 2023.
- Solomon, Esther. *Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion*. 2 vols. Ahmedabad: Institute of Learning and Research, Gujarat Vidya Sabha, 1976–1978.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. *A Study of Rongzom’s Disclosing the Great Vehicle Approach (theg chen tshul ’jug) in the History of Tibet’s Great Perfection Tradition*. PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2015.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle: Dzogchen as the Culmination of the Mahāyāna*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2017.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. “Constituting Canon and Community in Eleventh-Century Tibet: The Extant Writings of Rongzom and His *Charter of Mantrins (sngags pa’i bca’ yig)*.” *Religions* 8, no. 3 (2017a): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8030040>.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. “The Dzokchen Apology: On the Limits of Logic, Language, & Epistemology in Early Great Perfection.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 50, no. 1 (2021): 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-021-09492-z>.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. “A Biography of the Translator, Rongzom.” *Treasury of Lives*, August 2024. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>.
- Sur, Dominic D. Z. *The Practice of Philosophy: Metaphysics, Argumentation, and Identity in Tibetan Buddhism*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming 2025.
- Tillemans, Tom J. F. *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and His Tibetan Successors*. Boston: Wisdom, 1999.
- Van der Kuip, Leonard W. J. “An Early Tibetan View of the Soteriology of Buddhist Epistemology: The Case of ’Bri-gung ’Jig-rten mgon-po.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1987): 57–70.
- Wangchuk, Dorji. “An Eleventh-Century Defense of the Guhyagarbhatantra.” In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: Proceedings of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, edited by Helmut Eimer and David Germano, 265–291. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Wenta, Aleksandra. “The Making of Tantric Orthodoxy in the Eleventh-Century Indo-Tibetan World: \*Jñānākara’s \*‘Mantrāvatāra’ (Gsang sngags la ’jug pa).” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2018): 505–551.
- Westerhoff, Jan. *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Williams, Paul, and Anthony Tribe. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. London: Routledge, 2000.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Yaroslav Komarovski (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) for reading an early draft of this article and my translation of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*; and my thanks to Lama Chönam and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö, who took time one day to discuss a couple passages in *Establishing Appearance as Divine* with me at Tashi Choling Monastery in Ashland, Oregon. I also want to thank James Gentry (Stanford University), the Venerable Lama Sean Price (a.k.a. Gelong Tenzin Jamchen of Shechen Monastery, Nepal), and three anonymous reviewers, all of whom contributed informed criticisms and suggestions. Any misunderstandings and mistakes come down to me alone.

<sup>2</sup> More on Padamasambhava's work and *Secret Essence* (*Guhyagarbha*) noted below. On the latter, see *Śrī-guhyagarbha-tattva-niścaya* (*Dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid rnam par nges pa*) in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 102, 287–349. Suffice here to say that this tantra—especially chapters 1, 2, 3, and 13—is central to Rongzom's philosophical Vajrayāna and the Nyingma complex, more broadly. I am currently preparing a more detailed study of these materials for publication. The *Secret Essence Tantra*, typically studied in year eight or nine of the current Old School curriculum, emphasizes the innate purity or primordial perfection of everything in our experience—the subject of Rongzom's tantric logic.

<sup>3</sup> *Precious Beacon of Certainty* (*Nges shes rin po che sgron me*), cited in Heidi I. Köppl, *Establishing Appearances as Divine: Rongzom Chözang on Reasoning, Madhyamaka, and Purity* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2008), 155n226; cf. 84–6.

<sup>4</sup> In its conclusion, this paper returns to this point about *authorization*, which, throughout, I associate with the practice of logico-epistemological modes of *validation*—but not necessarily *realization* in the classical sense *√rtogs*. Philosophical discussions were not considered essential to the discourse in most Indian esoteric tantras. Old School proponents of *Secret Essence*, however, have mined a rich vein of texts, tropes, symbols, and the like in order to cultivate a Vajrayāna style of logic. In 11th-century Tibet, teachings on tantra and *pramāṇa* were ascendant elements of elite religious culture, though most authors—including proto-Nyingmapas—avoided compositions synthesizing the two. Indian precursors mingling tantra and *pramāṇa* are seen in Buddhagupta/Buddhaguhya's work (cited below), which I am currently studying for its use of syllogisms (*gtan tshigs*). There is also the study of Margherita Serrena Saccone and Péter-Dániel Szántó, *Tantra and Pramāṇa: A Study of the Sāramañjarī* (Naples: UniorPress, 2023). For a study of tantric *pramāṇa* in the Bön context, see Anne Carolyn Klein and Tenzin Wangyal, *Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bön, and the Logic of the Nonconceptual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); also, Anne C. Klein and Tenzin Wangyal, “Preliminary Reflections on ‘The Authenticity of Innate Awareness’ (*Gtan tshigs gal mdo rig pa'i tshad ma*),” *Asiatische Studien* 49, no. 4 (1995): 769–792; and Anne C. Klein, “Authenticity, Effortlessness, Delusion and Spontaneity in *The Authenticity of Open Awareness* and Related Texts,” in “New Horizons in Bön Studies,” eds. Samten G. Karmay and Yashuiko Nagano, special issue, *National Museum of Ethnological Survey Report* 15 (2000): 193–223; and Anne C. Klein, “Bön rDzog chen on Authenticity (*pramāṇa, tshad ma*): Prose and Poetry on the Path,” in *Changing Minds: Contributions to the Study of Buddhism and Tibet in Honor of Jeffrey Hopkins*, ed. Guy Newland (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion, 2001), 133–153. Additional Indian precursors may be seen in works of figures such as Lilavajra, also known as Lilāsavajra (Sgeg pa'i rdo rje), whose *Guhyagarbha-mahā-tantra-rāja-ṭīkā* (*Commentary on the King of Tantras, Secret Essence*) contains a chapter that surveys syllogisms (*gtan tshigs*) inferring the Mahāyoga view; see Otani 4718: *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po dpal gsang ba'i snying po'i 'grel pa* (*Commentary on the King of Tantras, Secret Essence*) in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 43, 267–428; cf. Otani 4719: *Dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa[i] rgya cher bshad pa'i 'grel pa* (*Śrī-guhya-garbha-tattva-nirṇaya-vyākhyāna-ṭīkā*). *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 43, 429–769. Whether and to what degree the approach to logic in these works maps onto Rongzom's is the subject of a forthcoming study.

<sup>5</sup> Rongzom's writings show, among other things, that the fundamental assumptions governing his Dzogchen approach to the path are rooted in exoteric canonical discourse found in textual traditions such as *Prajñāpāramitā* (*phar phyin*), *Avataṃsaka* (*phal po che*), *Ratnakūṭa* (*dkon brtsegs*), and *Sūtrānta* (*mdo sde*), among others.

<sup>6</sup> Physical form, the nature of the body, provides one means for making general distinctions between worldviews structuring classical discourse in Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tibetan Buddhisms. In the Pāli scriptures, the body is considered a source of suffering—a precarious balance of appetites overcome and cast off on the eight-fold path

to nirvāṇa (cf. *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* [Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma] in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* [Connected Discourses] attributed to the Buddha 56,11). In that sense, a practicing Buddhist works to reject the body, restrain the speech, and subdue the mind. By repressing and rejecting ordinary thoughts, words, and deeds, one cultivates the peace of the path to nirvāṇa. Likewise, in the classical discourse found in Sanskrit Mahāyāna texts, the body is generally considered a source of suffering; but it is not rejected. Rather, it is accepted as a burden—the means par excellence by which one progresses religiously—for the benefit of others (cf. the *Rgyal po bde spyod la gdams pa* attributed to Nāgārjuna, cited in Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher: kunzang lama'i shelung* [New York: HarperCollins 1994]: 34). Speech, even when untrue (e.g., metaphor, lies, etc.), is used in the service of setting others on the Buddhist path. And the *true nature* at the depths of one's mind—*buddha-nature* qua *gnyis su med pa'i ye shes*—is cultivated, not subdued. According to the Vajrayāna worldview expressed in Tibetan language scriptures, one cultivates a “pure view” of the body as an actual divine abode, a *maṇḍala* divine in nature. Speech evokes and expresses awakening, the awakened state, qua mantra, *dhāraṇī*, and the like (see *Secret Essence Tantra* 2,2; cf. Choying Tobden Dorje and Gyurme Dorje, *The Complete Nyingma Tradition: From Sutra to Tantra, Books 15 to 17: The Essential Tantras of Mahayoga, Volumes One & Two* [Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2016], 100).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1977): 106 s.v. “the four thorough purities.”

<sup>8</sup> It is true that (1) classical Indian notions of *tathāgatagarbha* or buddha-nature designate what amounts to an intrinsic nature of awakening to all sentient beings; and it is also true that (2) some classical Mahāyāna scriptures—e.g., *prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* such as *Vajracchedikā* (e.g., *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 34, 329.14–19) and quasi-*śāstras* such as *Mulāmadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses in the Middle Way*, e.g., 25,19)—deny any real distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Yet tantric traditions extend this idea of awakening-as-intrinsic beyond beings to phenomena ranging from inanimate things to physical bodies. Notably, views of reality as “intrinsically impure persisted in [Buddhist] sources even as voices within this tradition challenged this dualistic construction” through the dissemination of discourse on “buddha fields” (*buddhakṣetra*), “pure lands” (淨土) and perhaps even what is “mind made” (*manomayā*) and the like (David B. Gray, “Bodies of Knowledge: Bodily Perfection in Tantric Buddhist Practice,” *Religions* 12, no. 89 [2021]: 3). Moreover, there are a variety of presentations, debates, and views around purity and its implications for manifest experience and concepts of awakenings as well. For example, see James Gentry, “What Color Is Your Buddhahood? Vision and Vacuity in Tibetan Old School Accounts of Awakened Cognition,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44 (2021): 119–207. On the Dzokchen tradition and its figuring the body in relation to buddha-nature, see David Germano, “The Shifting Terrain of the Tantric Bodies of Buddhas and Buddhists from a Yoga Perspective,” in *The Pandita and the Siddha: Tibetan Studies in Honor of E. Gene Smith*, ed. Ramon N. Prats (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1995), 50–84.

<sup>9</sup> In *Man ngag lta 'phreng gi 'grel pa* (*Commentary on the Rosary of Views*), 311.24–314.4, Rongzom follows Padmasambhava (293.11–14) in juxtaposing vajra and dialectical vehicles. Cf. *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 34.4–18 n.b.15–18. The focus of the dialectical vehicle is the nature and scope of conventional phenomena (*Dkon cog 'grel* [Precious Jewel Commentary] 1, 48.1–2); cf. 1, 190.1). This accords with both *Commentary on the Rosary of Views* and the *Lta ba'i rim pa bshad pa/man ngag* authored by [s]Ka ba dpal brtseg. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, “*Flügel schläge des Garuḍa*”: *Literar- und ideengeschichtliche Bemerkungen zu einer Liedersammlung des rDzogschen* (Tibetan and Indo-Tibetan Studies 3 [Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1990], 8–14). It is not always clear if the term unanimously includes non-Mahāyāna (Ehrhard, “*Flügel schläge des Garuḍa*,” 8, 14), though Rongzom's usage suggests as much.

<sup>10</sup> The two syllables of the Tibetan term *gsang* and *sngags* correlate to the Sanskrit terms *guhya* and *mantra* (see *Mahāvutpatti* [The Two Volume Lexicon] 4790 and e.g., 4265). The combination *gsang-sngags*, however, is rendered simply as *mantra* (4237). Any instance of \**guhya*mantra, then, should have the asterisk to mark it as artificial, which this author's previous publications omitted. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer on this point.

<sup>11</sup> In the first essay of Rongzom's *Miscellanea*, concerning the vehicles, the term “resultant vehicle” (*'bras bu'i theg pa*) is a gloss that emphasizes that the primordial nature of all phenomena—their resulting nature or consequent actuality—and the fruits of their final nature, as it were, are said to be primordially perfect (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 36.22–24).



<sup>12</sup> As Dudjom Rinpoche explains it, “in the vehicle of dialectics mind-as-such is merely perceived as the causal basis of buddhahood. Since it is held that buddhahood is obtained under the condition whereby the two provisions increasingly multiply, and since the purifying doctrines which form the causal basis of nirvāṇa are made into the path, it is called the causal vehicle. Therein, a sequence in which cause precedes result is admitted” (Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. Gyurme Dorje with Matthew Kapstein [Boston: Wisdom, 1991], 244).

<sup>13</sup> Note that for later scholiasts, such as Jé Tsongkhapa, citing the *Triyāṇavyavasthāna* of Ratnākaraśānti, the superiority of Vajrayāna lies solely in its distinctive methods, particularly “the vast—deity yoga” (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 134). Thus, he asserts a non-difference obtaining between the sūtric and tantric views (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 110, 114; cf. 55), at least in terms of outcome. When it comes to causes, his view is more parsed (cf. *Tantra in Tibet*, 114–116).

<sup>14</sup> On this view, it is taught that “mind-as-such abides primordially and intrinsically as the essence of the result, identified in the buddha-bodies and pristine cognitions. Mind-as-such is hereby established as the ground which exists within oneself from the present moment as the object to be attained. It is then established as the path through its functions of bringing about recognition and removing the provisional stains which suddenly arise by means of inducing the perception of just what is, and it is established as the result [i.e., the fruit] through its function of actualizing this very ground. Since a sequence in which cause precedes result is not really distinguished therein, it is called the resultant vehicle (*’bras-bu’i theg-pa*) and the vehicle of indestructible reality (*rdo-rje theg-pa*)” (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 244). A detailed scholastic treatment of each term is also found in Jé Tsongkhapa (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 106–108).

<sup>15</sup> Beyond intellectual error, incorrect practice consists in such things as the inability to maintain faith, transgressing one’s vows, pledges, and commitments, practicing publicly for profit, and so on. See Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 15–17.

<sup>16</sup> Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> In the first sentence to his prefatory essay on Jé Tsongkhapa’s magnum opus on Vajrayāna, *Sngags rim chen mo* (*Great Exposition on the Stages of Mantra*), Tenzin Gyatso emphasizes that “it is essential to settle the meaning of the scriptures with stainless reasoning” (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 13). He adds that Vajrayāna refuge proper is not possible unless it is “based on analysing what scriptures are reasonable and what scriptures are not” (31).

<sup>19</sup> Divergent views on the soteriological value, if any, for logic (*rigs, hetu*)—that is, whether it is counted among so-called inner or outer sciences—have a long history in Buddhist thought, though it was “firmly established in the Buddhist curriculum in [the] *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya*” attributed to Ārya Asaṅga (D. S. Ruegg, *The Life of Bu-ston Rinpoche, with the Tibetan Text of the Bu ston rNam thar*, Serie Orientale Roma, XXXIV [Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966], 38). As such, it is taken to be of fundamental importance for a number of Buddhist schools “regardless of their precise attitude as to its religious purport” (Ruegg, *The Life of Bu-ston*, 38). Though a survey of Tibetan views remains beyond the scope of the present effort, Ruegg notes that for such figures as Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyeltsen (*sa skya paN+Di ta kun dga’ rgyal mtshan*, 1182–1251) and Buton Rinchen Drup (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364), “logic, though a necessary propaedeutic, was a profane science without a primarily religious purport” (Ruegg, *The Life of Bu-ston*, 38); cf. Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 102n96. “This attitude towards logic,” Ruegg continues, “differs from that of the dGe lugs pas who consider logic to be an essential foundation of the Buddhist religion and in whose schools it is taught as one of the five basic sciences” (Ruegg, *The Life of Bu-ston*, 38). Buton’s biography documents the classical attitude that, although not an instrument of awakening per se, *pramāṇa* discourse has value insofar as it remedies deleterious misuses of language and logic. See, for example, reference to Buton’s debates with Bonpos (Ruegg, *Life of Bu-ston*, 73). I return to the soteriological scope of *pramāṇa* in concluding remarks.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 102–103.

<sup>21</sup> Tenzin Gyatso writes: “mere belief in a source of refuge is not firm; unless there is valid cognition” (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 31). Below, we shall see *Establishing Appearance as Divine* rejects this idea—or, at least, troubles it insofar as faith can yield what amounts to, on Rongzom’s view, an

epistemic perspicacity with respect to the dharma (i.e., valid cognition) unstructured by any epistemological effort.

<sup>22</sup> Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 31. Historically, though, for proponents, *pramāṇa* discourse is not simply a rationalistic exercise. It is soteriological in scope (Masatoshi Nagatomi, “Mānāsa-Pratyakṣa: A Conundrum in the Buddhist Pramāṇa System,” *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honor of Daniel H. H. Ingalls* [Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980], 245), which is not to say it is considered soteriological per se (Vincent Eltschinger, “Buddhist Esoterism and Epistemology: Two Sixth-Century Innovations as Buddhist Responses to Social and Religio-political Transformations,” in *Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Eli Franco [Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 2013], 242–244). We return to this point below.

<sup>23</sup> Cultivating the view of emptiness, however, is nevertheless described as crucial for generating nondual gnosis, which is correlated with the so-called *jñānakāya* (Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 60–62; cf. 67–71).

<sup>24</sup> In some contexts, rationality may be merely that: a means to an end (*thabs, upāya*). In others, rationality may be the key mental operation that generates wisdom—i.e., insight into emptiness. In classical Buddhist philosophy, rational analyses are often set to the task of (1) demonstrating the veracity of the teachings and (2) used as media for penetrating the truth of things—i.e., realizing the ultimate nature of things and thereby transcending ordinary existence.

<sup>25</sup> Note, for example, that *Secret Essence* emphasizes both reasoning (e.g., ch. 2, v. 2) and the innate purity beyond reasoning (e.g., ch. 12, v. 16 and ch. 13, v. 8a); for English references, see Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, 100–101, 481, and 500–502, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> I.e., proponents of *pramāṇa* logical epistemology.

<sup>27</sup> Here, I follow Vincent Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics Studies on the History, Self-understanding and Dogmatic Foundations of Late Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), §3.2.1. Note, this first comparison corresponds to Rongzom’s view (cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 102.9–20).

<sup>28</sup> Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology*, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Eltschinger’s excellent study traces a “paradigm shift” in the status and context for both *yukti* and *āgama* (*Buddhist Epistemology*, §3.2.2), which he traces mostly to early Yogācāra innovations in the polemical context. He writes that “until the end of the fifth century, Yogācāra intellectuals (including Vasubandhu, the Kośakāra) generally recognized three means of valid cognition, viz. perception, inference and scripture ([*āpt*] *āgama*, etc.), sometimes four (the same plus analogy [*upamāna*]) and maybe even five, but never only two, contrary to the Buddhist epistemologists. These three means of valid cognition enter, with equal rights, the hermeneutic and argumentative complex of *yukti*, most conspicuously in the form of the so-called reason(ing) that proves by means of arguments (*upapattisādhana*-[198] *yukti*). In other words, scripture qua *pramāṇa* belongs to reason(ing)” (197–198).

<sup>30</sup> According to Ronald Davidson, tantric authors in India used logic and epistemology in three ways: (1) in order to reject it in a polemical context, as when subordinated to esoteric claims; (2) in order to incorporate some rationality into esoteric discourse; and (3) in order to assimilate and or appropriate it (along with its cultural cachet). In this third category are tantric texts that use the language of *pramāṇa* “for the purpose of gaining derivative authority” (“Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*: Esoteric Buddhism and Epistemological Nomenclature,” in *Dharmakīrti’s Thought and Its Impact on Indian and Tibetan Philosophy—Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Dharmakīrti and Pramāṇa*, ed. Katsura Shoryu [Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997/1999], 29–30). On Davidson’s analysis, this third orientation, which he takes to be primary, is geared solely toward “buttressing the public presentation of the authenticity of the Vajrācārya” (31), who is supposed to be reliable (*mi bslu ba, avisamvādin*). As an astute blind reviewer points out, this move—centering the local, physically present guru as *pramāṇa*—in general is, on this view, not unlike a tantric twist to Dharmakīrti’s setting the Buddha as *pramāṇa* in the *pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of *Pramāṇavārttika*. More specifically for Davidson, such

appropriation of epistemological language for the verification of esoteric Buddhism’s rhetoric on questions of authority stems from that archaic tension between doctrines held and the individuals holding them. In early Buddhist terms, the admonition to follow the truth and not the individual is

indicative of the tradition's efforts to establish authority outside of an embodied state, analogous to disembodied law. Clearly, though, this answer did not resonate with a strong theme in Indian culture—the tendency to organize institutions around personalities. . . . Thus, when Dignaga began the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* with the homage to the Buddha as 'embodied authority' (*pramāṇabhūta*) it was both his affirmation of a fundamental Buddhist perspective and acknowledgment that his audience might find a purely logocentric system less attractive than one espousing the intersection of theoretical aims and personal issues. (34)

Most notably, Davidson identifies *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣeka* (*The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi*)—the text Rongzom invokes below—as an example of his third category.

<sup>31</sup> Davidson writes in conclusion that “esoteric Buddhist representatives, whether the authors of scriptures or separate technical treatises, could employ much the same language for some of the same purposes, but with [a] shift in [35] focus. Instead of the Buddha, the ‘embodied authority’ became the Vajrācārya, the initiatory master” (“Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*,” 34–35), thus working to perpetuate the “power of personality paradigms” rather than any philosophical interest per se. According to James Gentry (personal communication, 2008), it is possible Davidson has misread a passage so as to take “reliability” to refer to the Vajrācārya rather than the efficacy of the Vajrācārya's pith instructions being efficacious when put into practice and carried out to the word. See Davidson, “Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*,” 31 n.b. n26 s.v. *de'i spyod pa'i rjes su 'jug cing tshig bzhin du byed la mi slu ba'o* . . . See, also, below.

<sup>32</sup> Dalai Lama, Tsong-kha-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 61. The dialectical approach of logic and epistemology taught in the Mahāyāna sūtras, on this view, would be considered an artful act of imagination. In the words of Dudjom Rinpoche, “when the profound and vast abiding nature of inconceivable reality is appraised according to the dialectical vehicle, ultimate truth is established through the valid cognition of inference by means of perceptive judgements made according to logical syllogisms, and so is an intellectually created ground” (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 247). According to Rinpoche, Vajrayāna or “the mantra [vehicle], on the other hand, does not refer to logical syllogisms and the intellectually contrived discriminative awareness produced by thought. Pristine cognition uncreated by the intellect” (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 247). Yet, according to the approach advocated in Mahāyoga tantra text traditions associated with *Māyājāla* (*The Web of Illusion*), there are three “all-embracing valid cognitions” that establish “the abiding nature of the continuum of the ground” as the view to be realized—i.e., penetrated via direct perception of intrinsic awareness (*rang rig*) (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 275). The three *pramāṇa* (“valid cognitions”) are: direct perception (*mngon sum*, *pratyakṣa*), inference through the force of fact (*dnogs stobs rjes dpag*, *vastubalānumāna*), and scriptural authority (*lung* [*shin tu lkog gyur*], *āgama*) (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, §2, 117, s.v.). There are four types of logic (*gtan tshigs bzhi*) that establish the ground per se: the four types of realization (*rtogs bzhi*), the three types of purity (*dag pa gsum*) given in Mahāyoga, the four modes of sameness (*mnyam pa bzhi*), and supreme embodiment or identity (*bdag nyid chen po*); cf. Dominic D. Z. Sur, “The *Dzokchen* Apology: On the Limits of Logic, Language, & Epistemology in Early Great Perfection,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 50, no. 1 (2021): 22–23n84.

<sup>33</sup> *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (*Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments*) (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözang* 2, 243–389) connects tantric ethics, pure view, and tantric *pramāṇa* in fascinating ways that inform Rongzom's broader philosophical project. I am presently preparing a study of these passages as part of a larger study on the topic for publication.

<sup>34</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözang* (258.4–7).

<sup>35</sup> Regarding *blo gzu bo* as “forthright imagination”: Dorji Wangchuk, “An Eleventh-Century Defense of the Guhyagarbhatantra,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: Proceedings of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, edited by Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 265–269, translates *blo gzu bo* as “objectivity”; Sur, “*Dzokchen* Apology,” translates it “open-minded.” Both mislead. Regarding the term: the Tibetan term *blo* corresponds to the Sanskrit *buddhi*, which is described as the intellectual “power of forming and retaining conceptions and general notions” (Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1872], 733 s.v. *buddhi*). Second, a *blo gzu bo* as such is not a passive nonconceptually constructed state in which there is no bias to any particular perspective—a detached and objective rationality—in accordance with *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs*, where we read that an intellect (*blo*) remains “straight” (*gzu bo*) when it does not experience attachment to a given perspective (*phyogs zhen med pa*, 701a). In Rongzom, an intellect that is *gzu bo* is given to a particular way of conceiving ordinary things in an

extraordinary manner. Rongzom's *blo gzu bo* refers to an axiomatic dialectic—a Vajrayāna style of thinking (i.e., imagining)—that validates and assents to a pure perception of reality. This dialectic can be summed up: *the purer, the truer*. This idea is unpacked in *Precious Jewel Commentary*, which states: “in assessments associated with a forthright imagination, one ought to understand that the purer the appearance, the truer it is” (43.6–7). The *Precious Jewel Commentary* also states: “the perception of impure water, pure water, and extremely pure water are different. Therefore each individual, having taken their own direct perception as valid, argues against any contrary defining features [asserted]. When as those [perceptions] are assessed with a forthright imagination (*blo gzu bo*), then the more purity perceived, the more real/true it is because [the view of purity] is the object of faculties purified of obscurations; and because, when set forth based on that, [the mind] is stable and incontrovertible” (104.2–7). Rongzom continues: “since there is disagreement about whether appearances are impure, pure, or completely pure, [Buddhists] having taken their own direct perception as valid, engage in argument against any contrary defining features. Those appearances, moreover, when set forth via a forthright imagination, [are evaluated,] as above, [according to] the supreme reasoning [of a forthright imagination]: *the purer, the [more] tenable*. In that context, an impure body is the appearance of ordinary body, speech, and mind linked to the ripening of karma. A pure body is the appearance of body, speech, and mind linked with the prayers of those who have attained empowerment. The completely pure body is the appearance of the *maṇḍalas* of the *kāyas* and wisdoms of the conquerors. These are set forth according to reasoning that accords with proponents of the existence of external objects” (*phyi rol gyi don yod par smra ba, bāhyārth[āsti]vāda*); on the term, *bāhyārthvāda* or *bahirarthavāda*, see Saccone and Szántó, *Tantra and Pramāṇa*, 49n53). “When made established in accordance with Yogācāra and the like, who insist that all is mental appearance, then all appearance of bodies, resources, and dimensions of experience are not in fact a real entity independent different in significance [from the appearance]. Being the appearance of ordinary mind as such, they are established in common” (*Precious Jewel Commentary*: 104.24–105.10). Thus, a better translation, playing on *gzu bo* as “upright,” “straight,” and “honest” while keeping the supremacy of the tantric view in mind, would be “forthright imagination.” Additionally, “forthright” means “proceeding directly forward,” which touches upon the idea of Vajrayāna as the direct path to buddhahood. For Rongzom, a *blo gzu bo* is best understood as a conceptual framework (thus an act of imagination) that proceeds directly forward toward awakening through naturally superordinating, and assenting to, the totalizing and pervasive nature of purity in interpreting one's own experience. Summing up the project of taking this forthright imagination to its logical conclusion, Rongzom doubles down on the fact that this presentation precludes any use of language to accurately describe what awakening is like, citing classical Mahāyāna sūtra: “in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (*Discourse on the Stem Array*) it says ‘to the degree you present characteristics, to that degree you truck in the experience of the immature; buddhas do not perceive any thing characterized’” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 136.20–21).

<sup>36</sup> For example, *The Rosary of Views* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 296.18–21).

<sup>37</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.12–17).

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), includes this tantra on a list of “important” texts he describes as a *canon in use* (152–153). Notable, too, is Davidson identifying this tantra as an example of “appropriation” (“Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*,” 30; cf. 30n29).

<sup>39</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.1–2). In typical Dharmakīrtian terms, reliability (*mi sblu ba*) correlates to notions of causal efficacy or manifestation (*arthakriyā*) with respect to an awareness event that is “not contravened” or “incontrovertible” (*mi bslu*). In *Establishing Appearance as Divine*, the reliability of the guru's pith instructions as tantric *pramāṇa* also lies in their ability to produce a successful (and somewhat predictable) practical outcome, a point made in *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi Tantra*: the pith instruction is a reliable (*mi bslu ba*) *pramāṇa* because putting them into practice in accordance with the guru's instructions to the letter brings about the predicted outcome (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 307.2–5).

<sup>40</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.2–5). This passage is cited but misinterpreted in Davidson (“Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*,” 31).

<sup>41</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (1, 111.5).

<sup>42</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.7–10).

<sup>43</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.10–12).

<sup>44</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.12–15).

<sup>45</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 307.15–18).

<sup>46</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 305.21–4).

<sup>47</sup> Tōh. 496. Tibetan: *Lag na rdo rje dbang bskur ba'i rgyud chen po*; cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 305.17: *Phyag na rdo rje dbang bskur ba'i tan tra*). Cf. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 152. Contra Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000): ch. 7 s.v. *Carya tantras*; Eltschinger's "Buddhist Esoterism," like David Germano, "The Seven Descents and the Early History of *Rnying ma* Transmissions," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 230, notes that Buddhaguhya (fl. eighth c.) classifies *The Ritual Initiation of Vajrapāṇi* as *kriyātantra*, where external behavior (*phyi'i spyod*, \**bāhyacaryā*) is emphasized, which is often contrasted with, say, *yogatantra*, said to be organized around the inner application of yoga (*nang gi sbyor*, \**adhyātmayoga*) rather than exterior behaviors (174n6). Germano also notes that later works, such as Atiśa's *Byang chub lam kyi sgron ma*, change the categorization from *kriyā* to *carya* (Germano, "The Seven Descents," 230).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 87, 215.11.

<sup>49</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 305.24–306.4). A similar point is made in Rongzom's commentary on *Secret Essence Tantra*: "the transformation of the appropriated aggregates corresponds to the five aggregates of liberation, which become the basis of embodiment associated with the qualities of sublime being's buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind. The nature of ethical discipline is in that [state], the *tathāgata*'s buddha-body, an exalted body purified [of any] impurity" (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 110.24–111.4).

<sup>50</sup> *yid nam par dag pa* [*dang ba*], *viprasannamanāḥ* (*The Two Volume Lexicon* 423). This phrase may helpfully gesture toward overlapping conceptual space linking the sort of epistemological "clarity," "vividness," or "lucidity" (*gsal ba*, *spaṣṭa*) valorized in Dharmakīrtian yogic perception (*rnal 'byor mngon sum*, *yogipratyakṣa*) and the primordial existential "purity" (*rnam dag*, *viśuddhi*) imagined (initially) in Rongzom's tantric approach.

<sup>51</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.4–7).

<sup>52</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.7–13); cf. *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 87, 279.3.

<sup>53</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.13–14).

<sup>54</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.14–16).

<sup>55</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 306.22–24).

<sup>56</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.18–21)

<sup>57</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 307.21–308.1).

<sup>58</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 308.12–14).

<sup>59</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 308.1–6).

<sup>60</sup> *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* (vol. 87, 102.6–7).

<sup>61</sup> For an English-language biography of Rongzom, see <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Rongzom-Chokyi-Zangpo/6194>; cf. Dominic Sur, *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle: Dzogchen as the Culmination of the Mahāyāna* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2017), 6–7.

<sup>62</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *Establishing Appearance as Divine* are from *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung*, though any interpolation from the critical edition of this text are indicated "C." An English translation of *Establishing Appearance as Divine* is available in Köppl, *Establishing Appearances*, who analyzes Rongzom's use of the four principles of reasoning (*rigs pa bzhi*). *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* contains both long works and many short essays, such as *Establishing Appearance as Divine*; others are in *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung's Miscellanea* (*gsung thor bu*).

<sup>63</sup> In Tibetan, the Sanskrit term "dispute" (*vāda*) renders as "debate" (*√rtsod*) and "dispute" (*√brgal*). In Sanskrit philosophy, *vāda*, along with verbal declaration (*brjod pa*, *jalpa*) and mere refutation (*sun ci phyin du rgol ba*, *vitandā*), comprise acceptable styles of polemical debate. The three are counted among 16 categories (*tshig gi don bcu drug*, *ṣoḍacapadārthā*; cf. *gnas*, *padārtha*) of Sanskrit philosophy, recorded at the opening of the *Nyāyasūtra* (*Threads of Reasoning*), along with the means of valid epistemological warrants (*tshad ma*, *pramāṇa*), objects of comprehension (*gzhal bya*, *prameya*), doubt (*the tshom*, *saṁśaya*), purpose (*dgos pa*, *prayojana*), exemplars (*dpe*, *dr̥ṣṭānta*), established philosophical positions (*grub pa'i mtha'*, *siddhānta*), the limbs or parts of a syllogism (*yan lag/cha shas*, *avayava*), speculative reasoning

(*rtog ge, tarka*), resolution (*gtan la dbab pa, nirṇaya*), pseudo-logic (*rgyu ltar snang ba, helvābhāsa*), quibbling (*tshig dor, chala*), specious objections (*ltag [g]chod, jāti*), and vulnerable or disputable points (*[tshar] gcad pa'i gnas, nigrāsthāna*) (D. S. Ruegg, *A History of Indian Literature: The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1981), 21n46; cf. C. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 87. Of the three styles of debate, only *vitandā* is qualified by the type of thoroughgoing nonacceptance of any position at all that is lionized in some *madhyamaka* textual traditions vis-à-vis *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*Dispeller of Disputes*) 29 (cf. *Catuḥśataka* [*The Four Hundred*] 16,25), though, as Esther Solomon writes, “no party would profess to indulge in a *jalpa* or *vitandā*” (*Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion*, 2 vols. [Ahmedabad: Institute of Learning and Research, Gujarat Vidya Sabha], 1976–1978, 881), including *Mādhyamikas* (D. S. Ruegg, “Does the *Mādhyamika* Have a Thesis and Philosophical Position?” in *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, ed. B. K. Matilal and R. D. Evans [Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986], 233–235; cf. Ruegg, *History of Indian Literature*, 37n93). For a survey of Indian dialectical styles, including *vāda*, see Solomon’s *Indian Dialectics*; cf. Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999): s.v. *inference (anumāna) and the Nyāya School*, especially 134–137. In historical terms, Esther Solomon has shown the roots and growth of dialectical philosophy as a trend that is motivated by engagement with and development of practice and theory (*Indian Dialectics*, 877), with the epic period witnessing the maturation of *vāda* discourse traditions (*Indian Dialectics*, 687). *Pramāṇa* literature, constituting instances of *vāda*, were first formulated in response to the “dialectical criticism of the Lokāyatas” (*Indian Dialectics*, 687). Evidence and proof criteria advanced in *vāda* literature contributed to the development of *pramāṇa* discourse (*Indian Dialectics*, 881).

<sup>64</sup> In this category, I do not consider so-called revealed or visionary authorship.

<sup>65</sup> Inferring fire from smoke is, for example, described in terms of inference based in the logic of effect or outcome (*’bras bu’i gtan tshig, kāryahetu*). *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s argument underlines the categorical primacy of inference based in the logic of nature (*rang bzhin gyi gtan tshigs, svabhāvahetu*). Key for Rongzom’s overarching meta-theory of logic—and his assertion that correct perception is perception of timeless purity—is his insistence that all forms and styles of inter-Buddhist logic are circumscribed insofar as they are subsumed within this category (i.e., the logic of nature). Glossing its scope in his *Miscellanea*, Rongzom offers a challenge to an imagined interlocutor, who is also a Buddhist:

In the end, that in which no fault is found is designated as conventionally true. That being so, the two approaches—the approach of the inseparability of the two truths and the approach of asserting two truths—must be understood to be the following. The pure expanse of reality is itself considered the essence of the *tathāgata* pertaining to the nature of all phenomena.

When this logic is demonstrated through detailed explanation, some may ask: how is it known that a buddha knows only the pure expanse of reality?

To this, we might respond by asking how one knows the array of exalted buddha-bodies and the gnosis [of a buddha] exist? [They] are not manifest in direct perception. Since, [for] both parties [in this debate], the blessings of compassion are established and proclaimed supposedly due to the observation of effect. In this case, while the existence of a cause is established by means of [its] effect, there is no definite need to establish [some] causal basis.

Someone may object: since the abiding nature of objects of knowledge is qualified in the manner of the two truths, even on the level of buddhahood it is not suitable to be without the modes of the two truths. This is established by a reason of nature (*rang bzhin gyi gtan tshigs*).

[Response:] that was explained above. The logic of nature pertains to reality. This reason establishes our text. On this view, according to treatises on logic, which teach that the general character of logic is such that it is entailed through its parts—and that without them, logical pervasion does not occur. Since logical pervasion is established, all logic is suffused with the logic of nature. In this case, if one determines it is not possible for nature to be otherwise, flaws will not undermine rationality (*rigs pa*). Moreover, on this view, [i] if something exists, its non-existence is impossible; [ii] if something does not exist, it is impossible for it to exist; [iii] if something exists, its existence is not possible; and [iv] if something does not exist, its non-existence is not possible.

All rationality is included in these four types of natural mode [because they encompass all the logical possibilities] of things. Accordingly, none of the logical [forms of rationality] found in treatises

on language and logic (*sgra dang tshad*), not those in treatises on rationality (*rigs*); all the logics in the sutras, tantras, authoritative transmissions, and pith instructions—[of] all the logics one might find set forth—none are seen to go beyond these [four modes] of nature. Whatever is established by these is not seen to be flawed. That being so, the general character of all logic pertains to the logic of nature.” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 30.4–31.5; cf. Sur, “The Dzokchen Apology,” 18n62, which erroneously identifies this passage as from *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1)

<sup>66</sup> We also find this thesis, with some slight terminological dissimilarity, in Rongzom’s commentary on Padmasambhava’s *The Rosary of Views* or *Commentary on the Rosary of Views* (95.3–9, 18–20), which may be compared with chapter two of *Secret Essence Tantra*. The verbal noun used here, *sangs rgyas pa*, the Tibetan equivalent of the secondary derivative Sanskrit, *bauddhika*, is noteworthy. In other contexts, this term means “one who follows the Buddha”—i.e., “Buddhist,” as in *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 7.15, 10.4–5, 13.19, 17.1, 32.5 passim. In the *Establishing Appearance as Divine*—and in the context of Old School philosophical Vajrayāna, however, *sangs rgyas pa* has a more abstract meaning, something akin to *perfect*. It is composed from a nominal form of a verbal stem, *√budh* (“to awake”), which forms *buddha*, meaning “awake[ned]” “awake-ing one,” etc. The Tibetan term for “buddha,” for its part, is composed by two preterit verbal elements: *√sangs* (“purified”) and *√rgya* (“expanded”). Thus, when we say “buddha” in Tibetan—*sangyé*—we literally say “purified-expanded” (*sangs rgyas*), a term referencing the nature of awakening, whose literal meaning is typically unpacked as *purification* of the two types of obscuration and the visionary *expansion* of the two types of exalted knowers, all of which amount to the perfected ideal. Cf. Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, 55; Herbert Guenther, *The Matrix of Mystery: Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1984) describes *sangs rgyas pa* “descriptive of a process and hence has an [215] adjectival as well as verbal connotation” that he distinguishes from the noun *sangs rgyas* (214–215n19); cf. 242n60. Combined with “primordially” (*ye nas*) and the nominalizing *ming mtha’*, -pa, *ye nas sangs rgyas pa* [\**ādi-bauddhika*] is “primordially buddhic,” “always awake,” “perfect from the beginning,” and the like. Just as *lauikika* (“worldly”), *vaudika* (“Vedic”), and *nyayāyika* (“logician”), so *bauddhika* (“buddhic”/“buddhifying”).

<sup>67</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 559.1–3).

<sup>68</sup> The centrality of this idea is seen in the frequency of its various iterations throughout philosophical Vajrayāna. The first couple examples in *Secret Essence Tantra* are seen at 2,2 (*Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma* 102, 290.17; Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, 100), which states “the three [worlds of] becoming are, from the beginning, *buddhakṣetra*” (*srid gsum ye nas gsangs rgyas zhing*); and at 2,14 (*Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma* 102, 292.2–3; Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, 100), which states that awakened beings—and every thing in our experience—are timelessly perfect (*de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad dang/ chos thams cad ye nas sangs rgyas pa . . .*). As Buddhaguhya/Buddhagupta puts it (line 366), everything we experience is always already pure (*chos rnam thams cad ye nas dag*). This idea is found throughout Rongzom’s writing, as well; notably, in *Precious Jewel Commentary*, we find the title, *Precious Jewel Commentary*, explained in terms of the tantric thesis (37.5–8). There is also a notable passage in which Rongzom is distinguishing his own *Secret Essence Tantra* exegeses from that given by mythic *ācārya* figures Padmasambhava, Sūryasiṃha, and Mañjūśrīmitra. Whereas Padmasambhava’s *Man ngag lta’ phren* (*The Rosary of Views*), Rongzom writes, offers pith instructions on Dzokchen spontaneity; and Sūryasiṃha’s *Bde ba chen po’i man ngag* (*Pith Instruction on Great Bliss*) treats what Rongzom calls “a means for producing the great bliss of *bodhicitta* by means of the nondual union of masculine and feminine based in the Mahāyoga approach to the path”; and Mañjūśrīmitra’s *Chi kha ma’i man ngag* teaches generation, perfection, and great perfection in terms of vital breath and *nādi*; Rongzom describes his own treatment as one that sticks to the words in explicating Dzokchen alone (*Precious Jewel Commentary* in *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 195.18–196.1). The fact Rongzom delineates the scope of his commentarial orientation from other, earlier masters is notable—and a topic of a forthcoming article on philosophy in *Secret Essence*. Again, *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s tantric thesis closely recalls a passage in the *Secret Essence*-based doxography attributed to Padmasambhava, *The Rosary of Views*. The passage reads: “in the Dzokchen approach to the path, meditate after realizing that all worldly and transcendent phenomena are, from the beginning (i.e., “primordially”; Tibetan: *ye nas*), without distinction in being the nature of buddha-body, -speech, and -mind” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 293–300; and again at 304.5–8; (337.23–338.1). Cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 450.13 and 492.4–7.

<sup>69</sup> *Ad Secret Essence Tantra* (*Secret Essence Tantra*) 2,2 (*Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma* 102, 290.13–18; Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, 100).

<sup>70</sup> In the Pāli tradition, see, e.g., *Samyuttanikāya*, *Khandhavagga* 48(6) s.v. Aggregates (Bhikku Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, Translated from Pali, vol. 1 [Boston: Wisdom, 2000], 886–887); in Sanskrit Buddhism, see, e.g., Tōh. 95: *Lalitavistara* (*rgya cher rol pa*) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh95.html?#translation>, §14,22).

<sup>71</sup> This is similar to the aporia produced in the concept of *tathāgatagarbha*.

<sup>72</sup> Tibetan: *da lam gyis sgrub pa lta bu ni ma yin*.

<sup>73</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “In the secret mantra approach [to the path], the two types of truth are inseparable, primordially perfected, and so on. Sentient beings set forth and debate their individual views on the character of shared perceptions; and that is the reason they are not debating about the existence of subject matter other than appearance” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 559.8–18).

<sup>74</sup> Dorje, *Complete Nyingma*, writes: “All things of phenomenal appearance, cyclic existence and nirvāṇa, appear as a mere magical emanation (*sgyu ma*’i *’phrul pa*), in which the relative and ultimate truths are indivisible and inseparable” (15); cf. Sur, *Entering the Way*, 166.

<sup>75</sup> For the Nyingma traditions of Buddhism, the term “Dzokchen” (*rdzogs chen*) mostly refers to the acme of Old School Buddhism’s nine vehicle doxographic model. The nine vehicle iteration of Buddhist practice lineages—one among many such documented schemes ranging variously from one to 16 vehicles (David Higgins, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)* [Vienna: Association for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2013], 225n553)—refers to that of the hearer (*nyan thos*, *śrāvaka*), solitary realizer (*rang rgyal ba*, *prayetkajīna*), bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa*’), *kriya* tantra (*bya ba*’i *rgyud*, *kriyātantra*, “action tantra”), *charya* tantra (*spyod pa*’i *rgyud*, *caryātantra*, “conduct tantra”) sometimes given as *ubhayatantra* (*upa*’i *rgyud* or *gnyis ga*’i *rgyud*), *yoga* tantra (*rnal ’byor kyi rgyud*, *yogatantra*), great *yoga* tantra (*rnal ’byor chen po*’i *rgyud*, *mahāyogatantra*), *anuyogatantra* (“tantra of subsequent yoga”) (*rjes su rnal ’byor gyi rgyud*), and the acme or peak *yoga* tantra of Dzokchen (*atiyogatantra*). The term “Dzokchen” thus indicates both a Buddhist teaching tradition that can be contemplatively put into practice (a *yāna* in the objective sense of the word) and an unimaginably sublime consummate primordial fundament structuring us at our bottom, something like an effortless gnostic perfection composing every moment of our being. While often identified via a Sanskrit rubric, *atiyoga*, traditional Dzokchen is a Tibetan style of Buddhism “that has its inception among Indian figures in the eighth century, and claims itself to be authored by a series of famous eighth century Indian Buddhists (Surativajra, Mañjuśrimitra, Jñānasūtra, Vimalamitra and Śrīsimha), [when] in fact the tradition represents arguably the first truly innovative transformation of tantra into a distinctively Tibetan form during the eleventh to twelfth century” (Germano, “The Shifting Terrain of the Tantric Bodies,” Part 1, under: *Indian Buddhist Tantra from Tibetan Perspectives*). Traditional glosses of the term *dzokchen* sometimes render it a bivalent term, such as when Dzokchen is described as “the climax of all vehicles and the culmination of all” Buddhist paths of practice. With that gloss, Dudjom Rinpoche gestures to the primacy of Dzokchen as both a philosophical theory we can study and a ritual meditative practice. See Dudjom, *The Nyingma School*, 294; cf. Nupchen’s 10<sup>th</sup>-century *Bsam gtan mig sgron* uses the phrases “the supreme vehicle [and] superb pinnacle of yoga” (*theg pa*’i *mchog rnal ’byor gyi phul yang tog*, 290.6) and “the preeminent treasure of all vehicles” (*theg pa thams cad kyi yang mdzod*, 291.2); cf. Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014): under: *rdzogs chen*. Also, other traditions—Buddhist and non-Buddhist: Bön, Kagyu, Geluk, among them—maintain Dzokchen teachings.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., Sur, *Entering the Way*, 91, 109, 105, and 142; n.b. 30n.

<sup>77</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 559.3–6). Note this would seem to be the classical (dualist) Buddhist position, which seems undeniable on a conventional level, thus contradicting Rongzom’s *Establishing Appearance as Divine pratijñā*. Recall, however, that it is not always the goal in *vāda* literature to demonstrate the supremacy of one’s position and prove it “right.” As Solomon writes: “an interesting feature of these is that the parties make out a point very clearly and have something to say in defense of their own position even after the other party has pointed out drawbacks in it” (*Indian Dialectics*, 688). In other words, the truth of the matter is about practical benefits, theoretical drawbacks notwithstanding.

<sup>78</sup> This idea is best articulated in Rongzom’s *Sbrul nag po*’i *stong thun*, known in English as the *Black Snake Discourse*. See *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 66.2–68.14. Rongzom synthesizes the black snake discourse in *Theg chen tshul ’jug* (*Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*) (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung*



1, 459.5–460.5, which is translated in Sur’s *Entering the Way* (see 89–91). The essay in volume 2 is translated in Appendix 5 of Sur (2025).

<sup>79</sup> Variation between “error”/“mistaken” and “fiction”/“confusion” attempts to reflect a useful polysemy vis-à-vis *’khrul ba*, as the inflection slips between objective and subjective registers.

<sup>80</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 559.8–18).

<sup>81</sup> Prima facie readings of *prajñāpāramitā* texts, such as *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (*The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*), *madhyamaka* literature (e.g., Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses on the Middle Way*), 25.11), *tathāgatagarbha* literature (e.g., *Ratnagotravibhāga-mahāyāna-uttaratantra-śāstra*), among others, may suit Rongzom’s interpretation. In those contexts, the text will be included in his hermeneutical category, “special Mahāyāna,” which is reserved for works grounded in the inseparability of the two truths. Specifically, the primary criteria for this category, Rongzom writes, is a rhetorical premium on the buddha ground as pure *dharmadhātu* recognized in the context of the indivisibility of the two truths (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 41.8–11).

<sup>82</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 559.18–21). This view is similar to the thoroughgoing illusionism of, for example, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, a text Rongzom includes in his hermeneutical category of “special Mahāyāna.”

<sup>83</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “That being so, phenomena, appearing as various attributes, are [in fact] the *maṇḍala* of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind itself, which, like the omnipresent (*dus gsum*) perfection [of awakening], are never something other than the essence of total purity. The difference between sentient beings and buddhas is not made in terms of phenomenal essence. Rather, like the perceptible appearance of specific causes and results within a dream, they, [awakened beings and sentient beings,] are set forth as merely appearing separate to the intellect by force of imagination.” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 559.21–560.2).

<sup>84</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 560.2–7).

<sup>85</sup> E.g., *Abhidharmakośa* (cf. La Vallée Poussin, *L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu: Traduction et Annotations*, vols. 1–6 [Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1971], 185–186; Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā [*Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines*]; Edward Conze, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, with the Divisions of the Abhisamayālaṅkāra* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995]: chapter XX s.v. *Three Doors to Deliverance*; and Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā [*Seventy Verses on Emptiness*] 7 and Lokāṭīṣṭava [*Praise for Transcendent One*] 26–28 [Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana*], respectively).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (*Commentary on the “Supplement to the Middle Way”*): *rnam par thar pa’i sgo mtshan ma med pa ni mtshan ma ma dmigs pa’i sgo nas zhi ba’i mtshan nyid can no* (cited in Anne MacDonald, *In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One: Volume I: Introduction, Manuscript Description, Sanskrit Text Volume II: Prasannapadā, Tibetan Text, Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens* [Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015]: §74, 171n331).

<sup>87</sup> *rtog*, *kalpanā*. Some may take issue with translating *rtog* as “concept” and *√rtog* as “conception”; Sur, *Entering the Way*, distinguishes between “concept[ualization]” (*rtog pa*) and “imagination” (*kun tu rtog pa*, *saṃkalpa*) in translating Rongzom in a different text and context (101 passim). In the present essay, in order to emphasize the situation (and art!) of conceptuality—the intellect—in philosophical Vajrayāna in contrast to classical Mahāyāna, I mostly use “imagination.” Conception, conceive, etc., meaning “to form,” is imagination inasmuch as it consists in *mental* formation. *Kalpanā*, is derivative of *kalpanam* via *√klṛp* (Vaman Shyivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Revised & Enlarged Edition* [Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1992] s.v. *kalpanā*).

<sup>88</sup> My thanks to Professor Yaroslav Komarovski for pointing this out.

<sup>89</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 560.7–13).

<sup>90</sup> An examination of his application of the four principles illuminates his practice of “reasoning itself” and evinces his overarching philosophical aim of authorizing, which is not the same as *logically establishing as proof*, the tantric view of purity in philosophical terms. According to Köppl’s *Establishing Appearances*, Rongzom’s aim is “to prove purity through reasoning” (2008, 61). Pace Köppl, I dissent from this view a bit below based on *Establishing Appearance as Divine*’s own presentation, which does not seem to me to be based in rationality, typically construed. A qualification is required.

<sup>91</sup> Köppl's *Establishing Appearances*, a translation of *Establishing Appearance as Divine*, treats the four types of reasoning, the locus classicus for which is (Tōh. 106) *Samdhiniromocana Sūtra* (*Discourse Unraveling the Intent*), chapter 10 (for an English translation, see John Powers, *Wisdom of Buddha: The Samdhiniromocana Mahāyāna Sūtra* [Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995], 284–289). Other studies and discussion of these four *yukti* are found in Matthew Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), 320–322; and Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology*, 197n22. The manner in which this fourfold rubric has traditionally been employed has varied widely enough as to leave uncertainty about its normative context. Rongzom's presentation is somewhat unconventional when compared to more recent presentations (Eltzschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology*). For example, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* lists the principle reasoning of reality first rather than last, as it is in canonical sources (Köppl, *Establishing Appearances*, ch. 4).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 102.21–103.1; 488–490.24; 2, 309.8–310.11; Sur, *Entering the Way*, 123–125.

<sup>93</sup> The arguably earlier, non-Buddhist roots are found in the medical diagnostic context—the “heuristic reasoning” of the *Caraka Samhitā* in which *yukti* correlates with medically warranted knowledge (*pramāṇa*) (King, *Indian Philosophy*, 44).

<sup>94</sup> Kapstein, *Reason's Traces*, 320–321; emphasis mine. The *Discourse Unravelling the Thought*, the earliest known source that employs the four principles of reasoning, certainly may have been an inspiration. Another source that may have played a role is Asaṅga's *Śrāvakaḥṛī* (*Stages of the Hearer*), in which Asaṅga argues for the impure nature of things using exactly these four principles. In that work, the four *yukti* are discussed in the context of critically reflecting upon the *buddha-dharma*. For Asaṅga, *yukti* corresponds conceptually with the terms “yoga” and *upāya*, signifying a *method* or *means to an end*. The fourfold logic are also treated in Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (*Compendium of Metaphysics*) and Maitreya's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. Rongzom was no doubt familiar with these works. Furthermore, we might also notice the *Valid Means of Cognition*, attributed to Trisong Deutsen, as a possible source of inspiration for Rongzom with its elaborate treatment of the fourfold logic (Köppl, *Establishing Appearances*, 62–63).

<sup>95</sup> According to *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*, each of the four types of logical reasoning concerns a particular dimension of perception. Each is said to have a different cognitive concern (*yul*) that, when properly applied, correlates to an elimination a type of skeptical bias (*sel ba bzhi*), which is considered a hindrance to the path (see *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* 488.1–490.24); for an English translation, see Sur, *Entering the Way*, 123–126. In that text, Rongzom describes their respective cognitive concerns or “objects” as follows: “the *yukti* or principle logic of reality comprises proof given in terms of nature as such. The principle of efficacy comprises proof given in terms of causal outcomes. The principle of dependence comprises proofs given in terms of causal root. The principle of valid proof comprises proof qualified by stainless rationality alone. For each of the four principles there are four respective eliminations: gnawing doubt about the essential nature of things, gnawing doubt about causal instruments, gnawing doubt about manifestation, and gnawing doubt about reasoning each, in their turn, eliminated through application of the four types of logic” (488.3–8); cf. *Precious Jewel Commentary* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 102.15–103.2) and *Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 309.2–310.11).

<sup>96</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 560.10–11).

<sup>97</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (2, 308.19–22).

<sup>98</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 560.13–14).

<sup>99</sup> “Those with faith in the teaching who have accepted scripture and pith instructions as authentic” (*spro ba rnams lung dang man ngag tshad mar byas*).

<sup>100</sup> *rdzogs par khyab pa*. Literally, “fully penetrating,” “perfectly pervading,” or “completely entailing.”

<sup>101</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 560.14–23).

<sup>102</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 560.23–561.5).

<sup>103</sup> “The nature and power of vajra buddha-body, -speech, and -mind qualifying all apparent phenomena” (*snang ba'i chos rnams sku gsung thugs rdo rje'i ngo bo nyid dang mthu can*).

<sup>104</sup> Tom J. F. Tillemans, *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and His Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Wisdom, 1999), 43.

<sup>105</sup> Tillemans, *Scripture*, 43–44.

<sup>106</sup> See Eltschinger, *Dharmakīrti*, 420; cf. Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 243–244. Rongzom’s phrasing gestures toward three analytic criteria (*dpyad pa gsum*) used to determine whether or not a scripture forms a sound basis for inferring the truth of the matter. Tillemans writes that, according to the three analytic criteria, “a scripture must be (i) unrefuted by direct perception, (ii) unrefuted by *vastubalapravṛttānumāna*, and (iii) free from contradiction with other propositions whose truth is scripturally inferred. Put in this way it might seem that what is being said is simply that the scripture cannot be refuted by any *pramāṇa* or that it cannot come into conflict with any of the other three kinds of objects. However, the point at stake, as we find it elaborated in PV I, k.216, Dharmakīrti’s *Svavṛtti* or *Svopajñavṛtti* and Karnakagomin’s *Ṭīkā*, is more subtle and is essentially an inductive argument: the scripture’s assertions concerning *pratyakṣa* and *parokṣa* are seen to be trustworthy, and so, similarly, its assertions about *atyantaparokṣa*, if not internally inconsistent, should also be judged trustworthy” (*Scripture*, 30). Śākya Chokden, for his part, rejects the idea that scriptural inference derives from the force of fact (George Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997]: 529–530n47).

<sup>107</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 561.6–13).

<sup>108</sup> As my blind reviewer points out, for Dharmakīrti and his legatees, inferring a sprout by means of a seed is only guaranteed under particular circumstances in which a complex of cooperating factors are present. Obviously, the existence of a seed does not in-and-of-itself warrant the sprout’s existence.

<sup>109</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 561.13–22).

<sup>110</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 561.22–562.1)

<sup>111</sup> *sgrub byed tsam bstan to* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung ’bum 2.309.10–11).

<sup>112</sup> Note to emphasize the concept of *acceptance* (*abhyupagama*, *khas len* [pa]), which connotes “in a general and weaker sense, to accept/acceptance (in regard to a view, doctrine etc.) and, in a strong sense, to assert/tenet” (D. S. Ruegg, *Three Studies in the History of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Philosophy: Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought, Part 1*. [Vienna: Arbeitskreis Für Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2000]: 106–7n3. We return to *abhyupagama* below.

<sup>113</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 562.1–6).

<sup>114</sup> The Sanskrit abstract suffix, *-gata*, has the sense here of “consisting in.” Thus, to say stuff is *tathāgata* is a metaphorical way of gesturing toward its ultimate nature. It is not a literal description, such as stating (absurdly) that a rock is an awakened being (*buddha*). That is, since phenomena consist in suchness, it is acceptable to call them “*tathāgata*.” A similar view is documented in the *Ratnakūṭa* collection, which Rongzom cites elsewhere, e.g., *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 75.16–8; cf. *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma* 43, 68.8–10.

<sup>115</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung 562.6–19). The Sanskrit *Viśayāvatārajñānālokālaṃkārasūtra*’s (*Discourse on the Ornament of the Light of Awareness That Enters the Domain of All Buddhas*) locative absolute—*asatsu dharmeṣu caranti loke*—seems preferable to the Tibetan *’jig rten dag na med pa’i chos la spyod* here, which occurs in other passages in *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* (e.g., 2, 75.22–4). Cf. Doctor’s 84000 translation, 1,42 (84000. *The Ornament of the Light of Awareness That Enters the Domain of All Buddhas* (*Sarva-buddha-viśayāvatāra-jñānālokālaṃkāra*, *sangs rgyas thams cad kyi yul la ’jug pa’i ye shes snang ba’i rgyan*, Tōh 100). Translated by Dharmachakra Translation Committee. *Translating the Words of the Buddha*, 2024. <https://84000.co/translation/toh100>). Notably, in the *sūtra*, just before declaring this couplet, the Buddha is making the point to the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī, that phrases describing non-implicative negations, such as nonarising (i.e., “eternal”) and “unceasing” designate *tathāgata*, a rhetorical move effectively collapsing the philosophical grammar structuring binary conceptualizations, such as positive-negative, pure-impure. Here, I translate the Sanskrit couplet, which makes a lot of sense, rather than the last two lines of the Tibetan verse, which do not make sense. By comparison, Köppl’s translation follows the Tibetan and renders the last line of the quatrain: “And, thus, within the worlds, relate to phenomena that do not exist” (*Establishing Appearances*, 99).

<sup>116</sup> The “way things are” is, in Tibetan: *ji lta bar gyur pa* or *yang dag pa ji lta ba*, and in Sanskrit: *yathābhūta*.

<sup>117</sup> I take “renaissance era” from R. M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), though it is important to understand this term in

contrast to the oppositional notions it implicitly forms—i.e., in contrast to the idea of “cultural rebirth” or renaissance—such as the idea of a cultural dark age; here, the idea of a dark age and a “Tibetan renaissance” are both predicated, in part, on triumphalist sectarian assumptions. Setting aside the rise of Vajrayāna, the claim that the interpretation of middle way discourse called (*dbu ma thal 'gyur ba*, \**prāsāṅgika-madhyamaka* [sic]) by Tibetans and the pan-Indic *pramāṇa* movement constituted a post-sixth century “erosion of an independent Buddhist intellectual agenda” (Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 99) seems belied by the former’s lack of popularity in the Indian context and the latter’s piecemeal place in the Buddhist world. Against Davidson’s claims of erosion, Eltschinger’s “Buddhist Esoterism” describes the Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* movement in terms of “productive . . . innovations” providing “new tools and issues” to *madhyamaka* discourse while assimilating and reviving *sautrāntika* and *yogācāra* discourse traditions (172). Regarding “\**prāsāṅgika-madhyamaka*”: Tibetan scholiast Jé Tsongkhapa, among others, describes the Tibetan creation (*byed pa*) of so-called *svātantrika-prāsāṅgika* nomenclature, not as a superfluous fabrication inappropriately projected (*rang bzo*) onto Indian discourse, but as a hermetic justified with recourse to explanations in Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā* (*Clear Words*), i.e., Tōh. 3860, *Dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel pa tshig gsal*, *Mūla-madhyamaka-vṛtti-prasannapadā* (Jé Tsongkhapa, *Byang chub lam rim che ba* [Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985]). Regarding the latter: see La Vallée-Poussin’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*.

<sup>118</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “To the question of whether [this is] undermined by direct sensory perception, scripture proclaims: ‘the intellectually immature fix on features’ [i.e., phenomenal attributes/characteristics], ‘wandering in a world of phenomena that do not exist.’ Just so, in the same way as children, with no mastery in language, grasp at optical illusions [i.e., ‘the falling hairs of cataracts’] and enjoy the wheel [conjured by the spinning] of a fire-brand, which brings about joy, likewise ordinary beings [who are like] children [i.e., the intellectually immature] are enjoying fixation on the features of objects in experience that are imagined by means of confused consciousness, which amounts to the enjoyment of non-existent qualities [or phenomena]” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 562.12–17).

<sup>119</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “if asked ‘in what manner are [sentient (“ordinary”) beings and buddhas] similar,’ we say a bliss-gone one (*sugata*) is not something distinguished in terms of ordinary body, speech, and mind, but rather in terms of actual reality. As is proclaimed [in scriptures like *Vajracchedikāsūtra*], on this view, [the subject,] the noble person (*āryapudgala*) [the predicate] is distinguished in terms of the uncompounded. Just as a noble one attains nobility due to attaining the unconditioned [i.e., *nirvāṇa*], all phenomena are *tathāgata* due to attaining the nature of the unconditioned [i.e., *śūnyatā*]. The experiential realm of signs/characteristics/features is not like that. In that way, those desiring to experience what does not exist end up experiencing phenomena that do not exist” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 562.19–563.1). Regarding distinguishing the noble person (*āryapudgala*) is in terms of the uncompounded: see *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* 34, 333.14–5; cf. *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* 34, 354.4–7; cf. *Prasannapadā* (*Clear Words*) (448.11–51); cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 75 (6–8).

<sup>120</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 563.1–6).

<sup>121</sup> There is no pro forma *chos can . . . thal . . . phyir* form so familiar in postclassical scholasticism used there, though the polemical tone is obvious in syntax, etc.

<sup>122</sup> Words in italics are meant to identify the less formal nomenclature structuring the argument vis-à-vis a subject, predicate, reasons, [dis-]analogy, etc.

<sup>123</sup> Notably, the argument imagines that *pretas* philosophize; or at least have time and leisure to speculate.

<sup>124</sup> *mi rnams kyis mthong ba bzhin du*. Here, the *bzhin* immediately after a verbal stem, *√mthong*, is construed in terms of the durative or continuative and not as the adverb, “as,” or the adjective, “like,” which applies in some contexts below.

<sup>125</sup> The phrase “those empowered to use water” (*chu la spyod par dbang ba rnams*) plays on tantric intimation vis-à-vis *wang* (*dbang*, *abhiṣeka*), which means both “initiation” (i.e., to begin or to induct into) and “empowerment” (i.e., to confer and authorize). The Tibetan *chu la spyod par dbang ba rnams* also means those with control over the use of water, a notion intimately tied in the Tibetan imaginaire (cf. *chab srid*) with regional dominion and, of course, political power.

<sup>126</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 563.6–15). Regarding the Tibetan *skyon med 'brel ba 'grub bo*: literally, a “flawless connection is achieved.”

<sup>127</sup> According to *The Rosary of Views*, realizing primordial purity is seeing the *maṇḍala* (*Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 298.10).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Commentary on the Rosary of Views* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 344.7–13).

<sup>129</sup> This is not unlike an inference that turns on recognition of a *yāna* or “vehicle.”

<sup>130</sup> Again, a phrase, *dag pa'i spyod yul la spyod par dbang ba rnams* puns on *dbang* (*abhiṣeka*), Buddhist Tantra's ritual initiation ceremony, in which there is a commitment (*samaya*) exhorting the exercitant to maintain the view of purity at all times. Notably, in *Precious Jewel Commentary*, in the context of explicating the tantric commitment that requires no maintenance (*bsrung ba med pa'i dam tshig*), the explanation correlates the characteristics of afflictive states of mind and the five buddha families by explaining the *samaya* in terms of not forsaking [the presumption] that both are inseparable in essence (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 109.1–4). Rongzom sets the distinction in terms of one's view: “for example, when the afflicted mind is explained as transforming into the gnosis of equality, insofar as one is qualified by a view of the self and one sees the absence of self, they are incongruous. Yet, the purification of views of the self is the consummation (*'grub pa*) of the exalted vision of selflessness (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 111.21–24). Cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 126.3. For Rongzom, the gnosis of equality corresponds to realizing selflessness (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 127.12–13).

<sup>131</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 563.15–564.7).

<sup>132</sup> Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 247, 345 passim. Within *atiyoga*, empowerment confers “the maturation . . . of the expressive power of awareness (*rig-pa'i rtсал-dbang*) and so forth” (Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 370).

<sup>133</sup> Patrul, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 332.

<sup>134</sup> Dudjom, *Nyingma School*, 142; cf. Daniel Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra: An Introduction to the Esoteric Buddhism of Tibet* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1986): 109.

<sup>135</sup> Again, this may be punning on being initiated, i.e., *if those em-powered in the experience of the pure domain of experience* . . .

<sup>136</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 564.7–12).

<sup>137</sup> *Precious Jewel Commentary*: “since it is direct perception of what appears for those whose karmic obscurations are impure that is negated, an inference like that [i.e., based karmic obscuration,] is also not acceptable logic. Therefore, that type [of logic] should not be used in this context.” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 180.14–16).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Chengdu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang), s.v. *mngon gyur*: (3) *gzhal bya'i gnas gsum gyi nang gses/ mngon sum tshad ma'i gzhal bya'am myong stobs kyis rtogs nus pa/ gzugs sgra dri ro reg bya lta bu'o/* (686a).

<sup>139</sup> This verb signals the conditioned/incomplete nature of the purification, which limits the accessing the gold.

<sup>140</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 564.12–17).

<sup>141</sup> *gzhi nyid*; “basis” (*gzhi*), here, refers to “basis of dispute” (*rtsod gzhi*)—i.e., a commonly accepted *namgwa* (experiences/ideas/representations), whose nature and scope permit of a wide horizon of possibilities, none of which is, for all, obviously *the* correct determination; cf. *Miscellanea* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 29.3–5; cf 64.1–64.3). The latter describes differences between dialectical and tantric approaches, which for Rongzom, center largely around the relation that obtains between the two truths as well as assertions concerning the status of divine *maṇḍalas* and the nature of the mind as naturally arising gnosis. Note this triad of concerns roughly equates to a presentation of ground, path, and fruit and models what we see at the top of *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*. For an English translation, see Sur's *Entering the Way*.

<sup>142</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 564.17–20).

<sup>143</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “on the basis of a contrary philosophical view, one argued as proof, “this river of pus commonly perceived by *pretas* like us is not simply pus in reality. It is actually water, too, because of being an appearance qua mental image (*sems kyi rnam pa snang ba'i phyir*)—like this pus and water, which are themselves obtained after being dedicated [and gifted to us as such]”; and “further, whatever is a mental image (*gang sems kyi rnam pa yin pa de*) is entirely appearance in character, like some pus appearing to the common [*preta*] and the water one gets after [it is] dedicated. The great river filled with pus, too, is an appearance qua mental image. These [two] images [of water and pus], moreover, are not distinct. They correspond to a

common appearance of fluidity, like the appearance itself of pus” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 564.20–565.4). Re *rnag gi mtshan nyid*: literally, “character of pus,” indicating the character of the appearance.

<sup>144</sup> The following constitutes the comparable pervasion relation [for establishing that logically]: for persons who accept [the water and pus both to be] mental appearance based in a shared perception of fluidity, then, inasmuch as [these] statements are logically established [for both parties and that is accepted as a logical subject (*chos can*)], this reasoning is established. Just so, after initially affirming them to be “comparable” (*mtshungs*), the character of the pus should then be refuted in this manner: while both are comparable insofar as being appearing mental images, since the appearance of pus is impure, it is an error—and the water is not an error since it is a pure appearance. On this view, that which is impure is error; and that which is error is impure. On Rongzom’s idea of “comparable identity” (*mtshungs pa’i gcig pa*), see *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1.479.23–480.13; cf. Sur, *Entering the Way*, 113–115; also *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 178.24–179.4.

<sup>145</sup> Tibetan: *sangs rgyas pa’i mtshan nyid*.

<sup>146</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 565.12–21).

<sup>147</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “these objective appearances of physical bodies, worlds, and resources for ordinary beings are in fact the experience of mental images. The [two] images are not even separate on account of [both being] connected to the common experience of the physical bodies, worlds, and domains of experience comprising physical body, speech, and mind—like the experience itself of pillars and the like.” For those accepting mind as appearance, this logic is sound” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 565.21–566.1). Regarding *rigs pa ’di grub pa yin no*: literally, “this reasoning is established.” Since *’grub* means, inter alia, “complete” and “understand,” “logic being sound” is preferable in English prose insofar as “established” leads to the phrase being established “as” something; whereas “sound” logic signals confidence within a worldview and does not require that further elaboration. “This” referring to *khyab pa nges pa’i gtan tshigs*.

<sup>148</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 565.12–21).

<sup>149</sup> *chos kyi skye mched kyi gzugs* is one of the forms appearing to mental awareness, which is typically listed along with aggregated forms (*bsdu ba las gyur ba*, *abhisamkṣepika*), open space (*mngon par skabs yod pa*, *abhyavakāṣika*), proper commitments (*yang dag par blangs pa la*, *samadanika*), the imagined (*kun btags pa*, *parikalpita*), and the “empowered” or “mastered” (*dbang ’byor ba*, *vaibhūtvika/vaibhūtika*).

<sup>150</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 566.13–15).

<sup>151</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 566.1–9).

<sup>152</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 566.15–16).

<sup>153</sup> Such existential extremes are difficult to imagine. Ironically, it becomes clearer in a subtler context. For example, “spicy.” The same basis may be spicy for one, but not another.

<sup>154</sup> That is, the appearances of water and pus are not each reflective of some different *given*, in Willfred Sellers’s sense of the term. Moreover, except as a momentary convention of use, our author posits no given and has no need to. As far as Buddhist debates go, it’s the turtles of appearance all the way down.

<sup>155</sup> “Field” (*zhing*)—i.e., “buddhified environment.”

<sup>156</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 566.18–567.2).

<sup>157</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: “Along those lines, perceptible appearance of divine buddha-body, buddha-speech, and buddha-mind are described in terms of gnosis and reality because [they] appear due to the potency of gnosis penetrating reality and the practice of the path of compassionate aspiration. Those divine appearances are also appearances of mental images qualified by habitual tendencies. Thus, they are included in the mind as such” (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 567.10–14).

<sup>158</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 567.14–18).

<sup>159</sup> The “habitual tendency toward linguistic expression” (*mngon par brjod pa’i bag chags*) refers most generally to karmic habitual tendencies within the ground consciousness that constitute latent predispositions toward linguistic expression. We note, here, the close connection between language and the types of conceptual proliferation that structures experience of *saṃsāra*; following, inter alia, Candrakīrti, *prapañca* is intimately related with language *vis-à-vis* *abhilāpa*, *abhidhāna*, and *abhidheya*: cf. his commentary on *Mūlāmadhyamakakārikā* [Root Verses in the Middle Way] 18,9 s.v., *prapañco hi vāk prapañcayaty arthān iti kṛtvā* (La Vallée-Poussin, *Mūlāmadhyamakakārikās*, 373.9).

<sup>160</sup> *srid pa yan lag gi bag chags*. Note Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgrāha* (*Compendium of the Great Vehicle*), chapter two, the *dependent nature* (*gzhan dbang gi mtshan nyid*) is delineated in terms of a group of eleven "cognizances" or "cognitions consisting in false imaginations seeded in the ground consciousness." Karl Brunnhölzl, *A Compendium of the Mahāyāna: Asaṅga's Mahāyānasamgrāha and Its Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2018), translates the relevant passage in *Compendium of the Great Vehicle*: "these cognizances appear to beings as: (1) the body, (2) the body-possessor, and (3) the experiencer, (4) the cognizances that [appear as] what is experienced by these [three], (5) the cognizances that [appear as] the experiencers of that [which is experienced], and the cognizances that [appear as] (6) time, (7) numbers, (8) locations, and (9) conventions arise from the seeds that are the latent tendencies of expression. For (10) the cognizances that [appear as] the distinctions between a self and others arise from the seeds that are the latent tendencies of the views about a self. For (11) the cognizances that [appear as] the pleasant realms, the miserable realms, and the deaths, transitions, and births [in those realms] arise from the seeds that are the latent tendencies of the limbs of existence" (429–30); cf. *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2005), vol. 76, 30.17–31.10; and Etienne Lamotte, *La Somme du grand véhicule d'Asaṅga (Mahāyānasamgrāha)*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1973), 24–25. The lattermost refers to the habitual tendencies associated with the so-called 12 limbs of conditioned existence (*srid pa'i yan lag bcu gnyis, dvādaśa bhavāṅgāni*), ignorance, formations, consciousness, name and form, six entrances, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age, and death.

<sup>161</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 567.18–23). This is similar to what is stated in Rongzom's *Rang byung ye shes* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 121.20–22; and 2, 121.24).

<sup>162</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine*: "the presence of self-occurring gnosis is proclaimed in the sūtra collections acceptable to the likes of both of us. On this view, a *Perfection of Wisdom* text declares: 'even the consciousness of an ordinary being is qualified by inherent purity.' And in the 'Turning of the *Dharmacakra* in the Realm of Suyamadevapura' chapter of the *Discourse on the Stem Array* [i.e., the *Avatamsaka*], it states: 'multitudinous world realms will be consumed [in] unimaginable fire. Space will not be consumed in fire, self-arisen gnosis is like that'" (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 568.1–9). Regarding the *Perfection of Wisdom*, *Establishing Appearance as Divine* reads: *so so skye bo'i shes pa'ang/ rang bzhin gyis ni rnam byang can/*, which resembles something found in the *Prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārtha* attributed to Dignāga (*Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* 55, 1380, 19–20); cf. *prthagjanānām yaj jñānaṃ prakṛtyavadvādanikaṃ | uktam tad buddhaśabdena bodhisattvo yathā jinaḥ ||*. That he is citing Dignāga is remarkable. Regarding *Discourse on the Stem Array*: cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 71.20–1, where the same lines are cited; and *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* 35, 675.16–8.

<sup>163</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 568.9–10).

<sup>164</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* (§1): *Die Erklärungen haben irgendwo ein Ende* ("Explanations come to an end somewhere").

<sup>165</sup> As Rongzom declares elsewhere, in the end, logic provides a vain form of assurance: "if it is said that someone proves any from among those self-defeating philosophical theories, this would only reference a flawless establishing proof for proponents of [that particular] philosophical theory—that is, those who perceive their own dialectical procedure to be flawless. Yet, from the point of view of those with deep and expansive awareness, philosophical proof is nonetheless a perception that is fabricated as one's own experience, which is [in reality] comparable to turbid water" (Sur, *Entering the Way*, 57; cf. *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 434.9–12).

<sup>166</sup> *yul dang dus*, alternatively: "object and occasion," etc.

<sup>167</sup> This is an existential negation.

<sup>168</sup> This is an epistemological negation.

<sup>169</sup> Space is defined by abstract properties, which are not something one finds, as it were, floating in space. There are no conceptually imputed absences (or flowers or rabbit horns) floating in space.

<sup>170</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 568.12–17).

<sup>171</sup> *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 568.19–23).

<sup>172</sup> *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 559.1–3.

<sup>173</sup> The fact that multiple valid points of view are countenanced here speaks to the meta-theoretical work *Establishing Appearance as Divine* is doing, which, though concerned to describe the conditions required to do

philosophy in a Buddhist style, is resolutely not jousting for theoretical supremacy vis-à-vis an obviously “right view.”

<sup>174</sup> Cf. *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 562.17–19).

<sup>175</sup> Tillemans, *Scripture*, 11.

<sup>176</sup> Tillemans, *Scripture*, 43.

<sup>177</sup> Sanskrit: *nāyaṃ puruṣo anāsrityāgamaprāmāṇyaṃ āsitum samartho*. Tillemans, *Scripture*, 45.

<sup>178</sup> As noted above, Rongzom makes clear in his *Miscellanea* that intra-Buddhist debate is restricted to disputes over the nature of perceptible appearances. See, for example, *Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 29.3–5. In fact, he writes that the only disagreements Buddhists argue about are the relation between the two truths, opinions about divine *maṇḍalas*, and nature of mind as naturally arising gnosis, or opinions on the primordial perfection of phenomena (64.1–3).

<sup>179</sup> Cited in King, *Indian Philosophy*, 130.

<sup>180</sup> King, *Indian Philosophy*, 137.

<sup>181</sup> *Extensive Discourse on Tantric Commitments* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 1, 305.24–306.4); cf. *Precious Jewel Commentary* (*Collected Works of Rongzom Chözung* 2, 110.24–111.4).