

THE JOURNAL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

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Volume 3

1980

Number 1

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Geshe Sopa Replies to Alex Wayman

I wish to thank the Editor for sending my review article to Prof. Wayman and giving him an opportunity to respond. I am of course sorry that he is upset by my observations on his translation.

First, I regret that Prof. Wayman suspects my intentions and regards any criticism of mine of his own articles and translation as a wish to seize an opportunity to denigrate Western Buddhist scholarship in general. I did not say, as he quotes me, or even, I hope, seem to say that Western scholars have produced no reliable translation of the Mādhyamika classics. My statement that Western Buddhist scholarship so far has produced few such translations is, I believe, fair and made with reference to the general problematic of translating certain kinds of Buddhist texts in the absence of well-established norms that have the consensus of a majority of Buddhist scholars themselves.

To an argument aimed not merely at me but at all dGe lugs pa monks and scholars, I would like to respond. For Prof. Wayman to say that “the dGe lugs pa monks spend so much time reading the later *yig-cha-s* that they rarely read even the works of their founder Tsong kha pa” is like saying that American college students take required courses and do required reading and little beyond that. In both the Tibetan and American educational systems, there always have been those who have gone beyond the requirements, and it is they, in general, who become the scholars and teachers. Tsong kha pa himself enjoined the study of the Buddhist classics (the *gzhung chen mo*) as offering the best advice (*men ngags*) for practicing Buddhism, and many dGe lugs pa monks and scholars have taken and continue to take him quite seriously here.

Prof. Wayman is, however, right that many educated Tibetans, while reading in the Tibetan language, cannot understand Tsong kha pa’s “Discerning” section. This is not even a question, but a simple matter of fact, and is why Tibetan scholars spend a great deal of time learning these things from other Tibetan scholars who are regarded as pure and authoritative sources of the teaching-transmissions of important works. Even the reading of specific, and generally difficult, passages of such texts is more to be determined by such important teaching transmissions than by the way the meaning of a word may appear in a Tibetan dictionary. In the instances of Tsong kha pa’s works, these teaching transmissions are thought to embody Tsong kha pa’s own subsequent commentary on his own compositions, and this is why they are regarded as weighty by Tibetan scholars themselves. Some of these traditions are incorporated in the *Lam rim*’s annotations (the *mchan bzhi*). I have not commented on Prof. Wayman’s use of the *mchan bzhi*, for the problem of utilizing them is not so substantially different from that of reading the *Lam rim* itself, and the handling of the *Samādhirāja* citation is just such a case in point. “(Form, etc.),”

as the *mchan bzhi* note, is not the meaning of the passage but only its misunderstanding by the overpervasionists.

As for myself, it is certainly unfair so gratuitously to imply that I have agreed to undertake the review of the translation of a work that I have not even read myself, and I wish to reassure Prof. Wayman that I have read the *Lam rim* in its entirety. Having had the good fortune to have studied the *Lam rim* with some of its most famous teachers in Tibet, I was pleased to review its translation when I was asked to. My background is public and needs no testimony from me, and if Prof. Wayman has some serious doubts here, he can determine the matter much more tactfully through a proper investigation on his own.

Also, leaving aside all consideration of yoga or meditation, I do not believe that the aims and methods of Western and Tibetan scholarship are so very substantially different. Each aims at arriving at an actual understanding of the thought of an author, and each utilizes the best means at its disposal for doing this, neither limiting itself to the mere exercise of looking up words in a dictionary and reading a few of somebody's footnotes. At any rate, while anyone can claim that dGe lugs pa monks and scholars do not really understand the thought of Tsong kha pa, it is indefensible to claim as well that they do not even make the attempt. On the other hand, if someone is mainly interested in the rediscovery of the *real* Tsong kha pa, he ought not to be too disquieted in finding himself confuted by someone more traditionally-minded, for this kind of originality always invites controversy. The burden of proof, however, now rests with the innovator to demonstrate the advantages of the "new" Tsong kha pa over the "old" one.

Here, I would like to make a few brief observations on the response:

Why say that I view Tsong kha pa's position as a *total* rejection of *svabhāva* when I have devoted three pages of my review article to trying briefly to delineate the sense in which Tsong kha pa accepts as well as rejects *svabhāva*?

Why say that Prof. Wayman has been misrepresented by my stating, "realists, including Yogācārins and Svātantrika Mādhyamikas" instead of "realists and Yogācārins and Svātantrika Mādhyamikas"? In my summarizing, the "inclusion" may represent my view, not Prof. Wayman's, but the discussion was not of what realism is and who the realists are, but of Tsong kha pa's view of what overpervasionism is and who the overpervasionists are.

Why say that translating *pramāṇa* by an "avenue of validity" "falls into the trap of translating it in the instrumental manner" (to wit, like a non-Buddhist)? "Validity" is not a cognition, and "avenue of validity" is free of the bifurcation into a consciousness (or cognition) and a *pramāṇa*—its agent or means. Prof. Wayman should have observed the difference between "avenue of validity" and "avenue" or "means of cognition."

"Ouch," as Professor Wayman has quite rightly noted in his response, is indeed an unacceptable translation for *kye ma kyi hu*. It is too colloquial to

render an obsolete classical interjection, and “alas,” or “woe is me” is much better. The translation of the passage was in fact to have read “alas,” but the journal editors failed to incorporate this and some other corrections in the copy sent to Prof. Wayman.

Beyond the above, there is still some rather questionable bit of misinformation about the *Lam rim* that Prof. Wayman seeks to promulgate in his response. I refer to his highly misleading talk about the *Lam rim*'s path lineage. His claim that “Atiśa’s lineage followed in the *Lam rim chen mo* is a combination of Yogācāra and Mādhyamika” is unfounded, and, to avoid becoming too long, I can only refer him to the *Lam rim*'s introduction, where Tsong kha pa identifies the two path lineages of the *Bodhipathapradīpa* as the *zab mo lta ba'i rgyud* and the *rgya chen spyod pa'i rgyud*, through Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga respectively. These lineages, however, are by no means coextensive with the Yogācāra and the Mādhyamika as Prof. Wayman claims, and his difficulties on this point may go a long way in explaining his difficulty in understanding my own assertion that “Tsong kha pa’s own position on discerning is that of a Mādhyamika.” Likewise, the Asaṅga-lineage, aside from not being the Yogācāra, is not particularly pertinent to Tsong kha pa’s view of *lhag mthong* in the “Discerning” section, for Tsong kha pa does not follow Asaṅga’s explanation here, and in calling Tsong kha pa’s view on “Discerning” that of a Mādhyamika, I am not referring to his view of *lhag mthong* in general, but only of that special *lhag mthong* that perceives reality, and which is his major topic of discussion in the “Discerning” section.

In conclusion, if Prof. Wayman wished to discredit my objections to his translation and was also able, he might certainly have done so by addressing his response more to these objections and less “against the man.” My rather long article confined its scope to two topics where I found Prof. Wayman’s statements quite unrepresentative of Tsong kha pa’s position. After all, these topics do occupy seventy pages of his translation. The former, the topic of overpervasionism, is one of the larger and most important topics of the entire “Discerning” section of which it stands at the head, and by devoting so much space to it Tsong kha pa evinces his quite genuine concern for nihilistic interpretations of the Prāsaṅgika. Here he has quite painstakingly set forth these nihilistic positions, grouped all the arguments proffered in their support into four key reasons, has laid out the essentials of his own position as a Prāsaṅgika, and has sought at great length to repudiate each of these positions along with its logical underpinnings—for about eighty Tibetan pages. Where in all this can Prof. Wayman find a single realist or a Yogācārin or a Svātantrika Mādhyamika as the overpervasionist opponent? And if the realists, etc., are there, why not bring them forth from so many pages, instead of flatly declaring, “Of course these [the realists, etc.] are indeed the opponents of the section (my translation, pp. 189-252), no matter how the Geshe tries to make them out otherwise? Something similar may be said about the second topic, i.e., underpervasionism, which, far from being nihilist, is a position most congenial to theism.