

Fuller does not address these concerns and, to be fair, it is not his intention to provide an assessment of his sources' philosophical assumptions.

This review cannot do justice to the wealth of textual analysis that Fuller provides to support his argument. He gives much detailed evidence from the *Nikāyas* and from the later *Abhidhamma* literature. He also refers extensively to previous academic discussions about *ditṭhi* in the works of Anderson, Gomez, Gethin, Hamilton, Jayatilke and others. As a work of careful and intelligent exegesis, Fuller's book is a welcome and valuable contribution to Buddhist Studies.

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Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness: To Be, Not to Be or Neither,
Karma Phuntsho (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 304 pp. £65.00 (Hb).
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Karma Phuntsho is a Bhutanese scholar who is already well known in the Tibetan monastic colleges of India, Nepal and Bhutan as a teacher and also as the author of some widely used and well respected text books. It was only after completing his training and graduating with the highest degree of *Khanpo* (*mkhan po*) from Namdrol Ling, the leading rNying ma pa monastic college in India, that Karma Phuntsho began his second academic career as a graduate student at Oxford. This book is the outcome of his DPhil thesis written there, under the supervision of Professor David Seyfort Ruegg, the leading Western academic scholar of Madhyamaka. This book therefore combines the intellectual influences of the very best of contemporary rNying ma pa monastic learning, from Namdrol Ling, with the very best of Western academic scholarship on Madhyamaka, from Professor Ruegg.

The outcome is a book of outstanding authority and clarity that seamlessly bridges East and West while maintaining a consistently high level of intellectual sophistication in both traditions. In particular, it shows a remarkable mastery of the technical terms of both traditions. In fact, Karma Phuntsho's grasp and skilful usage of Western philosophical technical language certainly exceeds that of most Western authors on Madhyamaka, who too often seem to retain one foot in the culture of the Dharma Centre. Above all, as his authorship of popular Tibetan-language scholastic textbooks would suggest, Karma Phuntsho is a gifted communicator who can convey complex philosophical ideas, in both Western and Tibetan idiom, with a deceptively easy clarity and simplicity. In fact, if one looks at other volumes on the subject of Madhyamaka, one can see that such simplicity and clarity is not at all easy to achieve, so we must count this volume as an unusually valuable contribution to the understanding of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy in the West. Its particular strong point, then, is its clarity and reliability of presentation: while Karma Phuntsho makes no attempt to produce an entirely original or previously unheard of contribution to philosophy on his own account, nor any radical new reinterpretation of Mipham, he does achieve a remarkably mature, subtle, contextualised and well-balanced synthesis of his difficult subject matter. This is not as simple as it might seem, since Mipham's Madhyamaka thought is scattered over several of his works, which Karma Phuntsho has therefore had to draw together. In fact, it might even be that Mipham's various writings specifically on Madhyamaka have never before been brought together

and presented as a single systematic whole in this way in any language, in which case, it might be a good idea to translate the book into Tibetan.

The focus of the book is the Madhyamaka interpretation of Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatsho (1846-1912). Mipham was a towering intellect and polymath from East Tibet who completely revolutionised rNying ma pa scholasticism in the late 19th century, raising its status after many centuries as a comparative intellectual backwater, to arguably the most dynamic and expansive of philosophical traditions in all of Tibetan Buddhism, with an influence and impact far beyond the rNying ma pa themselves. Despite Mipham's astonishingly broad range of interests, it is his writings on Madhyamaka, Karma Phuntsho believes, that will make the deepest long-term impact on Buddhist thought. Since almost all presentation of Madhyamaka in the west has until now been mainly dGe lugs pa in orientation, and since only two previous full length works on Mipham have so far been published in English, the publication of this book is a most welcome event.

The first fifty-four pages of the book contextualise Mipham's Madhyamaka thought by introducing the necessary philosophical and historical background in a very well-rounded way. Hence we are first introduced to a whirlwind tour of the many philosophical and soteriological implications of emptiness within the entire sweep of Buddhist thought, before narrowing the focus on to emptiness in specifically Mahāyāna Indian philosophy, with special emphasis on Nāgārjuna. Next, emptiness in Tibetan philosophy is reviewed, including a concise discussion of the entire panoply of Tibetan debates on the nature of emptiness, through which Mipham's immediate context and circumstances are introduced.

From page fifty-five onwards, the book begins to narrow the focus on to Mipham's specific contribution, presented in three long sections on delimitation of the Mādhyamika negandum, on the theory of the ultimate reality, and on knowability and effability. With these, the main body of the book, are introduced numerous highly complex and technical analyses that can not be adequately dealt with in a short review such as this one, presented as it is by a non-specialist in Buddhist philosophy and Madhyamaka. A longer and more philosophically detailed review by a specialist such as Matthew Kapstein would be welcome.

Mipham's particular views are first introduced through a lucid analysis of the delimitation of the negandum of the ultimate analysis – what exactly is it that the famous Madhyamaka analysis negates? – since here lay the core issue of debate in Tibetan Madhyamaka. Mipham's views differ from those of the dGe lugs pa school, even if, like the dGelugs pa but unlike the Jo nang pa and some of the bKa' brgyud pa, he certainly does not in any straightforward way espouse the absolutist *gzhan stong* view, and clearly retains the mainstream Madhyamaka apophatic understanding of the ultimate as the absence of a negandum achieved by negative logical analysis.

The dGe lugs pa had, according to their critics, differed even from their Indian hero Candrakīrti in narrowing the negandum in Madhyamaka down to the mere absence of hypostatic existence within objects, while leaving conventional phenomena intact. Mipham feels this innovation entailed a form of conceptual clinging which should also be given up, since such an absence of hypostatic existence is itself still logically dependent on the entity that was negated; Mipham believed Candrakīrti, for example, had himself negated much more. In contrast with Tsongkhapa, Mipham favours a more complete letting go of all concepts and elaboration (Skt. *prapañca*) whatsoever, which he terms the true Great Madhyamaka – a view the dGe lugs pa found nihilistic and subversive of philosophical reasoning. Nevertheless, Mipham retains a very strong emphasis on rationality, which he sees as supported by the two truths doctrine and by his affirmation of the classic Madhyamaka belief that emptiness is entailed by dependent origination: thus even if all concepts are

abandoned ultimately, cause and effect and hence rationality still prevail at the transactional level, permitting and empowering philosophical analysis and much else.

Mipham's Madhyamaka appears to constitute a return towards the more classic Madhyamaka doctrines (*snga rabs pa*) that remain closer to the *Prajñāpāramitā* and which had prevailed in Tibet prior to Tsongkhapa's radical transformation of Madhyamaka after the 15th century. Seen in historical perspective, this book tentatively seems to imply that by inserting a qualifier to the Madhyamaka negandum and thus limiting its reach to hypostatic existence only, Tsongkhapa had transformed Madhyamaka to make it suitable for his very particular soteriological revolution, which had envisaged logical debate between monks in the monastery courtyard as the primary soteriological exercise (no other Buddhist order, not even the scholarship-oriented Sa skya pa, had given intellectual debate such a high soteriological value, to the extent that it largely displaced meditation). Thus Tsongkhapa needed to reinforce the status of conceptuality within Madhyamaka, in order to validate ordinary conceptual processes to an extent that would philosophically justify a lifetime spent in debate, rather than one that culminated in meditation.

By contrast, Mipham's Madhyamaka view of abandoning all conceptual elaboration (*prapañca*) whatsoever powerfully reaffirms the classic *Prajñāpāramitā* congruent pre-Tsongkhapa view of Madhyamaka shared by most Sa skya pa, rNying ma pa, and many bKa' brgyud pa orders, and returns Madhyamaka to a system that harmonises better with those schools' final soteriology of contemplation. For those orders, debate is a branch of study, important to stabilise understanding and develop doctrinal certainty, but as such, still a prolegomenon to meditation, which is where direct experience of reality finally arises. Historically speaking then, one gets the impression from this book that Mipham represents a returning of some strands within Tibetan Madhyamaka towards its more classic form, after approximately two hundred years in which infatuation with and domination by debate had prevailed, extending roughly from the beginning of the 18th century dGe lugs pa political hegemony, until Mipham's time.

Next, the theory of ultimate reality is examined; although some of this has already been presented by John Pettit,¹ Karma Phuntsho also employs many additional sources that Pettit did not use. In brief, since Mipham differed from the dGe lugs pa in establishing the negandum, his view of the ultimate is also necessarily different. Mipham's view of the ultimate is coalescence, or, quite simply, that emptiness is form, and form is emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*), inseparably and not merely as the juxtaposition of two separate things. This harmonises perfectly not only with *Prajñāpāramitā*, but also with the rNying ma pa's *Mahāyoga* and *rDzogs chen* meditation (it probably also suits the equivalent bKa' brgyud pa and Sa skya pa systems pretty well). Thus Mipham's ultimate is not merely an absence of hypostatic existence, but also an ultimate reality that transcends all conceptual extremes, in its completeness perceivable only through the non-dual gnosis of the Buddhas; in this way, he retains a powerful mystical dimension as a correlate to his emphatic rationality. Notable aspects of Mipham's ultimate is a binary theory of the two truths, and his important schema of four stages of approach to realising the ultimate, which he describes as a 'very important and sacred quintessence of instruction'. As in previous chapters, Karma Phuntsho at all points throughout makes clear and very detailed comparisons between Mipham's views and those of other philosophers.

1. *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty: Illuminating the View of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection* (London: Wisdom, 1999).

The third and final section is on whether ultimate emptiness is knowable and effable. Since the dGe lugs pa and Mipham are discussing a different ultimate emptiness, they unavoidably end up with different conclusions. The dGe lugs pa delineate an ultimate emptiness that is a mere absence of hypostatic existence, and hence an existent phenomenon that is epistemologically knowable and expressible in language. Mipham's ultimate is far more radical, a complete freedom from all conceptual constructs; from the point of view of ultimate truth it is beyond the reach of ordinary language, even if within the reach of the enlightened being's intuitive gnosis; nevertheless, from the perspective of relative truth, it can still be approached through language and logical analysis. Hence while the dGe lugs pa tend towards eliminating the mystical and paradoxical statements of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *śāstras* altogether, by interpreting them as merely figurative and then strictly subordinating them to logical propositions, Mipham happily accommodates them as expressive of higher modes of perception and discourse, that exist alongside the conventional language analytic philosophical approaches of the relative truth. Thus Mipham seeks to strike an even balance between his twin loves of scholastic rationality and rDzogs chen mysticism.

The book ends with some concluding remarks that draw together the various themes, and which reiterate Mipham's Ris med background, and his irenic attempts to harmonise dissenting views as partially expressed truths rather than falsehoods.

There are also appendices, containing translations of some of Mipham's letters made in reply to his critics.

Perhaps the only true negative about this book is its price: since it will be an indispensable possession for any serious student of Tibetan Madhyamaka, in an ideal world, it would cost less than it does. Yet academic publishing being what it is, there is probably no viable alternative for RoutledgeCurzon.

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Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan,
James C. Dobbins (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004),
259 pp. \$25.00 (Pb). ISBN 0824826671 (Hb); 0824828704 (Pb)

Consider a study of post-sixteenth-century German religious reform opening this way:

Behind the modern Luther stands the medieval Luther, and by not paying fully serious attention, now in the twenty-first century, to Luther's personal encounters with the Devil and to his inequalitarian language about women, German Christian modernists are one-sidedly misrepresenting Luther's teachings and perhaps even the whole Reformation.

This would be a rough analogue to the message of James Dobbins's provocative study based especially on the earliest stage of Shin Buddhism.

Eshinni (1182–1268?) was the somewhat obscure wife of the Japanese Kamakura Buddhist thinker Shinran (1173–1262). She is best known in Japan for a set of her letters discovered in 1921, which served as confirming evidence for the actual historical existence of Shinran and became important sources of information for his modern biographical study. In this text Dobbins treats several topics which are related to Eshinni, who has not