Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism

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Dynamic Responses to, zong-ka-ba's
The Essence of Eloquence: I

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Preface

This book is the first of a three-volume series of related but stand-alone works on the first two sections of Tsong-Kha-Pa's *The Essence of Eloquence.* The focus of all three volumes is the exposition of emptiness in the Mind-Only School according to numerous Tibetan and Mongolian scholars over the last six centuries who have tried both to find and to create consistency in his often terse and cryptic tract.

This first volume is in four parts:

- A historical and doctrinal introduction
- A translation of the General Explanation and the Section on the Mind-Only School in *The Essence of Eloquence* with frequent annotations in brackets, footnotes, and backnotes
- A detailed synopsis of the translation
- A critical edition in Tibetan script of these sections in *The Essence of Eloquence.*

The second volume, *Reflections on Reality,* will:

- place reactions to Tsong-Kha-Pa's text in historical and social context by examining the tension between allegiance and rational inquiry in monastic colleges,
- expand on the religious significance of the three natures of phenomena
- present Jo-Nang-Pa views on the thoroughly established nature and Gelong-Pa criticisms,
- explain the reasonings establishing mind-only as means to overcome basic dread of reality, and
- consider how Tsong-Kha-Pa and his commentators present the provocative issue of the relationship between two types of emptiness in the Mind-Only School and compare how the topic of two emptinesses is debated today in America, Europe, and Japan, thereby demonstrating how the two forms of scholarship refine and enhance each other.

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*a*  Tsong Khapa blo bzin grags pa, 1357-1419.


*c*  Jo nang pa.

*d*  Dge legs pa.
The third volume, *Absorption in No External World*, will examine a plethora of fascinating points on the three natures raised in six centuries of commentary through:

- identifying the teachings in the first wheel of doctrine,
- probing the meaning of “own-character” and “established by way of its own character,”
- untangling the implications of, zong-ka-ba’s criticisms of Wonch’uk, and
- treating many engaging points on the three natures and the three non-natures, including (1) how to apply these two grids to uncompounded space; (2) whether the selflessness of persons is a thoroughly established nature; (3) how to consider the emptiness of emptiness; and (4) the ways the Great Vehicle schools delineate the three natures and the three non-natures.

I became involved with, zong-ka-ba’s *The Essence of Eloquence* in 1982, while under a Fulbright Senior Fellowship in India. I was visiting at the dhar-«zay College of Gan-den Monastic University, resettled in south India after the Tibetan diaspora beginning in 1959. I was checking with the abbot, La-«i Rin-œo-chay—who is a reincarnate lama (most abbots in the Ge-luk sect are not recognized reincarnate lamas) from the southeastern province of Tibet called Kam—my translations of zong-ka-ba’s presentation of Yoga Tantra in his *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra* and his exposition of the view of emptiness in his *Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path*: I checked the translations by orally retranslating the texts into Tibetan. Before our meetings, I would not look at the Tibetan text, so that my retranslation would be from the English as much as possible. The Tibetan of stock phrases was obvious, and thus, since he knew no English, he could not confirm my choice of translation-equivalents; however, he was skilled at rapidly criticizing or confirming my reading of the syntax of a sentence and thus its basic structure and meaning. We sometimes would pause to discuss an issue troubling to me or one on which he wanted to explore my understanding.

One day fairly early in my two-month stay at dhar-«zay College, he informed me that the Dalai Lama would probably come to Gan-den University to teach, zong-ka-ba’s *The Essence of Eloquence*. Since the text is renowned for its difficulty, I knew that I must prepare for the event; so I obtained a copy and started reading it. However, I found that little of the content was staying with me, and, since translation is, for me, an effective mode of focusing concentra-

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a *shar rtse*; literally, East Point.

b *dga’ ldan* (tuøita).

c This is one of four major orders of Tibetan Buddhism. It came to be the dominant form, in terms of numbers, and is the order from which the Dalai Lamas come.

d *khams.*
ation and of retaining material, I decided to use it as an exercise to immerse myself in the text, despite the fact that my long-time friend, Professor Robert Thurman, then of Amherst College and now of Columbia University, had translated the entire text and would be publishing it. Translation would promote my own understanding, even if nothing significantly different from Thurman’s work emerged. It turned out that I found it useful to add into the translation in brackets and in footnotes a great deal of material from six centuries of commentary to place The Essence of Eloquence in its subsequent context in Ge-luk-a scholarhip and to indicate the historical context of the composition.

* * *

I want to express my profound gratitude to fifteen Tibetan and three Mongolian scholars with whom I have worked on comparative systems of tenets (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist), on The Essence of Eloquence and/or its commentaries, and on related topics. I list these in order to show how what we learn depends on others’ help—an illustration of Buddha’s focal teaching, dependent-arising.

In the order of the first teachings received from these scholars (for full references to the texts see the bibliography):

The late Ge-Ñhay Nga-Ûang-Ûang-gyel of the Go-mang College of Dre-œang Monastic University: portions of Jam-Âang-shay-œa’s Great Exposition of Tenets

Professor Ge-Ñhay Hlün-drup-sö-œa of the Jay College of ðe-ra Monastic University and the University of Wisconsin: %ân-chok-jik-may-Ûang-œo’s Precious Garland of Tenets (see Sopa and Hopkins, Cutting through Appearances: The Theory and Practice of Tibetan Buddhism)


The late Ken-sur Nga-Ûang-lek-den, abbot emeritus of the Tantric College of Lower Hla-Ôa and ge-Ñhay in the Go-mang College of Dre-œang Monastic University (in Tibet): except for the chapter on the Autonomy School, all of Jam-Âang-shay-œa’s Great Exposition of the Middle; Nga-Ûang-œel-den’s Annotations (the chapter on the Consequence School twice); zong-ka-œa’s Extensive Explanation of (Chandrakirti’s) “Supplement to (Nāgarjuna’s) ‘Treatise on the Middle’’: Illumination of the Thoughts; all but twenty-five folios of Jam-Âang-shay-œa’s Great Exposition of the Middle; lectures on the Consequence School at the University of Wisconsin (which I translated).

The late Professor Ge-Ñhay Gen-dün-Èo-drö of the Go-mang College of Dre-œang Monastic University: portions of Jam-Âang-shay-œa’s Great Exposition of Tenets and Nga-Ûang-œel-den’s Annotations (the chapter on the Consequence School twice); zong-ka-œa’s Extensive Explanation of (Chandrakirti’s) “Supplement to (Nāgarjuna’s) ‘Treatise on the Middle’’: Illumination of the Thoughts; all but twenty-five folios of Jam-Âang-shay-œa’s Great Exposition of the Middle; lectures on the Consequence School at the University of Wisconsin (which I translated).

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It did my own translation without reference to Thurman’s and, several years into my work on the text, checked my translation against his.
œng Monastic University and the University of Hamburg; many aspects of Jam-Âang-shay-œa's Great Exposition of Tenets; a portion of Gyal-tsap's Explanation of (Dharmakirti's) Commentary on (Dignâga's) "Compilation of Prime Cognition": Unerring Illumination of the Path to Liberation; recorded teachings to Professor Joe Wilson on Jam-Âang-shay-œa's Great Exposition of Tenets on the Mind-Only School; and lectures on calm abiding (which I translated; see Lodrö and Hopkins, Walking through Walls, republished in restructured form as Calm Abiding and Special Insight)

Ke-«zün-sang-œo Rin-œo-chay of the Øying-ma order, founder of a monastery in Boda, Nepal, and a retreat center in the hills: tenet systems as presented in Êong-chen-rap-jam's Precious Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle and Precious Treasury of Tenets: Illuminating the Meaning of All Vehicles

The late Ge-Ôhay , a-drin-rap-«en of the Jay College of Óera Monastic University: the Fifth Dalai Lama's Instructions on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Sacred Word of Mañjuśrî and many discussions on epistemology

La-«i Rin-œo-chay, abbot emeritus of and ge-Ôhay in the Òhar-«zay College of Gan-den Monastic University: Pur-bu-Áok's small and middling Collected Topics; Ge-Ôhay Jam-œel-sam-pel's Presentation of Awareness and Knowledge; Pur-bu-Áok's Explanation of the Presentation of Objects and Object Possessors as well as Awareness and Knowledge and The Topics of Signs and Reasonings in the "Great Path of Reasoning"; Jam-Âang-shay-œa's Great Exposition of the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions; and lectures on the Mind-Only School and other systems of tenets (which I translated)

Den-ma Ío-chö Rin-œo-chay, abbot emeritus of the Òam-gyel College and ge-Ôhay in the Ío-ÔelÈing College of Dre-œung Monastic University: Jam-Âang-shay-œa's Seventy Topics; the sections on the two truths, the concentrations, and the formless absorptions in Paö-chen ðö-nam-drak-œa's General-Meaning Commentary on the Perfections; ïön-chok-jik-may-Ûang-œo's Presentation of the Grounds and Paths: Beautiful Ornament of the Three Vehicles and Thorough Expression of the Natures of the One Hundred Seventy-Three Aspects of the Three Exalted Knowers

The late Ken-sur Ye-Ôhay-tup-«en, abbot emeritus of and ge-Ôhay in the Ío-ÔelÈing College of Dre-œung Monastic University, principal of the School of Dialectics in Dharmsala, India: presentation of the two truths in the Middle Way Consequence School as found in , zong-ka-œa's The Essence of Eloquence; Paö-chen ðö-nam-drak-œa's Garland of Blue Lotuses; the section on Mind-Only in ÷ el-jor-hlün-drup's Lamp for the Teaching and in Aku Ïo-drö-gya-tso's Precious Lamp; a large portion of the first Dalai Lama's Great Treatise on Prime Cognition: Adornment of Reasoning; and lectures on the two truths in the Great Exposition School and the SÒtra School (which I translated)

The late Ge-Ôhay Ïo-sang-gya-tso of the Ío-ÔelÈing College of Dre-œung Monastic University, principal of the School of Dialectics in Dharmsala, India: presentation of the two truths in the Middle Way Consequence School as found in , zong-ka-œa's Illumination of the Thought
I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whom I first met in 1972 in Dharamsala. When he asked me to translate his Key to the Middle Way, I said that I would do so if he would answer whatever questions I had, and he responded affirmatively. This opened the way to working on seven books with him, often based on having become his interpreter on lecture tours in the United States in 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1989, and 1996; in Canada in 1980; in Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia in 1982; in Great Britain in 1984; and in Switzerland in 1985. These experiences opened me to many topics that I otherwise would not have encountered. I also attended his lectures on Nāgārjuna's Six Collections of Reasoning, 'zong-ka-ba's Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path, and Maitreya's Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle, the last being from the viewpoints of many Tibetan commentators. He truly sees the forest from the trees.

Extended explanations by the above Tibetan and Mongolian scholars made it possible for me to present this and the two other volumes on the Mind-Only School.

It was most fortunate that John C. Powers, then a graduate student in the University of Virginia Buddhist Studies program, wanted to translate Sūtra Unraveling the Thought, a foundational text of the Mind-Only School, which we read word by word in tutorial over several years. Also, Cyrus Stearns's completion of his fascinating thesis on Óhay-gyel-tsen, , zong-ka-ba's chief opponent in The Essence of Eloquence, was most timely and illuminating.

Many thanks to William Magee, who read through the entire text of this volume and made many editorial suggestions; to Paul Hackett, who provided
copious bibliographical assistance; and to Craig Preston, who created a new diacritics font and modified a Tibetan font. Many thanks also to the four seminar classes at the University of Virginia that tackled earlier versions of the three-volume series and helped me to see how to shape my work.

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