

WIENER STUDIEN ZUR TIBETOLOGIE UND BUDDHISMUSKUNDE 100

## **A Road Less Traveled**

**Felicitation Volume in Honor of John Taber**



ARBEITSKREIS FÜR TIBETISCHE UND BUDDHISTISCHE STUDIEN  
UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

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GEGRÜNDET VON  
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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON  
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JOHN TABER

EDITED BY  
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John Taber, Albuquerque, 2016, photograph by Isabelle Ratié © I. Ratié

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# The \**Madhyamakaprajñāvatāra* of a Late Candrakīrti

Matthew T. Kapstein

To John Taber, *paṇḍitānāṃ paṇḍitaḥ*, in friendship.

## Introduction

In an article that appeared not long ago, I promised an edition and translation of a short philosophical tract, the \**Madhyamakaprajñāvatāra* (MPA, Tib. *Dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa*) by a certain Candrakīrti (Kapstein 2018: 3, n. 9). The present essay redeems that promise.

The brief colophon of the MPA attributes the work to the “great master” (*mahācārya*) Candrakīrti and the translation to the author together with the Tibetan 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas. It is perhaps odd that the Tibetans routinely seem to have classed it as a work by Nāgārjuna's famous commentator, who also wrote the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, despite the colophon's clear affirmation that the author participated in the translation in collaboration with 'Gos, a well-known figure during the early part of the “later spread of the doctrine” (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*) in Tibet, corresponding to the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> Candrakīrti, the author of the MPA, is probably to be identified with a scholar from Kashmir who independently translated the *Trisvabhāvapraveśasiddhi*, which he attributed to Nāgārjuna, a text that is in fact nothing but an alternate version of the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* credited

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<sup>1</sup> Ruegg (1981: 81) has already called attention to the fact that the author must be a late Candrakīrti and to uncertainties about the proper form of the title. He writes: “The \**Madhyamakāvatāraprajñā* or \**Madhyamakaprajñāvatāra* translated into Tibetan by its author together with 'Gos·khug·pa·lHa(s)·bčas must be by another Candrakīrti who lived much later [than Nāgārjuna's commentator], in the eleventh century.” This is, to the best of my knowledge, the only discussion of the MPA in the secondary literature to date. It is, of course, duly listed in the standard catalogues of the Tibetan canons: in Ui et al. 1934 it is no. 3863; and in Suzuki 1961, no. 5264. In both cases, its placement immediately following the *Madhyamakāvatāra* offers further evidence that the Tibetan editors of the canon did not care to distinguish the several Candrakīrti-s from one another.

to Vasubandhu and translated into Tibetan by the same 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas, but with Ratnākaraśānti's disciple Śāntibhadra acting as *paṇḍita* (Kapstein 2018). We do not know much about the Kashmiri Candrakīrti beyond what is implied here, namely that he belongs to the mid-eleventh century and apparently knew some Tibetan.

Following a preamble giving the title of the text in Sanskrit and Tibetan, as well as the customary “translator’s homage” (*'gyur-phyag*), addressed in this case to Mañjuśrīkumārabhūta, the main body of the work consists of 77 seven-syllable lines, which may be divided for convenience into nineteen verses each of two to six lines and assigned roman numerals in the text given below. I have marked the Sanskrit title I have adopted, \**Madhyamakaprajñāvatāra*, as conjectural, and I take it to mean the “Introduction to the Discernment of the Middle Way,” that is to say, to *prajñā* as understood and taught in the Madhyamaka. The Sanskrit title as found in the text itself, however, is *Madhyamakāvātāraprajñā*, which does not precisely accord with the Tibetan version, for, if the Sanskrit as we find it here is correct, we would expect the Tibetan to have been rendered *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i shes rab*.<sup>2</sup> This does not make very good sense to me, though it might be interpreted to mean *prajñā* which introduces, or enters into, the Madhyamaka, or even perhaps “*prajñā* as taught in the *Madhyamakāvātāra*.” Some such interpretation would find support in both the author’s name, identifying him in some sense with his more famous predecessor, as well as in the general pattern of the text, which may appear to offer a sort of résumé of the earlier Candrakīrti’s great work. However, the preference that we find in our present text for the “neither one, nor many” argument favored by Śāntarakṣita, but not highlighted by the first Candrakīrti, as well as the title as given in Tibetan, urge caution about this. We may note, too, that the Tibetan translator, 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas, was primarily known for his transmission to Tibet of the so-called Ārya Tradition of the Guhyasamājatantra (*gsang-'dus 'phags-lugs*), the line of teaching that was passed down through a group of tantric masters cognate to the great Madhyamaka teachers – Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti – and supposed by Tibetan tradition to have been the very same persons.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the Candrakīrti with whom we are concerned here seems also to have credited the *Trisvabhāvapraveśasiddhi* to Nāgārjuna suggests that his lineage similarly

<sup>2</sup> In fact, I believe that the Sanskrit title as we find it in the Tibetan canonical versions of the MPA, like many of the Sanskrit titles found in the Tibetan canons, is most likely a Tibetan back-translation and not original.

<sup>3</sup> On 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas and the Ārya tradition of the Guhyasamāja, refer to BA, pp. 359–364, and 'Jam-mgon 1985. On the history of the Ārya tradition in general, see also Wedemeyer 2007: 3–63.

claimed the mantle of the Madhyamaka founders. However, in the accounts available to us of 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas's transmission of the Guhyasamāja, his collaborator Candrakīrti is nowhere mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

Although the MPA never seems to have played an important role in Tibetan Madhyamaka studies, it was nevertheless familiar to scholars, particularly to those of the Sa-skyapa school, for we find it cited in the writings of the great specialist of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāraśāstra*, G.yag-sde Paṅ-chen Sangs-rgyas-dpal (1350–1414),<sup>5</sup> as well as in works by Tsong-kha-pa's noted critic Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams-seng-ge (1429–1489)<sup>6</sup> and by *dge-slong* Kun-dga'-bkra-shis.<sup>7</sup> Much later, we find it cited, too, in the encyclopaedic *Shes-bya kun-khyab mdzod* of the eclectic master Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas.<sup>8</sup>

One point of interest in the citations of Go-rams-pa and Kun-dga'-bkra-shis is that both occur in distinctively tantric contexts, referencing an apparent similarity between MPA XII and a celebrated verse from the *Hevajratantra*, I.v.11a–b: “there is neither meditator, nor meditation; neither mantra, nor deity.”<sup>9</sup> Though the MPA can by no means be considered a tantric text, the reference is perhaps intentional and may tell us something of the milieu in which the work was composed. The hint of a tantric connection is strengthened by the mention of the “three vows” (*sdom gsum*, Skt. *trisaṃvara*) in verse XIV, if this phrase is to be understood as it typically was in Tibet, as designating the *prātimokṣa*, *bodhisattvasaṃvara*, and the tantric *saṃaya*.<sup>10</sup> These observations tend to support the hypothesis sketched in Kapstein 2018, that the MPA and *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* are likely to have been philosophical *précis* produced and circulated within predominantly

<sup>4</sup> Unless, that is, he is to be identified with the Candrarāhula who was from Kashmir and was also one of the major teachers of 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas. Refer to BA, pp. 360, 758.

<sup>5</sup> *G.yag-ṭik* (vol. 1, p. 39) cites verse IV; p. 227 reproduces the entire text from X.3 to XVII.4.

<sup>6</sup> Go-rams-pa (2007: 294) cites verse XII.

<sup>7</sup> Kun-dga'-bkra-shis (2007: 221) cites verse XII.1–3. I have not so far succeeded in locating biographical information on Kun-dga'-bkra-shis. The colophon of the work to which I refer here, p. 268, states that it was written in a fire female ox year on behalf of the Sa-skyapa heir Ngag-dbang bsod-nams dbang-po grags-pa rgyal-mtshan dpal-bzang-po, who is no doubt to be identified with the Sa-skya khri-chen Byams-pa Ngag-dbang bsod-nams dbang-po grags-pa rgyal-mtshan (1559–1621), in which case the year of composition must be 1577.

<sup>8</sup> Kong-sprul 2002: 561 (= Sde-dge xylographic edition, vol. ĀḤ, fol. 270a), reproduces the entire passage X.3–XIII, following which Kong-sprul adds that “this is the culminating Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika tenet” (*dbu ma thal 'gyur ba'i bzhed pa mthar thug pa'o*).

<sup>9</sup> Snellgrove 1959: vol. 2, p. 16: *nāsti bhāvako na bhāvo 'sti mantran nāsti na devatā*.

<sup>10</sup> A detailed survey of Tibetan treatments may be found in Sobisch 2002.

tantric milieu. Be this as it may, the brief presentation within the MPA of Madhyamaka thought in relation to contemplative practice, resembling indigenous Tibetan works of the *blo-sbyong* (“mind-training, spiritual exercise”) and *lta-khrid* (“guidance on views”) genres, may be of interest in connection with current discussions of Buddhist philosophy responding to the idea of “spiritual exercise” as developed in the writings of philosopher Pierre Hadot.<sup>11</sup>

Variants in the Tibetan text, among the five editions of the Tanjur consulted (and recorded below as C., D., G., N., and P.), are mostly minor alterations of orthography and make little difference for our understanding of the work. The editors of the *Dpe bsdur ma* composite edition of the Tanjur have in general accepted the readings of D. (and hence usually C.), even in the cases in which G., N., and P. are clearly preferable, though the variants from N. and P. are entered into their notes. A particularly striking example of problems stemming from this practice may be found in verse IV, line 12, where only an unbending adherence to the principle of *lectio difficilior* would justify the C. and D. reading of *slong ba'i dngos po*, adopted in the *Dpe bsdur ma* text, against the alternative *snang ba'i dngos po*, which I have accepted.

The contents of the nineteen verses into which I have divided the work may be outlined as follows (with Sanskrit section headings that I have assigned):

- |          |                        |   |
|----------|------------------------|---|
| (I)      | <i>śāstrārambha</i>    | The author’s statement of intent ( <i>pratijñā</i> ).   |
| (II)     | <i>piṇḍārtha</i>       | Summary.  |
| (III)    | <i>adhiśīlāśikṣā</i>   | The practice of moral discipline.   |
| (IV–XII) | <i>adhiprajñāśikṣā</i> | The practice of discernment: (IV) general statement of the neither-one-nor-many argument; (V) critique of atomism; (VI) critique of aggregations; (VII) the falseness of phenomenal features ( <i>alīkākāra</i> ); (VIII) the neither-one-nor-many argument applied to mental states ( <i>caittasika</i> ); (IX) no contradiction with unanalysed experience; (X) ordinary convention requires no proof; (XI) the nature of the “unborn;” (XII) no final affirmations are possible. |

<sup>11</sup> Refer to Fiordalis 2018, which includes a thorough bibliography of work on Buddhism in relation to Hadot.

(XIII–XV)	<i>adhicittaśikṣā</i>	The practice of meditation: (XIII) absorption ( <i>samāhita</i> ); (XIV) awareness following absorption ( <i>prṣṭhalabdhajñāna</i> ); (XV) contemplative lifestyle ( <i>cārya</i> ).
(XVI)	<i>phala</i>	The fruit, awakening as buddha.
(XVII)	<i>sārasaṅgraha</i>	Brief recapitulation.
(XVIII)	<i>upadeśa</i>	Concluding advice to the reader.
(XIX)	<i>pariṇāmanā</i>	Dedication of merit.

It will be evident to students of Buddhist philosophy that very substantial annotation might be added to the present text and translation, to identify parallel passages and to fill out the arguments and doctrines referenced herein. For reasons of space and time, however, I have not undertaken to do that here: *alaṃ ativistareṇa!* Rather, in the spirit of the mathematics textbooks in use when I was in school, these matters may be left as exercises to be completed by astute readers at home.

## Text and translation

### (Preamble)

dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa zhes bya ba bzhugs so//  
 rgya gar skad du/ ma dhya <sup>a</sup>ma kā<sup>a</sup> ba tā ra pra dznyā nā ma/  
 bod skad du/ dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa zhes bya ba/  
 'jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa la phyag 'tshal lo//

<sup>a</sup> C. D. mi ka a

Herein is The Introduction to the Discernment of the Middle Way

In Sanskrit: Madhyamakāvatāraprajñānāma

In Tibetan: dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa zhes bya ba

Namo Mañjuśrīkumārabhūtāya! Homage to Mañjuśrī in Princely Form!

**(Body of the text)**

(I) dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa'i//<sup>b</sup>  
don ni bdag gis bshad<sup>c</sup> bya ste//

<sup>b</sup> C. D. 'jug pa'i

<sup>c</sup> C. D. bshad par

What I am to explain is the significance  
Of the introduction to the discernment  
of the middle way.

(II) dgag sgrub<sup>d</sup> gnyis ka dgag 'ba'  
zhig//  
dngos la dgag sgrub 'ga'<sup>e</sup> yang med//  
de lta bu ni goms byas na// 5  
phun sum tshogs pa thob par 'gyur//

<sup>d</sup> C. D. bsgrub, <sup>e</sup> C. D. gang

Refutation and proof are both only  
refuted.

In reality, there is no refutation or  
proof at all.

If you cultivate contemplation in this  
way,

You will obtain the perfect goal.

(III) mi dge bcu ni spangs nas ni//  
dge ba bcu ni dang du blang<sup>f</sup>//  
dngos por zhen pa bkag nas ni//  
rang la bsgrub<sup>g</sup> tu cung zad med// 10

<sup>f</sup> G. N. P. blangs, <sup>g</sup> C. D. sgrub

Having abandoned the ten  
unwholesome deeds,  
One undertakes the ten that are  
wholesome.

Having stopped obsession with entities,  
You have nothing more to achieve.

(IV) snang<sup>h</sup> ba'i dngos po 'di yang ni//  
yang dag pa yi rang bzhin med//  
du ma dang ni gcig bral phyir//  
sgyu ma'i glang po ji bzhin no//

<sup>h</sup> C. D. slong

As for these apparent entities,  
They are without genuine essence.  
Because they are free from many and  
one,

They are just like an apparitional  
elephant.

(V) cha shas sna tshogs gnas pa  
na// 15  
rdul phran gcig pu nyid ma yin//  
de nyid med pas du ma gang//  
phan tshun spangs te gnas pa<sup>i</sup> na//  
gzhan gyi dngos po ga la yod//

<sup>i</sup> C. D. pas

In that various parts subsist,  
The atom is not at all unitary.

If, because it is not just so [i.e.,  
unitary], the many [parts]

Subsist in mutual exclusion,

Then where is that thing-constituted-  
by-another?

(VI) de nyid med pas de bsags  
pa'i// 20  
rags pa'i gzugs dang rdzas sogs gang//  
rnam pa sna tshogs snang ba dang//  
shes pa tha ni mi dad pas//  
shes pa du ma nyid du 'gyur//

Because that is not, the aggregated  
gross forms,  
Substances, and so forth,  
Their varied apparent features,  
And cognition are no different;  
Hence, cognition must be manifold.

(VII) rnam pa rdzun<sup>j</sup> pa nyid kyis  
ni// 25  
shes pa de yang rdzun<sup>k</sup> par 'gyur//  
de lta min na bden nyid 'gyur//

Because the features are non-veridical,  
That cognition, too, must be  
non-veridical;  
For, otherwise, it would be truth.

<sup>j, k</sup> C. D. brdzun

(VIII) de nyid phyir na sems byung<sup>l</sup>  
gang//  
gcig dang du ma spangs pa yi//  
dngos po gang yang mi gnas te// 30  
phan tshun spangs te gnas phyir ro//

Therefore, what mental states there are  
Subsist not as things at all,  
In the absence of one and many,  
For those abide as mutually exclusive.

<sup>l</sup> G. N. P. 'byung

(IX) mngon sum la sogs 'gal zhe na//  
ma yin ma brtags nyams dga' ba//  
de ni bdag gis bkag pa med//

If you object that this contradicts  
perception, etc.,  
That is not so; for I have not negated  
Unanalysed, spontaneous experience  
(*avicāra-ramaṇīya*).

(X) tha snyad tsam zhig bsgrub<sup>m</sup> pa'i  
phyir// 35  
dam bca' gtan tshigs nyid ma yin//  
ye nas skye med ngang 'di<sup>n</sup> la//  
dgag bya med la bsgrub<sup>o</sup> bya med//  
<sup>m</sup> G. N. P. sgrub, <sup>n</sup> C. D. nyid, <sup>o</sup> G. N. P.  
sgrub

To establish mere convention alone,  
There is no call for assertion and reason.  
For, with respect to this primordially  
unborn nature,  
There is neither *negandum* nor  
*probandum*.

(XI) mya ngan 'das dang ma 'ongs  
pa//  
skye med ngang du khyad par  
med// 40  
skye med nyid kyang ma yin te//  
skye ba'i dngos po med phyir ro//

Nirvāṇa and the future  
In their unborn nature are no different.  
The unborn itself is not,  
For there is no thing that is born.

(XII) kun rdzob med la don dam  
 med//  
 sangs rgyas med la sems can med//  
 lta ba med cing sgom pa med// 45  
 'bras bu med cing spyod pa med//

There is no relative, no absolute,  
 Neither buddha, nor sentient being.  
 There is no view, no meditation,  
 Neither result, nor conduct.

(XIII) de yi don ni bsgom bya ste//  
 rtog med blo ni rang zhir bzhag//  
<sup>p</sup>dngos gzungs med cing g.yeng ba<sup>p</sup>  
 med//  
 mtshan ma med cing gsal bar  
 bsgom<sup>q</sup>// 50

Its significance is to be meditatively  
 cultivated:  
 Free from conceptualization, the mind  
 is placed in natural peace.  
 Without apprehension of things,  
 undistracted,  
 Without attributions, one lucidly  
 meditates.

<sup>p</sup> C. D. ngos gzung med cing yengs pa  
<sup>q</sup> G. N. P. sgom

(XIV) langs la dngos por snang ba  
 kun//  
 sgyu ma tsam du shes byas nas//  
 sdom pa rnam gsum 'bad pas bsrung//  
 yan lag bdun pa la sogs bya//  
 snying rjes' phan sems che bar bya// 55

On arising, knowing all appearing  
 things  
 To be mere apparition,  
 One diligently preserves the three  
 vows (*trisaṃvara*),  
 Performs the seven-fold service, etc.,  
 And with compassion magnifies  
 altruism.

<sup>r</sup> G. N. P. sgom

(XV) yul la chags pa spang bya  
 zhing//  
 'gron po'i tshul gyis gnas par bya//  
 sems can ma dad spangs nas ni//  
 bdag nyid dgon par gnas par bya//

Desire toward objects is to be  
 renounced,  
 One should dwell in the manner of a  
 visitor.  
 Abandoning faithless creatures,  
 One should stay by oneself in retreat.

(XVI) de yi 'bras bu sangs rgyas  
 kyi<sup>s</sup>// 60  
 'bras bu chen po thob pa ste//  
 chos kyi sku dang longs spyod rdzogs//  
 sprul pa'i sku ru gnas pa yis//  
 sems can thams cad sgrol bar byed//

The fruit of that is the acquisition  
 Of the great fruit of awakening;  
 By abiding in the bodies of reality,  
 Perfect rapture and emanation,  
 One liberates all sentient beings.

<sup>s</sup> G. N. P. kyi



(XVII) de phyir 'bad pa<sup>t</sup> thams cad  
kyis// 65  
dang<sup>u</sup> po lta ba<sup>v</sup> thag bca<sup>d</sup> de//  
bar du bsgom<sup>w</sup> pas nyams su blang//  
tha mar 'bras bu thob par 'gyur//  
de bas 'bad de brtson par bya//

<sup>t</sup> G. N. pas, <sup>u</sup> C. D. dngos, <sup>v</sup> G. N. bar

<sup>w</sup> C. D. pa

Therefore, making all efforts,  
One should first ascertain the view,  
In between cultivate spiritual  
experience in meditation,  
And in the end obtain the fruit.  
Thus, making efforts should one strive.

(XVIII) de ltar bdag gis bshad 'di  
la// 70  
phyogs 'dzin pa yi sems bor la//  
rigs pa yis ni dpyad par bya//  
chos la skur ba gdab mi bya//  
g.yeng ba thams cad spangs nas ni//  
\*bsgrub pa la ni<sup>x</sup> brtson par bya// 75

<sup>x</sup> G. N. P. sgrub ni rab tu

Thus, regarding what I've explained  
here,  
Abandon biased thought,  
And examine it through reason.  
One should not blaspheme the dharma.  
Having renounced all distraction,  
One must earnestly strive for  
attainment.

(XIX) bdag gis 'di byas bsod nams  
kyis//  
sems can thams cad grol gyur cig//

By the merit of my composing this  
May all sentient beings be liberated.

### (Colophon)

dbu ma shes rab la 'jug pa zhes bya ba// slob dpon chen po zla ba grags pas  
mdzad pa rdzogs so// pañḍi ta de nyid dang lo tstsha ba 'gos khug<sup>y</sup> pa lha btsas  
kyis bsgyur ba'o// //

<sup>y</sup> G. N. P. khu

The Introduction to the Discernment of the Middle Way, composed by the great  
master Candrakīrti, is completed. It was translated by that very *pañḍita* and the  
translator 'Gos Khug-pa Lha-btsas.

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