

# OCEAN of REASONING

A Great Commentary on  
*Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*



← RJE TSONG KHAPA →

Translated by GESHE NGAWANG SAMTEN and JAY L. GARFIELD

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*This translation is dedicated to His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV, the Ocean of Wisdom, in gratitude for his boundless compassion and tireless efforts on behalf of the welfare of all sentient beings.*

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# Translators' Introduction

Homage to Mañjuśrī in gratitude for his inspiration of the great teachers of the Mahāyāna tradition whose insight and care in composing their treatises have made this work possible.

The reader of this translation of an early fifteenth-century Tibetan philosophical text will have to get used to the heavily outlined prose style used by Tsong khapa and other Tibetan scholars in the composition of such texts. So let us get started here. This introduction has five parts: the life and works of Tsong khapa, a discussion of the text and its structure, our methodology, comments on the root text and our translation of it, and our acknowledgments.

## 1. The Life and Works of Tsong khapa

This section has two parts: a brief biography of Tsong khapa and the principal works of Tsong khapa.

### 1.1 A brief biography of Tsong khapa

Tsong khapa (whose ordination name was actually bLo bZang Grags pa, / Lobsang Dakpa/ but who is universally known as “Tsong khapa” [the man from Tsong kha] sometimes prefaced with the Tibetan honorific title “rJe” [Lord] or as “rJe Rin po che” [Precious Lord]) was born in Tsong kha in the Amdo region of Tibet in 1357. He studied widely as a young man and was taught by many of the leading scholars of all of the Tibetan traditions of his day, in particular the Sakya masters Red mda ba /Rendawa/ and Rinchen rDo rJe /Rinchen

Dorje/; the Kagyu master sPyan snga Rin po che /Chenga Rinpoche/; and the Jo-nangpa masters Bo dong Phyags las rNam rGyal /Bodong Chakleh Namgyal/, Khyung po Lhas pa /Khyungpo Hlehpa/ and Chos kyi dPal pa /Chökyi Pelpa/.

Tsong khapa was recognized early in life as a scholar and practitioner of enormous promise and deep understanding and even in his youth was widely sought as a teacher. He continued to study throughout his life, and his works demonstrate an enormous mastery of Indian and earlier Tibetan philosophical literature, logic, hermeneutical theory, and tantra, as well as an extraordinarily synoptic mind, a powerful grasp of subtle detail, and the ability to see how small details matter in philosophical exposition. His work always reflects penetrating analytical insight. His career output is enormous, comprising six major treatises and dozens of smaller texts as well as hundreds of brief philosophical and religious poems. His entire corpus comprises eighteen volumes.

Tsong khapa's first principal treatise, *Legs bshad gser 'phreng* /Lekshe ser-ten/, or *The Golden Rosary of Eloquence*, was completed when he was thirty years old, after over a decade of work. It is an extensive and complex text, demonstrating philosophical sympathy for the Yogācāra or Cittamātra (Buddhist idealist) school of philosophy, reflecting Tsong khapa's early scholarly focus on the Maitreya texts foundational to that school and the treatises and commentaries of the great Indian Cittamātra philosophers Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Sthiramati. His account of Madhyamaka in that text focuses primarily on its negative dialectical character. While it is an important and profound text, it does not reflect Tsong khapa's mature philosophical views.<sup>1</sup>

During the period following the composition of *The Golden Rosary*, Tsong khapa's attention was focused on the *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Perfection of Wisdom*) sūtras foundational to the Madhyamaka school, as well as on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* (*Commentary on Dignaga's Encyclopedia of Logic*) and on his continued study of tantra. It is clear that during this time he developed the conviction that motivates much of his work in his later texts: A complete understanding of Buddhist philosophy requires a synthesis of the epistemology and logic of Dharmakīrti with the metaphysics of Nāgārjuna. By fusing these two strands of the Indian Buddhist tradition Tsong khapa works to develop an understanding of the view of reality and of the proper mode of engaging with reality both cognitively and ethically as these are developed in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and their commentaries. Tsong khapa argues that the development of a correct view of the ultimate nature of things requires rigorous analytical argument as well as meditative practice; that the deliverances of proper analysis and of proper meditation are completely congruent; and that the prac-

1. For an English translation of part of this text, see Sparham (1993).

tices of study, contemplation, and meditation should be inseparable in a practitioner's life.

Tsong khapa spent most of the years 1390–1398 in extended retreat, often solitary, but sometimes with teachers or colleagues. He reports in his autobiography that at the end of this period of contemplation he was rewarded by a vision of the great Indian Madhyamaka masters, after which he attained complete understanding of the Madhyamaka view as expounded by Nāgārjuna and as interpreted by Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, and Candrakīrti. (The cover illustration of this volume represents that vision.) The major philosophical texts composed in the remaining twenty years of his life develop with great precision and sophistication the view he developed during this long retreat period and reflect his realization that while Madhyamaka philosophy involves a relentlessly negative dialectic—a sustained critique both of reification and of nihilism and a rejection of all concepts of essence—the other side of that dialectic is an affirmation of conventional reality, of dependent origination, and of the identity of the two truths, suggesting a positive view of the nature of reality as well. This insight is articulated in his philosophical poem composed when he emerged from this long retreat period, *Legs bshad snying po /Lekshe nyingpo/ (The [condensed] Essence of Eloquence)* (Thurman 1984).

The last two decades of Tsong khapa's life were enormously productive, both in terms of scholarship and in terms of his lasting contribution to Tibetan monastic and academic culture. In 1409 Tsong khapa inaugurated the annual Mon lam chen mo (Great prayer festival) which has continued to be observed to this day by all Tibetan Buddhist schools, and established the dGe lugs pa /Gelug/ school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded dGa ldan /Ganden/ Monastic University in Lhasa, the first of the “three seats,” or major monastic universities, of this order. These universities are still functioning in exile in India, and for five hundred years were among the largest universities in the world, enrolling about ten thousand students each, drawn from all over the Buddhist world.

In 1402 Tsong khapa composed his monumental and encyclopedic treatise on the stages of the Buddhist path from initial engagement with dharma to complete enlightenment, *Lam rim chen mo (Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path)* (Cutler et al. 2000–2004). The text we translate in this volume was composed in 1407–1408, as was his masterful text on Buddhist hermeneutics *Legs bshad snying po /lekshe nyingpo/ (The Essence of Eloquence)* (Thurman 1984, Thab-khas 2001). Tsong khapa passed into mahāparinirvāṇa in 1419. He left behind numerous illustrious students, including his two principal disciples mKhas grub rje /Khay drup Jay/ and rGyal tshab /Gyeltsab/.

## 1.2 The principal works of Tsong khapa

Tsong khapa's six major works comprise two independent philosophical treatises, two explicitly commentarial works, and two treatises on practicing the path to enlightenment. But this division is somewhat artificial and misleading. Each of his texts is packed with philosophical argument, each involves extensive commentary on Indian Buddhist texts and discussions of Indian and Tibetan commentaries, and each is concerned with the point of Buddhist philosophy—practicing the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

His two independent treatises are his earliest major treatise, *Legs bshad gser 'phreng*, and his enormously influential (and complex) text on Buddhist hermeneutics, *Legs bshad snying po* (*[Extensive] Essence of Eloquence*).

Tsong khapa's major treatises on the path are *Lam rim chen mo* and *sNags rim chen mo* /*Nahk rim chenmo*/ (*Great Exposition of the Tantric Path*). The former is a complete treatise on all stages of Buddhist practice; the latter specifically addresses the practice, the realizations to be achieved, and the way of life of a tantric practitioner.

The major commentarial treatises include the present text, which is a commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and *dBu ma dgongs pa rab gsal* (*Illumination of the Meaning of the Middle Path*), a subtle and wide-ranging commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra*.

We include as Appendix III to this volume a bibliography of those works of Tsong khapa now available in English.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Text and Its Structure

The text we offer here is generally known as *rTsa she tik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* /*Tsashay tikchen rikpeh gyatso*/ (*Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), and for that reason that is the title on the cover. But Tsong khapa himself calls it *dBu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* /*Uma tsaweh tsik layur chehpa sherab che chaweh namsheh rikpeh gyatso*/ (*An Ocean of Reasoning: Commentary to Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, the Text Known as "Wisdom."*). This is the reason for the difference between the title on the cover of this text and the title inside.

*Ocean of Reasoning* is of great importance to understanding the Tibetan reception of Madhyamaka philosophy—especially in the dGe lugs school—

2. For more detail on the life of Tsong khapa, see Thurman, *The Life and Teachings of Tsong Kha Pa* or the "Introduction" to *The Central Philosophy of Tibet: Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence*.

and to interpreting Nāgārjuna in light of subsequent philosophical developments in India and Tibet because it is the last truly grand, systematic commentary on this text. Tsong khapa endeavors in *Ocean of Reasoning* not only to comment directly on Nāgārjuna's text, but also to bring to bear all major subsequent commentaries on that text, to adjudicate disputes between earlier commentators, and to show how Buddhist logic and epistemology can be used to interpret Nāgārjuna. It is hence the most philosophically and hermeneutically sophisticated discussion of Nāgārjuna's text in the canonical Buddhist literature and is a true masterpiece of Tibetan philosophy.

While the text is composed as a verse-by-verse commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*)—albeit with extensive background discussion and exploration of issues raised by that text—it is in some respects also a subcommentary on Candrakīrti's (late sixth century) *Prasannapadā* (*Lucid Exposition*) and to a lesser extent Buddhapālita's (ca. 470–560) commentary on Nāgārjuna's text (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikāvṛtti* [*Commentary to Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*], usually referred to simply as *The Buddhapālītī*). Tsong khapa follows Candrakīrti's text and Buddhapālita's expositions closely, quoting frequently from their commentaries, referring to them frequently, but also often paraphrasing large sections of their commentaries without explicitly saying that he is doing so. Indeed, in reading this text, one is thereby reading, at least in translation and close paraphrase, the bulk of each of those texts.

That is not to say, however, that Tsong khapa simply repeats what these earlier commentators have already said. He comments on, clarifies, elaborates on, and compares and occasionally criticizes their views. He also develops many lines of original analysis and commentary. So the text is not simply a subcommentary on *Prasannapadā*, but stands as an independent commentarial and philosophical work.

*Prasannapadā* is also composed as a response to earlier commentaries—Buddhapālita's and Bhāvaviveka's (early sixth century) *Prajñāpradīpā* (*Lamp of Wisdom*) and its autocommentary (*Tarkajvalā* [*Blaze of Argument*]), as well as Avalokitavrata's commentary on *Prajñāpradīpā*. Bhāvaviveka criticizes Buddhapālita's reading of Nāgārjuna on logical grounds, arguing that the reductio arguments Buddhapālita attributes to Nāgārjuna are inadequate to establish the Madhyamaka position because they would not defend positive theses based upon premises acceptable to the Madhyamaka.

Candrakīrti defends Buddhapālita through a subtle analysis of the structure of reductio arguments, making use of a distinction between two distinct logical forms a sentence expressing a negation might have, and of nuanced account of the logical form of the conclusions of the Madhyamaka dialectic. Tsong khapa presents in the first chapter a detailed exploration of the debate between these three great Indian commentators, defending Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti and arguing that the implications of what look like a narrow logical

squabble are immense for a proper understanding of Madhyamaka and of its account of emptiness. He argues that only by adopting Candrakīrti's reading can one understand emptiness to be empty, dependent arising and emptiness to be equivalent, and only thus can the mādhyamika establish the emptiness of all phenomena and the reality of dependent origination through reductio arguments aimed at the refutation of positions according to which phenomena have essence. This discussion in the first chapter is complex and technical but rewards careful reading, and it is essential to bear the results of this chapter in mind to understand Tsong khapa's readings of the later chapters.

Our translation deviates in one important way from the original. Tsong khapa includes three major topics in the first chapter: his preliminary explanation of the text as a whole, his commentary on Nāgārjuna's homage verses, and his commentary on the first chapter itself. The result is a single chapter comprising nearly one-fifth of the entire text, with a complex structure. For clarity of exposition we have divided this into three chapters, one for each of these principal topics.

Tsong khapa devotes a chapter to each of Nāgārjuna's twenty-seven chapters in addition to a dedication section and a brief afterward. He outlines the text carefully, offering a reading of the logical structure of the text as a whole. We reproduce that outline down to the chapter level after this introduction. It is important to bear this outline in mind in order to see how Tsong khapa reads the structure of Nāgārjuna's argument and how he sees the place of each chapter in that argument.

### 3. Methodology

This section has three parts: translation policies, texts consulted, and the outlines.

#### 3.1 Translation policies

Turning *rTsa she ṭik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* into *Ocean of Reasoning* has been no easy task. The Tibetan and English languages simply are not designed for each other. Finding words or phrases in one language with similar semantic range to those in the other is often nearly impossible. We try to be relatively consistent in our choices of terms while remaining flexible enough to allow context to determine alternate readings of a word; we try to balance preserving lexical resonance or syntactic devices against semantic precision; we try to produce readable English from readable Tibetan. All of this has proved very challenging. We were constantly reminded of the Italian proverb: *Traditori Traditori!*

This text poses some special problems: Tsong khapa often writes very long sentences—sometimes a single sentence will go for a page. We have usually broken these into many English sentences in order to make the text readable. But this often requires, in order to represent relations between the new sentences that were once encoded grammatically, the insertion of lexical material. Sometimes there is no way to break these sentences, and the result will be some rather awkward English constructions. While we have tried to remain as lexically close to the source text as possible consistent with clarity in English, we have taken a few more liberties with grammar. In some cases we have also departed from lexical precision in order to make the same point in more natural English prose. Tibetan permits deletions in places where English does not and longer anaphoric relations between pronouns and their antecedents. In these cases we have had to supply deleted material or to replace pronouns with appropriate noun phrases.

In all of these cases, we have tried to ask ourselves this question: Had Tsong khapa been writing in modern philosophical English, how would he have put this point? This is *not* the closely related question: Had Tsong khapa been writing in English in the early twenty-first century how would he have put this point? And it is *certainly* not the question: Had Tsong khapa been writing for an early twenty-first century Western-educated, English-speaking audience, how would he have put this point?

To translate with this last question in mind would be to rewrite the text entirely—to write a new text arguing in contemporary philosophical terms for Tsong khapa's positions and interpretations. To keep the second question in mind would certainly produce a more fluent text, but it would create anachronistic arguments, create anachronistic formulations of points, reflect anachronistic presuppositions, and would substantially alter the literary style of the text. We have tried to preserve as much of Tsong khapa's style as possible, and have tried to present this text as what it is, an early fifteenth-century Tibetan scholastic commentary on a second-century Indian text, while presenting it in contemporary English. We have therefore striven neither to make it more philosophically familiar, nor less culturally or temporally alien. The text demands that the reader open himself or herself to a distant philosophical perspective and to take seriously the philosophical concerns and approaches of a scholar writing in a different time and a different cultural context, but we hope that it does not require that a reader of contemporary English learn a new *language* in order to read the translation.

Tibetan technical philosophical, logical, and religious terms pose special difficulties. Sometimes these have no precise English equivalents and require the use of circumlocutory phrases or awkward neologisms. We have tried to minimize this, as the use of such phrases may convey the sense that the original is neologistic or circumlocutory without generating any additional clarity. There are also terms that have developed standard translations in what has



come to be called “Buddhist Hybrid English” that simply do not convey much, if anything, to those not already conversant with the original Sanskrit or Tibetan. Many of these terms have been fixed by translators with backgrounds in philology or religious studies who may not be fully conversant with the technical philosophical and logical issues addressed in this vocabulary. Often it turns out that in the case of philosophical and logical terms, these in fact have reasonably precise equivalents in English. Where this is so, we have deviated from standard Buddhological translation practice and have opted for the English technical vocabulary. We hope, after all, to be presenting a philosophical text to philosophers. At other times, we have simply used standard translations where these seem to be reasonably in order.

Our glossaries (appendices 1 and 2) are limited: We have included terms where we take ourselves to have done something unusual, either to call critical attention to our choice in the hope of inspiring some debate or in order to suggest a policy to future translators. Where our translation choices are either fairly standard, presumably uncontroversial, or just not very interesting, we have not bothered with glossary entries.

The Western reader, we predict, will find this text very difficult going. There will be an inevitable temptation to think that the “fault” lies in our opaque translation. At the risk of sounding defensive, we point out here that this text is very difficult to read in Tibetan. The philosophical and interpretative arguments are often complex and are occasionally simply unclear. The sentences are so long and their grammar so intricate that they often take a long time for native Tibetan readers to parse. A lot of background in Buddhist learning is presupposed by the text, and references can often be very oblique.

While we hope that we have not made the text any *more* difficult in English than it is in Tibetan, we have also not tried to make it any *less* difficult. In many places it has been tempting to rewrite for greater conceptual clarity, as opposed to greater lexical clarity. We have resisted that temptation to editorial license. In many cases it has been tempting to write explanatory footnotes explaining how an argument goes or why Tsong khapa makes a particular point. We have even been tempted to preface the translation with a long interpretative essay. But we have resisted these commentarial impulses as well.

There are three reasons for this. First, we are lazy. If we were to begin explaining everything that might need explanation, the task would be endless, and the book would double in size. We would be essentially writing a sub-subcommentary. Second, we do want to present the text to the reader as Tsong khapa presented it, and he did not include such footnotes. Third, sometimes we might in fact be wrong about what is going on and we do not want to foist our errors on our unsuspecting readers! Due to our own imperfections we are certain that there are many places at which our translation could have been smoother and more accurate. We apologize for all of our errors and for any false impression they create regarding this text.

While trying to keep the text as uncluttered as possible by extraneous matter, we have included footnotes of two main types. Some notes point out variants of texts, special translational problems, or unusual translation choices. We also include some notes that provide background information, necessary for understanding the passage in question, that might not be widely known by Western readers not conversant with Buddhist philosophy. We have tried, however, to limit these notes to places where they are absolutely essential and we have not indicated all of the many concordances with earlier commentaries. This would quickly become tedious, and those with access to those texts do not need this translation in any case.

### 3.2 Texts consulted

The edition of *rTsa she tik chen* from which we worked is that published in 1987 by the Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Press in Sarnath, now unfortunately out of print. It is, however, the version of the text most widely used by scholars of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and the boldface bracketed page numbers in the text refer to that edition. In cases of uncertainty or of downright typographical error we consulted both the Lhasa and the bKra shis Lhun po /Tashi Hlunpo/ editions of the text.

We used the sDe dge editions of all Indian canonical texts in Tibetan, referring to the Tibetan editions always in the first instance, as versions Tsong khapa was reading in Tibetan. Where the Tibetan was ambiguous or obscure, we referred to the Sanskrit edition of *Prasannapadā* for clarification of Candrakīrti's or Nāgārjuna's words, and in the case of sūtras cited in Tibetan for which Sanskrit or Pali texts are available we checked questionable readings against the Sanskrit or Pali. On the other hand, where Sanskrit and Tibetan editions were at odds—where the canonical Tibetan translation is in fact incorrect—while we note the discrepancy in translators' footnotes, we follow the Tibetan in our translation to remain consistent with Tsong khapa's reading.

All volume and page references are to the sDe dge edition of the bsTan 'gyur /Tengyur/. Where chapter/verse citation has become common for texts such as *Yuktiśaṣṭikā*, *Śūnyatāsaptati*, *Ratnāvalī*, *Catuḥśataka*, or *Madhyamakāvatāra* and many others, we have used this form where Tibetan and English editions of these texts set in verse form are readily available.

### 3.3 The outlines

This section has two parts: what outlines are in Tibetan texts, and how we handle them in this text.

### 3.3.1 What outlines are in Tibetan texts

Tibetan Buddhist philosophical and religious texts are heavily outlined. They are divided into sections, subsections, sub-subsections, etc. This does indeed help the reader to see the overall structure of the presentation or argument. But the outlines themselves can be hard to follow as they are presented in the texts. At the beginning of each subdivided section, there will be an outline passage that goes something like this: The first [section] has two [sections]: The presentation of the argument, and the refutation of objections. The first has three: the presentation of the premises, stating the conclusion, explaining the example. The first has three, etc. . . . First. Then a few pages later we find, "The second has two parts, etc. . . ." followed by the first part of the first part of the second part. By the time one has gone a few more pages and hits a few more "Seconds," it is easy to get confused about whether one is in the second part of the second part of the third part of the first part, or in the second part of the second part of the first, let alone what the part was called, or where it all fits in the big picture. It is also hard to put all of the scattered outline material together to get a sense of the overall structure of the text.

### 3.3.2 How we approach them

This section has two parts: how we approach the chapters, and how we approach the text as a whole.

#### 3.3.2.1 How we approach the chapters

We have approached the outlines by providing the outline information in several forms so that it is easy to navigate the text and to find one's bearings no matter where one is in this ocean. First, we provide a complete outline of each chapter at the beginning of the chapter, so that its overall structure can be seen at a glance. Second, we translate all of the outline prose as it is presented in the text, so as to preserve the style of the original and so that one can see how the text subdivides as one reads. Third, using a decimal numbering system, we reproduce the section numbers and their titles at the beginning of each section.

#### 3.3.2.2 How we approach the text as a whole

So much for the outline of each chapter. But in fact, the entire text is outlined as a whole, with the chapters each assigned to places in the outline. Since the

relevant outline prose may be hundreds of pages from a chapter it governs, it is doubly hard to make sense of the overall structure from the prose alone. To solve this problem, we also provide an overall outline down to the chapter level before the entire text, indicating the place of each chapter in the structure of the text. It is worth referring to this outline when starting a new chapter to get a sense of where one is in the text.

In addition, we have expanded the brief heading statements at the beginning of each chapter, bringing forward outline information collated from all of the outline prose governing each chapter to construct a summary outline paragraph explaining just where one is in the text. One should take these paragraphs as well as the summary outlines and the section headers as our interpolations. But they are always interpolations constructed by assembling the relevant prose from elsewhere in the text. We hope that the greater ease of navigation will make up for this slight distortion of the original form of presentation.

#### 4. The Root Text and Its Translation

This section has two parts: Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and revisions of the translation.

##### 4.1 Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

Nāgārjuna is easily the most important philosophical figure in the Buddhist world after the historical Buddha himself. He probably lived during the first or second century of the common era in South India, but very little is known about his life despite the availability of several traditional hagiographies. There is considerable debate concerning whether all of the texts traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna are composed by the same person, and some argue that there are in fact two or even three Nāgārjunas. But there is clearly one who is the author of a set of terse but powerfully argued philosophical works that are the foundational texts for the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Nāgārjuna is regarded as a founding figure of every Mahāyāna school in Asia from the Tibetan schools through Japanese Zen. His principal philosophical texts are *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*Reply to Objections*), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* (*Sixty Verses of Reasoning*), *Śūnyatāsaptati* (*Seventy Verses on Emptiness*), and *Ratnāvalī* (*Jeweled Garland*). The last of these is written as advice to a king and is addressed primarily to a lay audience. The others are scholarly philosophical texts.

*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is the most important of Nāgārjuna's texts. It is the subject of major commentaries by the Indian scholars Buddhapālita, Bhā-

vaviveka, Avalokitavrata, and Candrakīrti, and many more commentaries in Tibet. It is cited widely in subsequent Buddhist literature, and debates about how to interpret it define differences between major Buddhist philosophical schools. It has been translated not only into all non-Indian Mahāyāna canons, but also a number of times into Western languages, with five English translations appearing in the last few decades. It is, however, a very difficult text to read and to interpret, and modern interpreters differ among themselves about the correct way to read it at least as much as canonical interpreters. Nāgārjuna has been read as an idealist (Murti 1960), a nihilist (Wood 1994), a skeptic (Garfield 1995), a pragmatist (Kalupahana 1986), and as a mystic (Streng 1967). He has been regarded as a critic of logic (Inada 1970), as a defender of classical logic (Hayes 1994), and as a pioneer of paraconsistent logic (Garfield and Priest 2003).

In twenty-seven chapters of philosophical verse, Nāgārjuna develops a powerful critique of the idea that things have essences, arguing instead that all phenomena are empty of essence. He develops a doctrine of two truths. The ultimate truth is that all phenomena are empty of essence. The conventional truth is the ordinary empirical truth about the world. However, the distinction between the two truths is emphatically not an appearance/reality distinction: They are two *truths*, not a truth and a falsehood.

Nāgārjuna is able to maintain this ontological tightrope act in virtue of his argument that emptiness itself is empty, and is hence neither more nor less real than any conventional phenomenon; it is not an essence, but the absence of any essence. Moreover, emptiness, Nāgārjuna argues, is nothing but the fact that phenomena are dependently arisen—that every entity depends for its existence on causes and conditions, upon its parts, upon the wholes to which it belongs, and for its identity on nominal and conceptual imputation and conventions.

The emptiness of all phenomena, the emptiness of that emptiness, and the identities of emptiness with dependent arising and of the conventional and ultimate truth are the central ontological principles of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nāgārjuna argues that this doctrine of emptiness is a middle path between two extreme positions: reificationism and nihilism. To reify phenomena is to regard them as existing with essences, as existing independently. To be nihilistic is to take the fact that they are empty of essence and exist merely dependently as their complete nonexistence, and hence to regard empirical reality as entirely false.

Nāgārjuna's methodology is the use of reductio arguments to demonstrate that neither of these extreme positions is tenable—that each collapses into incoherence, even by the lights of its own proponents. The interpretation of these reductio arguments, and of the degree to which the *mādhyamika* endorses their conclusions, is a matter of hot dispute between Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti, and Tsong khapa devotes much of the first chap-

ter of the text to a careful examination of this debate. Though this material is highly technical, it is essential in order to understand his interpretation of the remainder of the text. It is important to bear in mind that for Nāgārjuna the use of *reductio* arguments is no mere rhetorical device, but reflects his commitment to refraining from characterizing any nature of things because of his commitment to the incoherence of the very *idea* of the nature of things. But just how this dialectic works and just how far one should go in reading Nāgārjuna as refraining from asserting that things have any nature is a matter of hot debate, not only in classical India and Tibet, but among contemporary scholars.

Rather than develop and explain these doctrines here, and rather than take sides in these debates, we invite the reader to explore the text itself with Tsong khapa. The reader who wishes to read more recent literature on Nāgārjuna should consult Garfield (1995, 2000), Kalupahana (1986), Williams (1989), Sprung (1979), Streng (1967), Murti (1960), Lindtner (1986), Tuck (1990), Hopkins (1983, 1987), Napper (2003), or Walser (2005).

#### 4.2 Revisions of the translation

One of us (Garfield) has published an earlier translation of and commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Garfield 1995). The present translation of the root text differs in many places from that earlier translation. There are three reasons for these differences. First, we sometimes simply hit on more felicitous ways to put the verses in English.

Second, it was often necessary to adjust what would have been a perfectly good rendering of a root verse in order to make it consistent with Tsong khapa's commentary. There are two reasons for this. First, sometimes distinct translation choices reflect choices between different shades of meaning or emphasis. It is necessary when translating these verses in the context of Tsong khapa's commentary in these cases to reflect the nuances that follow his reading. More frequently, though, we were forced to make changes because Tsong khapa frequently glosses verses word by word. In these cases, a translation, whenever possible, must include a lexical item corresponding to each lexical item Tsong khapa identifies. At these times, we have sacrificed what might have been a smoother translation of the root verse for an alternative that allows the reader to make sense of these word-by-word glosses. Translation is always a matter of balancing many constraints, and where one is translating a text with a commentary, the commentary perforce constrains the translation of the root text.

Finally, and most embarrassingly, there were errors in the translation of Garfield (1995). We have corrected them. We hereby jointly advise that this translation supersedes Garfield's earlier one.

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