

The Embodiments of View: Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches in the Contemplative Typology of the Great Perfection

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ABSTRACT

The assertion of a state which is unconditioned and beyond temporal change creates unavoidable tensions for any Buddhist account that concerns the shift from worldly experience to a liberated one. The presence of such tensions can be found in the controversy between simultaneous (*cig char; yugapad*) and gradual (*rim gyis; kramaṇa*) conceptions of the contemplative path and the state of liberation itself. This controversy found its early Tibetan expression in the so-called *bSam yas* debate, in which representative figures of both approaches argued about basic contemplative and soteriological issues. Later on, *Klong chen pa*, the renowned 14th century Tibetan teacher, explicated several contemplative typologies that included elements from both approaches. This research belongs to qualitative research using two interpretative perspectives, namely the Pragmatic attitude that focuses on the actual results of the scheme and the Transcendental point of view. The results showed that by examining the typologies and their presuppositions it becomes clear how the efficacy of each approach is closely related to individual capacities of practitioners. As such, the tension between simultaneous and gradual models is revealed as deeply contextual and not binary.

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Introduction

When asserting a state that is unconditioned and beyond temporal change certain unavoidable tensions arise for any account which deals with the shift from worldly experience to a liberated one (Ajahn & Ajahn, 2009). For example, one may ask how an unconditioned state can arise from a cumulative process of cognitive, affective and behavioural changes. Or one may wonder how awareness can

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transcend basic intentional patterns, which construct lived reality in the world of spatial and temporal relations.

The questions that emerge from the mutual consideration of the unconditioned and the conditioned serve as the backbone for several theoretical and contemplative debates within various Buddhist milieus. One of these debates concerned the controversy between simultaneous/subitist (*cig char; yugapad*) and gradual (*rim gyis; krameṇa*) conceptions of the contemplative path and the state of liberation itself. According to Luis Gómez the debate between simultaneous and gradual approaches was present in numerous Buddhist cultures, including those of India, China and Tibet (Gomez, 1983a; Gómez, 1987). The debate itself encompassed the contemplative path and the liberated state alike. It included issues which concerned the means necessary for attaining liberation, the nature of the contemplative process and the characteristics of the liberated state (Gómez, 1987).

The dispute between simultaneous and gradual approaches found its early Tibetan expression in the so-called *bSam yas* debate. In this debate representative figures of both approaches argued about the contemplative and soteriological issues just mentioned. Although described as an historical event that occurred in the second half of the 8th century C.E., the debate also reflected the ongoing dispute between distinct Tibetan traditions with regard to issues of practice and liberation (Jackson, 1982). Thus, in accordance with the claim of David Seyfort Ruegg that the *bSam yas* debate had become a partly dehistoricized topos for later Tibetans, it is possible to view the debate as a conceptual space in which several approaches tried to resolve the tension between the unconditioned state and our worldly temporal lives (Ruegg, 2002). According to Gomez such a space included not only gradual Indian and simultaneous Chinese approaches, but also a Tantric approach identified with Vimalamitra, which asserted several simultaneous motifs (Gomez, 1983a). Therefore, the later Tibetan polemics in which such traditions as "The Great Perfection" (*rDzogs pa chen po*) and certain strands of "The Great Seal" (*Phyag rgya chen po; Mahāmudrā*) were identified with the teachings of the Chinese teacher Ho-shang Mahāyāna/Mo-ho-yen can be seen as recapitulation and elaboration of the early traditions that were part of the debate.

One of the traditions to be connected to the simultaneous approach was 'The Great Perfection' (*rDzogs pa chen po*). This tradition emphasized from its early stages a vision of a primordial non-dual awareness (*gnyis med kyi ye shes*), which is beyond the fragmented relation of perceiver (*'dzin pa*) and perceived (*gzung ba*) and the continuum of temporal changes. For example, in one of the earliest rDzogs chen treatises – 'The Cuckoo of Transcendental Awareness' (*Rig pa'i khu byug*) – it is clearly stated that the original nature of awareness is already non-dual and perfect. Simultaneously, it shines through and within individual phenomena, which are erroneously perceived as essentially distinct from one another. For an extensive discussion on the early views of the 'Great Perfection' (Karmay, 1988). Yet, the manner through which this vision was incorporated in actual contemplative paths differed between distinct strands of 'The Great Perfection'. Some of those asserted a strict negation of the principles of gradual practices, including these of other Tantric traditions. Others delineated a more inclusive attitude that acknowledged the importance of such practices for certain practitioners. Perhaps the clearest example of the negating approach in 'The Great Perfection' is found in the eclectic Tantra 'The

All Creating King' (*Kun byed rgyal po*), in which previous tantric principles of praxis are denigrated due to their reliance on effort, manipulation and construction (Clemente & Lukianowicz, 1999)

One of the central proponents of an inclusive attitude was Klong chen rab 'byams pa, the renowned 14th century Tibetan teacher, who is considered to be the great systemiser of the 'Old Translations' School (*rNying ma*) in general, and 'The Great Perfection' in particular. Although rarely mentioning specific figures from the debate in an explicit manner (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009a), Klong chen pa presented several schemes that divided the different practitioners according to their capacity to abide in the natural state of non-dual awareness (Higgins, 2013; Ruegg, 2002). Classificatory schemes of different practitioners are already found in the early discourses of the Buddha himself. For example, in the 'Kīṭāgiri Sutta' the Buddha described seven types of practitioners based on their contemplative realizations and the path ahead of them. As such, the schemes incorporated distinct models of contemplative practice, because each of these was suited to the abilities of one of the capacities.

In this paper I will examine two rDzogs chen contemplative schemes in which Klong chen pa described differing capacities for directly recognizing and abiding in luminous awareness (*gsal ba'i rig pa*). Even though each of the schemes belongs to a distinct rDzogs chen strand, it will become evident that both acknowledge diverse approaches for realizing the unconditioned state of liberation. This would help to explain the observation of Seyfort Ruegg that several Tibetan figures, including *dPal dbyangs* of the *sBa* family and *Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*, an 18th century Tibetan teacher and the author of *The Crystal Mirror* (*Shel gyi me long*), have asserted that the simultaneous and gradual attitudes should be considered as methods of contemplative instruction (*'khrid tshul*) and not as opposed dogmas that advocate distinct liberative goals (Ruegg, 2002).

Following this examination, I will consider how the two schemes contribute to our understanding of different contemplative paths. For this, I will apply two interpretive perspectives; a 'Pragmatic' attitude that focuses on the actual fruits of the schemes and a 'Transcendental' viewpoint, which concerns the conditions that makes the schemes possible. The pragmatic perspective would demonstrate how the paths are shaped by the lived experience of individual practitioners. This conclusion would corroborate the finding of Gomez, Seyfort Ruegg and others. Adding to the existent research, the transcendental perspective would reveal how the co-appearance of simultaneous and gradual approaches expresses innate elements of mind-itself (*sems nyid; cittatva*).

Method

Research context

The contemplative schemes to be presented in this article appear respectively in two of Klong chen pa's main corpora – the 'Trilogy of Rest' (*Ngal gso skor gsum*) and the 'Seven Treasures' (*mDzod bdun*). In what follows these schemes will be presented through a close reading of key passages from selected treatises in the two corpora.

Following the elucidation of the contemplative schemes, I will utilize two interpretive methods for the sake of demonstrating how the schemes exemplify a

possible integration of sudden and gradual approaches. The first method is a pragmatic one, influenced by William James. The second method is a transcendental-phenomenological one as presented by Edmund Husserl.

Instrument and data collection

The data used in this study were obtained from various sources and literature related to the research problem. In this research, two types of data are used, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data sources are the main data sources used in this research and come from books that discuss Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches in the Contemplative Typology of "The Great Perfection". Secondary data sources are sources collected after primary data has been collected. This secondary source is used in order to complement or add to the primary data that has been collected previously. Secondary sources in this research come from literature reviews in the form of buku, journals, papers, and other previous studies.

Data analysis

To determine the validity of data, data analysis techniques are needed. The implementation of data checking techniques is based on a number of certain criteria starting from finding data, analyzing data, looking for additional data, checking the validity of the data, and finally making an analysis to verify research findings (Bowen, 2009). In this study, what is prioritized is the credibility test carried out by checking the validity of sources and methods with the aim of achieving nothing but the truth about existing phenomena. the source validity test referred to in this study, namely by comparing and cross-checking the degree of trust in information that has been previously obtained. Meanwhile, to test the validity of the method, namely checking the degree of trust in the findings of the research results and checking the degree of trust in several data sources. After carrying out the credibility test, the final stage is to make an analysis to verify the research findings that have been carried out by describing them in a sentence.

Findings

A Tripartite Classification of Contemplatives Skills

The Unity of 'Calm Abiding' and 'Special Insight'

The first scheme was presented by Klong chen pa in the 11th chapter of "Resting in Mind-itself" (*Sems nyid ngal gso*) and its auto-commentary, in which he discussed the unity of 'Calm Abiding' (*zhi gnas*; *śamatha*; *samatha*) and 'Special Insight' (*lhag mthong*; *vipaśyanā*; *vipassanā*) (Wangchuk, 2008). The commentarial explication of the root verses is based on three main corpora: the fundamental rDzogs chen Tantra 'The All-creating King' (*Kun byed rgyal po*), the Songs of Realization associated with the Mahāsiddhas (*mGur, gLu; Do ha*) and several Sūtras, including the *Samdhinirmocana* (*dGongs pa nges par 'grel pa*) and 'The Supreme Meditative Stabilization' (*'Phags pa ting nge 'dzin mchog dam pa; Āryasamādhī-agrottama*). Owing to their notable presence in the commentary, it can be argued that the discussion on the unity of Śamatha and Vipāśyanā provides an integrative account of Sūtra, Tantra and commentarial literature (*bsTan bcos; Śāstra*) that attempts to delineate the contemplative ramifications of a non-dual vision, which emphasizes a natural state of liberation. Additionally, although the discussion of the

two contemplative practices was usually characterized by a gradual orientation, similar to the presentation found in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākramas*, Klong chen pa expanded it by referring to persons of exceptional ability who are able to unite the practices much more swiftly. At the same time, Klong chen pa acknowledged that for most practitioners a gradual path is indeed the most suitable one. In this sense, he followed the claims of Mo-ho-yen, the protagonist of the Simultaneous approach in the *bSam yas* debate, who reserved the subitist practice for those of sharp faculties (Gomez, 1983b; Ruegg, 2002). Based on this early distinction, we can ponder whether the classification into differing contemplative capacities indicates an innate division or rather characterizes diverse phases in the contemplative life of a single practitioner. If the latter option is valid, we can argue that a subitist approach is inevitable for each and every practitioner, even when the contemplative praxis involved gradual techniques. Perhaps an initial answer that favours the second option is found in the assertion of Mo-ho-yen that the state of liberated non-dual abiding is attained by the Buddhas after numberless kalpas (Gomez, 1983b). That is to say, even the person of highest contemplative capacity needs an extended period of time (of gradual practices) in order to achieve it.

Finally, according to Klong chen pa each of the two contemplative practices of Śamatha and Vipāśyanā is related to one of the inherent aspects of awareness. Hence, one can argue that the difference in uniting these practices stem from distinct capacities to directly perceive the holistic nature of awareness. On the one hand, the ability to immediately recognize this nature implies an instantaneous unity of practices. On the other hand, a progressive recognition indicates that the inherent aspects reveal their basic unity only gradually.

a. The Highest Capacity

Klong chen pa begins his discussion of the diverse capacities by considering the highest (*yang rab*) one. According to him, the individual of the highest capacity is able to abide in the spacious-cum-luminous state of natural awareness without engaging in any intentional practice:

In this way, having the good fortune of merit that was previously accumulated, the (practitioners) of the highest faculty, (assisted) by the condition of the holy lama, are liberated by merely realizing the meaning of innate mind-itself. This meaning is beyond the object to be cultivated and the cultivator, [being] like the sky. Without the need to cultivate by deliberate effort, they naturally abide at all times within the yoga of mind-itself, which is (like) a flowing river (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b).

This passage indicates that the practitioner of highest capacity is able to settle into his/her original awareness (*yang dag pa'i rig pa*) in a natural way which does not involve any deliberate effort. Therefore, even though the attainment of such capacity is presumably dependent on previous accumulations of merit and a present contact with a teacher, the actual realization of mind-itself arises in an instantaneous and natural manner. The spontaneous realization of the highest capacity is further clarified when considering the effortless nature of abiding in the state of mind-itself. According to the passage above, such an effortless abiding dissolves the two supposedly basic poles of intentional consciousness, the subjective grasper and the objective grasped. Without these poles, the structure of

lived temporality which is based on felt changes of the grasping pole, its intentional acts and the grasped phenomena, is no longer present. According to Edmund Husserl the phenomenon of temporality consists of three distinct layers, (1) the absolute flow of inner time-consciousness which constitutes temporal flow without being in it, (2) the temporal continuum of immanent appearances, being the experiential objects of consciousness and (3) the external time of transcendent objects, being the objects that result from gathering the perspectival perceptions into a unified being (Husserl, 2012; Zahavi, 2010). The description of the highest capacity indicates a state in which the two layers of immanent experience and external objects have dissolved for the abiding awareness. As such, it is possible to claim that this mode of abiding awareness is indeed beyond temporality. Alternatively, one can assert that this mode is a state of pure 'now-ness' in which awareness is totally present without engaging in recollection or anticipation of any kind. Instead, awareness abides in its own nature, which is smoothly flowing like a river. Consequently, irrespective of the question whether the highest capacity is reached by a gradual process, its actual realization is indeed instantaneous in the sense of dissolving the temporal structure of consciousness.

Klong chen pa's description of the lived state of liberation also reveals a noticeable difference in the practical instructions for the different contemplative capacities. Unlike an analytical conception of practice that guides the practitioner to dissect the various objects of consciousness and reach their empty yet interdependent nature, the highest capacity in this context simply releases awareness from being directed to any cognition, affection or volition while remaining lucid and loose (*lhod pa*):

Since continuously abiding in a state that is without clinging to [any] truth, [a] playfulness which is indeterminate, without breaks between sessions, [and] self liberated beyond partialities, [one] courses within the pure field of Samantabhadra (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b).

Owing to the contemplative orientation of the highest capacity, which emphasizes a non-intending (*mi dmigs pa*) abiding, it becomes quite clear why it is challenging to support such an approach in the case of a concept-based debate. In contrast to attitudes that are based on analytical methods which are much easier to systemize and replicate, this approach advocates a capacity that is mainly, if not exclusively, an intuitive trans-reflective capability of resting awareness without engaging in any intentional act. As a result, the intuitive "justification" of a subitist attitude is less accessible to people who are not endowed with the ability to abide in the natural playfulness of the self-liberated (*rang grol*) state. That is because the compelling (and even apodictic) power of this approach originates from the direct actualization of the experiential ability, and not from a consistent and systematic argument. In this regard, setting the *bSam yas* debate as an encounter that should lead to a clear preference of one faction already tipped the scales in favour of analytic oriented approaches, because these are easier to convey and validate in an objective and public manner.

b. The Middling Capacity

Unlike the practitioner of highest capacity who can abide effortlessly in the vast (*yangs po*) and luminous space of awareness, the practitioners of lower capacity are still required to apply certain contemplative means for the sake of dissolving their grasping tendencies (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). Still, the specific means vary between the middling and the lowest capacities, as their ability to unite the aspects of calm abiding and clear luminosity differs (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). While the practitioner of middling (*'bring po*) capacity can unite the two aspects from the early phase of practice, the practitioner of lowest (*tha ma*) capacity goes through a gradual process in which the two aspects are treated separately (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). The difference between the capacities is further reflected in the characteristics of each of the two contemplative practices, even when these are designated under a shared term for both capacities. The distinction in characteristics derives from the close connection between the two practices of 'Calm Abiding' and 'Special Insight' and the intuitive skill of the individual practitioner for resting while remaining lucid. As this skill signifies the ability to directly perceive the natural qualities of mind-itself, its level of evolvment dictates whether the practitioner is suitable for a practice that directly turns to mind-itself or whether s/he should engage in a gradual set of contemplative exercises.

The practice of the middling capacity is explicated as the application of three types of immobility (*mi g.yo ba gsum*); the immobility of body (*lus mi g.yo ba*), the immobility of sense faculties (*dbang po mi g.yo ba*) and the immobility of mind (*sems mi g.yo ba*). The immobility of body refers to the seven points of Vairocana, whose application is meant to still somatic agitation and quiet cognitive and affective turbulence (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). The teachings of the immobility of sense faculties instructs the practitioner to allow all sense impressions, including those of the mind, to arise without suppressing or following any of them (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). Finally, the immobility of mind naturally arises from the application of its predecessors, as awareness rests in a state that is lucid and free from the extremes of elaboration (*spros pa'i mtha' dang bral ba*) (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b).

The instructions just presented are reminiscent of certain teachings attributed to the Chan teacher Mo-ho-yen, in which he views the highest contemplation as not engaging with phenomenal contents while, simultaneously, not attempting to repress any of these (Gomez, 1983b). At the same time, in both cases, it is quite evident that the instructions are designed for practitioners of an advanced capacity, who are able to abide in a state where sense impressions arise without activating conditioned reactions (Gomez, 1983b). Hence, one could argue that these instructions are given with attention to their contextual application, without claiming for an all-encompassing validity. In this sense, they can certainly be considered as part of an inclusive contemplative scheme in which practitioners of different capacities are provided with distinct instructions for practice.

The application of the three types of immobility is enriched by eight methods of resting/placing the mind in its own essence. These eight methods of resting the mind are actually experiential instructions that guide awareness to a state of equipoise (*mnyam par bzhaq pa; samāhita*), that is described as a natural samādhi in which the usual reactions associated with the mind are no longer active. In this respect, the methods do not ask of the practitioner to actively engage with a certain

phenomenon, whether somatic, perceptual, affective or mental. Rather, they encourage her to re-connect to a dimension of lived experience, in which awareness does not grasp any individual phenomenon. The state of natural samādhi is perceived as the unity (*zung du 'brel; yuganaddha*) of 'Calm Abiding' and 'Special insight' since it perfectly balances the quality of unborn stillness and a luminosity that is free from elaborations:

Since one abides in that unborn state, it is 'calm abiding'. Because of being luminously open [and] free from elaborations, it is precisely 'special insight'. As [this state] is of a single essence without divisions, it is the 'unity' [of calm abiding and penetrative insight] (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b).

The affiliation of the eight methods which emphasize the release of cognitive and affective acts with the unity of contemplative practices offers a model of vipaśyanā practice that is different from models that identify it with analytical meditation (*dpyad sgom*). Dissimilar to a view that characterizes this practice as the meticulous application of certain analytical acts, the eight methods encourage an unmediated seeing of luminous mind without engaging in any cognitive act. Nevertheless, because Klong chen pa is well aware that not every practitioner is capable of such a trans-cognitive approach to vipaśyanā practice, he also does not completely do away with analysis. Rather, he reserves it for practitioners of a lower capacity to which we will now turn.

c. The Lowest Capacity

Klong chen pa claims that the practitioners of lowest capacity must engage in the gradual application of śamatha and vipaśyanā, since they cannot immediately unite the natural aspects of awareness in their present state of mind (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). The order of the gradual application is in line with the one offered by Kamalaśīla, the main protagonist of the Gradual approach in the *bSam yas* debate (Adam, 2002). First, the practitioner is instructed to cultivate the qualities associated with the śamatha practice, such as quietude, one-pointedness and non-conceptuality. Those are cultivated through three consecutive phases, which are the taming of discursive acts (*rnam rtog 'dul ba*), the one-pointedness of observation (*dmigs pa rtse gcig*) and the actual samādhi of calm abiding (*zhi gnas kyi ting nge 'dzin dngos*) in which the three aspects of human subjectivity – body, speech and mind – are permeated by joy (*dga' ba*) and happiness (*bde ba*) (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). After cultivating the qualities of 'Calm Abiding', the practitioner is guided to train in the special insight that perceives all phenomena as dream-like. This perception is enabled through a gradual analysis of the dependent origination of phenomena, which leads to the realization of their non-subsisting way of being (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). By perceiving all phenomena as dream-like the practitioner clearly sees their insubstantial (*rang bzhin med pa*) yet luminous nature and this seeing, in turn, culminates in the disclosure of their own-reality (*chos nyid*) which transcends fixations and conceptions (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). Eventually, after training in the two practices separately, the practitioner should engage in their unified application, by realizing the insubstantial nature of phenomena and abiding in that experiential state (*ngang*) without intending any phenomena (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). Such abiding leads to a state of equipoise in which there is a co-disclosure of the empty vastness and luminous appearances of natural awareness (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009b). Consequently,

the gradual application of practice, like its more immediate counterparts, concludes in realizing the non-dual state of natural awareness. In this case, it is identified with the unified actualization of the contemplative methods. Yet, due to the progressive nature of this path, the abiding in this state is perceived as the fruit of an incremental development of certain qualities, and not as a spontaneous ability of awareness to rest in its own nature.

Rhythms of Visionary Experience in the 'Heart Essence'

The contemplative scheme in the *Sems nyid ngal so* describes distinct paths of praxis that stem from different capacities of uniting the original aspects of awareness - emptiness and luminosity. As such, the scheme distinguishes between spontaneous and gradual modes of practice. At the same time, the element of gradualism is also present in the actual unfolding of liberative experience, especially in the case of the middling and lowest capacities. Consequently, we can ask whether gradualism is an inherent aspect of every contemplative path, even when the practices themselves advocate a direct and unmediated turn to the nature of mind-itself. Certain clues for answering this question are found in the contemplative system of the "Heart Essence" (*sNying thig*), which is the tradition most associated with Klong chen pa (Cuevas, 2005; Germano, 1994; Higgins, 2013). In his elaborations of this tradition, which are based on the corpora of "The Seventeen Tantras" (*rGyu bcu bdun*) and the "Heart Essence in four Parts" (*sNying thig ya bzhi*), Klong chen pa presents a contemplative system of numerous intentional practices and two main practices that are characterized by a non-dual vision (Germano, 1997, 2007; Guenther, 1992; Laish, 2015). The main practices themselves are subdivided according to the tendencies of the individual practitioners. The practice of 'Cutting through Solidity' (*khregs chod*) is intended for the practitioners of sharp faculties who are lazy (Klong chen rab Byams-pa, 2009), while the practice of 'Leap Over' (*thod rgal*) is meant for diligent practitioners with an inclination towards effortful practices (Klong chen rab Byams-pa, 2009). At the same time, the two practices share similar principles, such as spontaneity (*lhun grub*), non-elaboration (*spros med*) and openness (*phyal ba*).

Although the main practices emphasize principles that echo the contemplative vision of the simultaneous approach, they also include a gradual element with regard to the actual unfolding of experience throughout the meditative process. The presence of a temporal unfolding is especially evident in the 'Leap Over' practice that is considered to be the concluding non-dual practice which is meant to reveal the clear yet empty nature of phenomena. According to Klong chen pa, the realizations of this practice unfold through a series of four visions (*snang ba bzhi*) that are characterized by radical transformations within the somatic, affective, cognitive and perceptual realms. Even though the unfolding of these visions is described in a detailed manner, Klong chen pa also states that for those of supreme intellect (*blo*) the unfolding is immediate (*cig car*) as the fourth vision occur through the familiarization (*goms pa*) with the first one, without involving the two middle ones (Klong chen rab Byams-pa, 2009). Hence, similar to the simultaneous and gradual approaches in the context of the contemplative methods, the unfolding of liberative realization is intimately related to the capacity of the individual practitioner. While for the practitioner of mediocre capacity the unfolding of

realization is gradual and successive, it is immediate and swift for the practitioner of supreme capacity.

Pragmatic and Transcendental Perspectives on Contemplative Praxis

A Pragmatic Integration of Contemplative Capacities

Klong chen pa's typologies of practitioners and unfolding realizations suggest a novel outlook on the controversy between gradual and simultaneous approaches to meditative praxis. Unlike the prevalent historiographical description of the *bSam yas* debate as an argument-oriented discussion between two alternative positions that was decided through logical criteria, Klong chen pa's typologies offer a pragmatic perspective in which theoretical views are related to individual capacities, without being categorically accepted or rejected. The pragmatic perspective to be presented in this paper follows the assertions of William James that 'The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true?' (James, 1987) and 'You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience (James, 1987). That is to say, the pragmatic perspective considers the validity of the differing contemplative approaches according to their ability to transform lived experience. Needless to say, such ability is closely related to the unique skills of the individual practitioner. This pragmatic perspective is based on the understanding that different practitioners have distinct degrees of competency when it comes to resting in the spacious openness of awareness while sustaining clarity and luminosity. According to this view, varying contemplative instructions are offered to each practitioner as a matter of skilful means, without prescribing a single type of path for everyone. At the same time, a pragmatic perspective reaffirms the resolution of the debate in favour of the gradual approach, since it acknowledges that for most practitioners such an approach is much more suitable than a subitist one that can be applied successfully only by few.

The pragmatic interpretation of Klong chen pa's contemplative typologies emphasizes the gradual discernment of suitable contemplative means by individual practitioners. The gradual rhythm applies even for the practitioner of highest capacity, since such capacity is attained only through prior accumulations of merit. Therefore, it appears that Klong chen pa's typologies support, after all, a gradual interpretation of contemplative practice. Yet, a pragmatic perspective that promotes such conclusion approaches the contemplative path in a partial manner, because it only concerns itself with the experiential unfolding of different contemplative means. Due to its scope, a pragmatic approach refrains from addressing the origins of the contemplative path or the conditions that are essential for its practical actualization. In this respect, it does not clarify other aspects of the controversy between subitist and gradual approaches, such as the status of innate and acquired elements in the path (Gómez, 1987; Ruegg, 2002).

Transcendental Conditions for Contemplative Praxis

In order to decide whether Klong chen pa's typologies wholly support a gradual approach or actually offer an integrative approach, we need to examine whether those presuppose certain innate capacities that are essential for their

actualization. Such examination is enabled by the method of a transcendental-phenomenological investigation that is concerned with the general qualities and structures of lived experience in the attempt to understand how perceptual and conceptual schemes are constituted and become meaningful (Husserl, 2012). In this paper, the term 'Transcendental' has a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the essential aspects of awareness, without which no experience is given (Mohanty, 1985). On the other hand, it signifies the conditions that make the contemplative path and its liberative fruit possible. This meaning is congruent with other works that utilized a transcendental perspective when treating Buddhist views regarding awareness (Arnold, 2005; Higgins, 2013). At the same time, both meanings of 'Transcendental' do not assert a realm that is separate from experience, as they are crucial for its occurrence. Instead, they signify the most basic dimension of experience that inheres in all its forms.

In this context, our interest lies in ascertaining the experiential conditions that are imperative for shaping and applying diverse contemplative approaches. The necessity of ascertaining these conditions becomes especially pronounced when taking into account the ambivalent position of experiential structures vis-à-vis the path. On the one hand, the diverse elements of the path, including structured techniques, meditative instructions and formulated initiations, are meant to transform these structures for the sake of attaining an unconditioned state of freedom. On the other hand, the application of all these elements depends on the current experiential structures, since these determine the ways through which the elements are interpreted, implemented and evaluated. In this regard, the experiential traits serve both as the intended object of the path and as the set of cognitive, affective, perceptive and volitional traits that determine how the path is actualized. In this respect any analogy of the relations between the path and the mind to processes of objective entities indicates a fundamental misunderstanding as to the role of mind in determining how the path is actualized. A clear example for such misunderstanding is found in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra which states that proper application of suitable means will provide the right conditions for liberation, just like the milk that turns to cream with the juice of p'o-chiu trees, and not because of any inherent creaminess in the milk (Liu, 1982). Yet, even with the most skillful teacher and/or eloquent instructions what guarantee do we have that the mind of the practitioner will interpret them in the correct manner, unless there is already an innate intelligence that guides from within. Therefore, we cannot consider only the transformative influence of the path on them, but we also need to examine how they enable the path to achieve its efficacy. Such examination is especially relevant in the context of the non-dual vision of 'The Great Perfection', as this vision affirms a state of liberation that transcends the supposedly basic division of lived experience into intending subject and intended objects. In that case, we may rightly ask how the path can actualize its liberating insights, if the experiential traits that implement it are exclusively within the sphere of intentional consciousness. For example, when considering the Yogācāric model of the eight consciousness, we can ask how the transformation of the ground (gnas gyur pa; āśraya-parāvṛtti) is possible at all, if the 'Ground Consciousness' (kun gzhi rnam par shes pa; ālaya-vijñāna) is indeed the exclusive matrix of lived experience (Sparham & Schmithausen, 1993; Waldron, 2003). If it is claimed that the application of the contemplative means is responsible

for the transformation, then we are faced with a fundamental lacuna in the form of ignoring the hermeneutical and practical roles of the affective and cognitive mechanisms in applying the means. Since these mechanisms are bounded by the ground consciousness, it is quite doubtful that they could transform or transcend it, regardless of the specific nature of the mediated means. As such, it seems almost essential to assume a more basic element of non-dual awareness that will serve as a condition for the very possibility of transforming the ground consciousness (Davidson, 1985; Higgins, 2013). For the sake of finding out if and whether this difficulty can be resolved, we have to explicate the experiential traits that are necessary for actualizing the path. Furthermore, we have to discover whether certain traits of awareness already transcend or precede the intentional structure of consciousness.

A starting point to our transcendental investigation of Klong chen pa's contemplative typologies is found in the non-dual view of 'The Great Perfection'. According to this basic view, the authentic nature of mind-itself is already and always empty and luminous. Hence, it is present, in a certain implicit way, in the mind-stream of all sentient beings, regardless of their current state of mind. The assertion of an original luminous nature of mind is found already in early strata of Buddhist literature. For example, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha proclaimed that 'Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind but it is defiled by adventitious defilements (Almogi, 2010; Shaw, 2014). Further assertions of an undefiled original nature are found in various traditions, such as *Yogācāra*, *Tathāgatagarbha* and numerous Tantric strands. For example, in *Udāna* 8.3, the Buddha states that 'There is, monks, an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. If, monks, there were no unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned. But because there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, therefore an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned (Almogi, 2010; D'amato, 2005; Hookham & Hookham, 1991; Makransky, 1997). Owing to this presence we might assert, along with 'The Great Perfection', that the actual application of the contemplative path involves three elements - the established (inter-subjective) tradition, the original element of luminous mind and the current patterns of the afflicted mind. The contemplative typologies offer us several accounts of the possible relations between the three elements, ranging from an almost full disclosure of the luminous nature in the manifested mind and the traditional instructions to an almost complete concealment of it.

The descriptions of the highest capacity, and to a lesser degree the middle capacity, suggest that the practitioner is endowed with an ability of luminously resting in spacious awareness. When considering this ability in the context of the intentional tendency of consciousness to focus on definite phenomena, we notice an essential experiential difference between the two (Moran, 2013). While luminous resting involves an intuitive release of all intending acts, the intentional structure of consciousness is based on perpetually engaging in such acts. Therefore, the possibility of luminous resting cannot be deemed as one more kind of intentional act, because it defies the basic characteristic of such act, which is its directedness (Klong chen rab Byams pa, 2009c; Namkhai, 1990). Instead, it should be perceived as a necessary aspect of mind-itself, since without it a non-dual mode of non-

directive awareness cannot manifest in the individual life of the practitioner. Moreover, by identifying the ability as a transcendental aspect of mind-itself we can also account for the possibility of recognizing a non-dual state. Without the inherent presence of luminous resting, it becomes impossible to explain how intentional consciousness, which is characterized by an intuitive division between grasper and grasped, can recognize a non-dual state while not turning it into another intended object. Finally, the pragmatic attribution of this ability to the higher capacities indicates that lucid resting in itself has a most beneficial felt value. As such, we may assert that the pragmatic significance of directly resting in mind-itself reflects a felt valuation which is inherent to its basic nature. That is to say, the pragmatic construction of the path follows, at least in its highest stages, felt values which are intrinsic to a fundamental mode-of-being of mind-itself.

The transcendental status of lucid resting with regard to the higher capacities seems to be obsolete in the case of the lower contemplative capacity, as his/her path is gradual in its techniques and unfolding experiences alike. For that capacity, the path appears to be pragmatically designed by continuous adjustments, both throughout the collective history of traditions and within the lifetime of practitioners. At the same time, this path depends on the skilfulness of the practitioner to apply the contemplative techniques, as well as on her ability to acknowledge and evaluate the unfolding experiences. Thus, even the path of lower capacity that is indubitably gradual already presupposes certain inherent competencies, which are crucial for its application and appreciation alike.

Transcendental Presuppositions of the Gradual Approach

In what follows, we discuss the necessary role of some inherent competencies in shaping major Buddhist elements – the motivation for praxis and the self-valuation of practices – for the sake of showing that even a gradual approach already presupposes certain innate traits in the sphere of lived experience.

The basic motivation for praxis is usually presented as the wish to end suffering for oneself and, in certain traditions, for others also (Bodhi, 2001). Yet, why is suffering a problem that needs to be resolved? Even if we assume that the motivation to end suffering became a normative ideal for Buddhists, such that from a certain point onwards it was accepted without much consideration, we still need to account for its initial arising, as well as to its persistent influence on people of different cultures and historical periods. An initial solution for the problematical status of suffering is found when recognizing its experiential roots. Since suffering is possible and meaningful only within a context of lived experience, it can be claimed that experiences of suffering are problematical owing to their felt value, on which further layers of religious and cultural dogmas can be built. However, the presence of felt values already indicates the necessity of an innate discrimination that is expressed through the manifestation of distinct felt tones of experience. Even more, such an innate discrimination is also imperative for the sake of explaining why a particular group of experiences became so problematic in the context of Buddhist dharma. Without it we are left with a regulative claim that lacks the basic condition for being meaningful, since there is no experiential recognition of suffering and no perceptual ground to create such a term, let alone communicate it. At the same time, it is important to discern between an innate discrimination of the felt values of

experiences and genetic constructive processes that associate these with personal narratives. By discerning the two aspects of discrimination, we are able to separate the indubitable presence of a feeling tone that is suffering and the possibility of attributing it to changing circumstances in an idiosyncratic manner.

The presupposition of an inner discrimination regarding the felt values of experiences also assists us in accounting for the pragmatic shaping of contemplative practices. Unlike external events whose beneficence might be determined by external criteria that can be measured, how is the beneficent value of contemplative practices to be determined? Can one claim that practices are valued according to experiential indicators that occur during actual practice or following it, because without such indicators there is no reason to differentiate between practices? Furthermore, it seems that the presence of experiential indicators is inevitable when taking into account the basic Buddhist motivation of extinguishing suffering (as a felt element) and attaining peace. Of course, we are well aware that certain practices are evaluated according to their worldly results. However, we can still ask what makes such a result so desired that it brings one to adapt an arduous practice. In a similar manner, if it is asserted that practices are to be valued according to their influence on behavioral patterns, we can still question the basic criteria that make certain patterns beneficial and others non-beneficial. The role of liberated intelligence in the shaping of contemplative practices is clearly stated in Śīlabhadra's commentary on the *Buddhabhūmisūtra* (*Sangs rgyas kyi sa'i mdo*) - the *Āryabuddhabhūmivyākhyāna* (*'Phags pa sangs rgyas kyi sa'i rnam par bshad pa*) - when describing the gnosis of comprehending individualities (*so sor rtog pa'i ye shes*; *pratyavekṣaṇajñāna*) in the following manner:

The gnosis of comprehending individualities is the origin of all Dharanis, Dhyānas, Samādhis and equal abidings (*Samāpatti*). It enters unhindered into all the distinct aspects of the objects of knowledge. It is the skillful means which reveals all the lapis-like enlightened embodiments, etc. It utterly teaches the Dharma that is the cause which cuts all doubts (Śīlabhadra, 1982).

As such, the gradual path also depends on felt discernments, which motivate the application of the path and the pragmatics of its various practices. At the same time, since the inherent intelligence contributes felt discernments but not a fully formed path, it does not guarantee an unmistaken interpretation of the path. For example, a practitioner may err in associating the felt value of its present experience with a certain meditative attainment. Yet, this mistake does not stem from the felt value itself but from not being acquainted with a wide enough range of felt values and misattributing a lesser value to a higher attainment. However, even the possibility of erroneous attribution is in itself a further evidence for the presence of inherent felt values, because without the latter there is no sense in referring to experiential attainments and there is no way to evaluate whether the claims of the practitioners are experientially valid or not.

The necessity of some innate experiential traits for all three types of contemplative capacities demonstrates that both simultaneous and gradual paths presuppose certain elements of what can be termed 'Primordial Intelligence' (*ye shes*). As a result, both approaches can be viewed as having characteristics that are traditionally associated with either the gradual or the subitist approach. At the same

time, the actual skills of the individual practitioner decide which of the two approaches is more salient. While the higher capacities pragmatically testify to the efficacy of the simultaneous path by swiftly realizing the original state of awareness, the lower capacity validates a gradual approach by displaying a cumulative process that is guided by the unfolding inherent-valuations of awareness.

Conclusion

Klong chen pa's contemplative schemes reveal that the simultaneous and gradual approaches act as complementary attitudes to the meditative path and its experiential unfolding. This view accords well with the observations of several scholars, such as Luis Gómez and David Seyfort Ruegg, who claimed that the two approaches were already well-established in an Indian Buddhist context. In this context they were often perceived as being in a creative tension that did not result in the elimination of either.

At the same time, one might ask whether the presence of distinct contemplative capacities is actually the cause for the repeated advocacy of the two approaches. That is to say, can one assert that the simultaneous and gradual approaches arose as a way to acknowledge different contemplative capacities, only later becoming a topic for doctrinal dispute? If we indeed accept the close relation between contemplative capacities and different forms of the path, the argumentative tone of the *bSam yas* debate becomes secondary to the pragmatic question of which approach befits particular practitioners. Hence, instead of reaching a decisive solution to the issue of sudden and gradual, such as the one that is offered in standard Tibetan representations of the *bSam yas* Debate, we return to a contextualized question about the most efficacious praxis based on the individual capacities of practitioners.

Finally, by looking at simultaneous and gradual approaches alike through the non-dual vision of Mind-itself, we can see how the pragmatic shaping of these approaches is rooted in certain innate elements of natural awareness. In this sense, both approaches presuppose an innate dimension of lived experience, which is immediate and intelligent. Simultaneously, they reveal how this dimension gradually unfolds in individuals. In this sense, the tension between natural immediacy and gradual discovery is inevitable and any attempt to resolve it in a categorical manner covers basic aspects of our very nature.

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