Introduction

During the long history of growth, transformation, and spread of Buddhist traditions across various cultures of Asia, their followers developed a wide variety of worldviews, contemplative techniques, and ritual practices. Of special interest are the diversity of Buddhist ideas about reality and the methods of incorporating those ideas in contemplative practice. For centuries Buddhists have been exploring and contesting such fundamental issues as the nature of reality, the means of accessing it, the connection between its intellectual understanding and direct realization, the ways of its articulation, and the relationship between its realization and other elements of Buddhist thought and practice.

As Buddhism grew and diversified, Buddhists articulated multiple theories of reality and the contemplative techniques intended to achieve its realization. Those theories saturate the voluminous philosophical and contemplative literature that originated in South Asia and was later translated into Chinese, Tibetan, and other languages. They also play a crucial role in numerous systems and traditions that have continuously been evolving in Buddhist cultures until the present day. In contrast to early followers of the Buddha, subsequent generations of Buddhist thinkers faced the additional problem of organizing the theories of reality inherited from their predecessors, selectively matching them with the views of specific traditions, lineages, and schools with which they increasingly came to identify themselves. As a result, in the growing and expanding Buddhist world, the questions of accessing, realizing, and articulating reality were rarely limited to the philosophical, contemplative, or soteriological dimensions of Buddhism. In the Tibetan cultural area—as well as elsewhere—they came to be intricately linked with such issues as sectarian identity, faithfulness to one's lineage, and the struggle for power in religious and political spheres.

The process of organizing, interpreting, transforming, and refining the Mahāyāna systems of thought and practice inherited by Tibetans from their Indian predecessors played a crucial role in the formation of the distinctively Tibetan form of Buddhism. This process started during the last centuries of the first millennium, and gained momentum during the first half of the second. By the fifteenth century, Tibetan thinkers were almost universally addressing the questions of the nature of reality and its realization in terms of Yogācāra (*rnal 'byor spyod pa*, Yogic Practice), Madhyamaka (*dbu ma*, Middle), and several tantric systems of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The general tendency was to valorize Madhyamaka, showing its superiority over Yogācāra while retaining epistemological ideas developed by Yogācāra thinkers and matching the Madhyamaka view of reality with that of Buddhist tantras that came to be unquestionably treated as the highest teachings of the Buddha. By the fifteenth century, many Tibetan traditions had produced distinctive interpretive approaches to reality that came to be accepted as standard. Challenging those positions, or articulating views that appeared to run contrary to them, was tantamount to challenging the very traditions that produced those positions and consequently enmeshing oneself in inter- and intrasectarian controversies. Nevertheless, one would also hear powerful alternative voices whose messages were clearly received by contemporaries, and whose echoes are still resounding today.

This book brings back to light one such voice—that of the seminal Tibetan thinker Serdok Penchen Shakya Chokden[1] (*gser mdog paṇ chen shākya mchog ldan*, 1428–1507), a thinker who occupies a special place in the intellectual history of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Working during one of the most formative but least explored periods in Tibetan history, he was deeply involved in the inter- and intrasectarian polemics of his time, and articulated a startlingly new reconsideration of the core areas of Buddhist thought and practice, in particular Yogācāra and Madhyamaka.

While this study focuses on Shakya Chokden's unique interpretation of the nature and relationship of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, it goes beyond that. Shakya Chokden's thought provides an invaluable base to challenge and expand our understanding of such seminal topics as epistemology, contemplative practice, the relationship between intellectual study and meditative experience, and other key questions that occupy contemporary scholarship on Buddhism and religion in general. The interpretive strategies he offers are particularly valuable when applied to rival positions on reality and its contemplation held by Buddhist thinkers.[2] Exploring his ideas in the context of these and

related topics, this study seeks to enrich our understanding of the religious life of fifteenth-century Tibet, as well as several intellectual developments in Buddhism spanning more than fifteen centuries and culminating in transformations of Tibetan religious thought during the past two centuries.

Although Shakya Chokden was one of the most influential fifteenth-century scholars of the Sakya (*sa skya*) tradition, his works were largely neglected by later generations of Tibetan thinkers. This was caused by a number of factors, such as his controversial questioning of the views of Sakya Pendita Künga Gyeltsen (*sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1182–1251), the supreme authority of the Sakya tradition; his support of the views of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) that was rejected by the mainstream Sakya thinkers who saw those views as contradicting the views of self-emptiness (*rang stong*) they advocated; and his severe criticism of the views of Tsongkhapa Lopzang Drakpa (*tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*, 1357–1419), the "founder" of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) tradition that eventually became the "government religion" in Central Tibet. Despite the fact that Shakya Chokden was clearly producing sophisticated original work and commentaries, within his own Sakya tradition he was not held in the same high esteem as his contemporary and rival, Gowo Rapjampa Sönam Senggé (*go bo rab 'byams pa bsod nams seng ge*, also known as Gorampa, *go rams pa* 1429–1489). Gorampa's views were more consonant with those of the Sakya mainstream, and he eventually became the most influential Sakya philosopher. His works—unlike those of Shakya Chokden—still comprise an important part of the curricula in Sakya monastic institutions.[3] It also appears that Shakya Chokden's attacks on Geluk literally sealed the fate of his writings: according to some accounts, in the seventeenth century, powerful Geluk supporters sealed the printery where the blocks for his works were kept, and confiscated copies of his writings.[4] Shakya Chokden's works were largely unavailable until recent times, and it was not until 1975 that his collected works in twenty-four volumes were published by Kunzang Tobgey in Thimphu, Bhutan.[5] As a result of those events, Shakya Chokden still occupies a controversial position in the Tibetan Buddhist world in general and the Sakya tradition in particular.

Despite this controversial standing, Shakya Chokden is remembered as an honorable member of a group known as the Six Ornaments Beautifying the Snowy Land (*gangs can mdzes pa'i rgyan drug*). This group consists of Yaktön Sanggyepel (*g.yag ston sangs rgyas dpal*, 1348–1414, also known as Yakpa, *g.yag pa*) and Rongtön Mawé Senggé (*rong ston smra ba'i seng ge*, also known as Rongtön Sheja Künrik, *rong*

ston shes bya kun rig, 1367–1449) who excelled in sūtras (i.e., non-tantric Buddhist systems), Ngorchen Künga Zangpo (*ngor chen kun dga' bzang po*, also known as Dorjechang Künga Zangpo, *rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po*, 1382–1456) and Dzongpa Künga Namgyel (*rdzong pa kun dga' rnam rgyal*, 1432–1496) who excelled in tantras, and Gorampa Sönam Senggé and Shakya Chokden who excelled in both sūtras and tantras.[6] Together they are considered to be the most important masters of the Sakya tradition after its Five Foremost Venerable Founders (*rje btsun gong ma lnga*): Sachen Künga Nyingpo (*sa chen kun dga' snying po*, 1092–1158), Sönam Tsemo (*bsod nams rtse mo*, 1142–1182), Drakpa Gyeltsen (*grags pa rgyal mtshan*, 1147–1216), Sakya Pendita Künga Gyeltsen, and Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (*'phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan*, 1235–1280).[7] Even among the Six Ornaments Shakya Chokden occupies a unique place. He was a student of both Rongtön and Künga Zangpo, and studied under the former for twelve years and under the latter for six years.[8] In addition, he is also recognized by the Sakya tradition as a reincarnation of Yaktön Sanggyepel, Rongtön's teacher. It is not an exaggeration that, along with Gorampa, he is treated as a master of *both* sūtric and tantric systems. Shakya Chokden's mastery is reflected in his encyclopedic knowledge of both systems. He also often makes multiple cross-references between tantric approaches to ultimate reality and contemplative practice on the one hand, and sūtric views of emptiness and epistemological theories on the other.

The complexity and integration of Shakya Chokden's thought can be understood only with the help of the cross-references between his different writings, especially when in later texts he offers refined clarifications of his positions. I was often puzzled by seeming discrepancies and contradictions found in some of his works, only to later encounter passages where he clarifies his positions or gives explanations that together with his other statements complement each other and thereby provide a broader and clearer picture of his system. Gradually, I became convinced that to adequately understand Shakya Chokden in general and his approach to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka in particular, I must deal with a variety of compositions scattered throughout the twenty-four volumes of his collected works. As a result, in this study I have utilized multiple sources—about fifty of his works altogether—including specifically the texts he wrote from his early fifties on, during the period of crystallization of his own unique views on Mahāyāna:[9] independent writings summarizing essentials of particular topics or the whole body of texts; commentaries on Indian texts; letters of replies to particular questions, qualms, and objections

raised by other Tibetan thinkers regarding his views; and expressions of realizations (*rtogs pa brjod pa*, *avadāna*) of Indian masters.

Similar to Tsongkhapa, Gorampa, Dölpopa Sherap Gyeltsen (*dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan*, 1292–1361) and other influential Tibetan thinkers, Shakya Chokden developed his ideas as an integrated system that is best appreciated on its own terms. In my explaination of this system, therefore, I adopt the centuries-old method favored by Tibetan writers, namely a sympathetic detailed study of a particular thinker's views as an integrated whole. I do acknowledge the evolution of Shakya Chokden's ideas over time,[10] as he himself does.[11] But I also argue that similar to other seminal thinkers, at a certain point in his life he started focusing on organizing his mature views into an interrelated network of ideas while simultaneously solving problems they raised. This period started in his early fifties, if not earlier, and it is characterized by the crystallization of his unique approach to the nature and relationship of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka—the main topic of this study. In my analysis of his works written during that period, I approach them as mutually complementary and comprising a developing and crystallizing, yet coherent, system.

In the following chapters I also demonstrate how Shakya Chokden's interpretation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka is related to other areas of his thought and the broader intellectual context of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. When useful, I make comparative statements, although I am not attempting a general comparison of Shakya Chokden's views with those of other thinkers. It is true that no system of ideas can be formed without an ongoing dynamic relationship with its intellectual environment, absorbing and modifying some views and rejecting others. One cannot fully appreciate Geluk philosophy, for example, without acquaintance with the views of early thinkers that Geluk writers were rejecting or influenced by. Likewise, Gorampa's views can be fully understood only if one is acquainted with the system of Tsongkhapa that was the main focus of Gorampa's criticisms. Shakya Chokden's ideas were also formed in reaction to the views of his predecessors and contemporaries. Therefore, in my explanation of his views, I will be touching upon systems of other thinkers that he was critically responding to. But overall, I will refer to those views only as an intellectual background to Shakya Chokden's own positions.

In order to better explain Shakya Chokden's system, I will also be addressing several criticisms he leveled at Dölpopa, Tsongkhapa, and other thinkers. Analysis of those criticisms and responses to them, especially by Geluk thinkers, is an important topic, as is the comparison

of Shakya Chokden's and Tsongkhapa's views.[12] Nevertheless, such analysis and comparison are not relevant in the present context and will only distract readers from the main trajectory of this book. As the following discussion of Shakya Chokden's life and works demonstrates, by the time he started articulating his unique approach to Mahāyāna systems, he already had completed major refutations of Tsongkhapa's version of Madhyamaka, and pursued very different objectives in his novel interpretation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. His criticisms of Dölpopa, on the other hand, are much milder and are not as numerous as those of Tsongkhapa. I will selectively address only those criticisms that are relevant to the current study, such as those of Tsongkhapa and Dölpopa's approaches to self- and other-emptiness. Readers interested in comparative study of rival Tibetan philosophies in general, and those of Shakya Chokden and his opponents in particular, are advised to consult the relevant scholarly literature.[13]

I want to reiterate that the ideas of Tsongkhapa, Dölpopa, Gorampa, and other seminal Tibetan thinkers are best understood and appreciated when treated as parts of integrated intellectual systems those thinkers developed. Shakya Chokden's ideas addressed in this book—such as ultimate reality being impermanent, for example—also can be understood only as parts of his broader intellectual project. In the analysis of that project, I see myself not as a critic or apologist, but as someone who unpacks Shakya Chokden's approach to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka within the broader context of his system. I further hope that this study will contribute to our understanding of the intellectual history of fifteenth-century Tibet, although writing such a history per se is clearly beyond the scope of the current project. I will see my mission accomplished if, as a result of reading this book, my readers grasp the inner dynamic of Shakya Chokden's system and acquire a nuanced understanding of his unique worldview, which in turn hinges upon his novel interpretation of the nature and relationship of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka.

1. Introducing the Visions of Unity

The history of Tibetan Buddhist philosophical writings is the story of complex and often uneasy alliances between epistemology, logic, theories of emptiness, tantric views, and other elements that derive from divergent sources, different times, and dissimilar contexts. Possible combinations of those elements and their subdivisions are virtually inexhaustible, and together they inspired remarkably creative interpretive

endeavors by generations of Tibetan thinkers. Those thinkers rarely saw themselves as creators of new philosophies or synthesizers of otherwise incompatible systems of thought and practice. Instead, they almost unanimously understood their work as a process of retrieval of original and true intents of the authors of texts they dealt with,[14] and tended to treat their sources as parts of an interconnected and often harmonious whole.

In particular, writings in the style of doxography (*grub mtha'*, *siddhānta*)[15] attempt to bring together, organize, and give structure to multifarious elements of the Buddhist universe. But precisely because of this organizational impulse, doxographical writings tend to be delimiting, bringing into the same discourse such elements as epistemology, Madhyamaka dialectics, contemplative techniques, and tantric rituals that otherwise are highly diverse in terms of their origins, style, and content. Despite its problematic nature, doxographical genre is particularly favored by Shakya Chokden and other Tibetan thinkers who focus on contents and divisions of Buddhist systems. The doxographical structure they commonly use is the fourfold hierarchical division of Buddhist tenet systems into those of Vaibhāṣika (*bye brag smra ba*, Proponents of Particulars), Sautrāntika (*mdo sde pa*, Sūtra Followers), Cittamātra (*sems tsam*, Mind-Only), and Madhyamaka. In this doxographical approach, each preceding system is treated as lower than the succeeding one in terms of its views and practices. Furthermore, Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika are treated as Hīnayāna, and Cittamātra and Madhyamaka as Māhayāna systems. Despite its apparent limitations and artificiality, such doxographical discourse extends not only to philosophical, but also ethical, contemplative, ritual, and political dimensions. Far from being an abstraction removed from "real life," doxography is manipulated by actual historical agents and brings about tangible results in areas as seemingly remote from each other as contemplation and politics.

Studying in Tibetan monastic universities, one often hears such statements as "buddhahood cannot be achieved without putting the Madhyamaka view into contemplative practice," "the real Sakya, Geluk, etc., Madhyamaka view of ultimate reality is such and such," and so forth. These and other statements indicate that in the Tibetan Buddhist world, adopting a particular doxographical position is often dictated by and bears on one's sectarian standing. When a particular doxographical stance is considered to be too radical, its author is very likely to be treated as controversial and unorthodox. Alternatively, the organizational coherence and other virtues of the author's doxographical approach might be so appealing that he can acquire a

substantial following and his heterodoxy might eventually turn into a new orthodoxy, at least within certain circles. Such was the fate of several important doxographies whose authors (e.g., Tsongkhapa and Dölpopa) remained well-known figures in the Tibetan intellectual world; on the other hand, Shakya Chokden and Taktsang Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen's (*stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen*, b.1405) bodies of work receded into relative obscurity. My task in the present book is to bring one such thinker—Shakya Chokden—back to light, place his life and works within the broader context of Tibetan Buddhism, and present the full richness and uniqueness of his writings on the Mahāyāna systems.

One of the most complicated areas of Buddhist thought explored by Shakya Chokden in minute detail is the nature and relationship of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. In Tibet, the two systems are nearly universally viewed as the two most important Buddhist philosophical traditions. Nevertheless, from their very inception, there has never been consensus on the meaning of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, and for more than fifteen centuries the question of correct identification and interpretation of these systems has remained unsolved. Below are highly simplified descriptions that contemporary students of Buddhist philosophy in Tibetan monastic institutions or European and American universities are most likely to encounter. I use these descriptions here only in order to introduce the subject and highlight Shakya Chokden's unique position. Greatly expanded versions of these descriptions are presented later in this text.

Madhyamaka and Yogācāra systems are usually viewed as mutually exclusive. Madhyamaka is treated as synonymous with Niḥsvabhāvavāda (*ngo bo nyid med par smra ba*, Proponents of Entity-lessness) and Yogācāra[16] as synonymous with Cittamātra. The Madhyamaka view is understood as the negation of nature or "entity" (*ngo bo*, *bhāva*) of all phenomena, including the entity of negation or emptiness itself. The Yogācāra view, on the other hand, is understood as the affirmation of reality of mind (*sems*, *citta*) qualified by negation of other phenomena, such as external objects (*phyi rol gyi don*, *bahir-dhārtha*). Although Yogācāra denies the existence of external objects, depending on whether appearances or "aspects" (*rnam pa*, *ākāra*) of those objects in mind are treated as true (*bden pa*, *satya*) or false (*rdzun pa*, *alīka*), Yogācāra is further subdivided into two systems of Alīkākāravāda (*rnam rdzun pa*, False Aspectarians) and Satyākāravāda (*rnam bden pa*, True Aspectarians).[17]

In contrast to that approach, Shakya Chokden accepts that neither Yogācāra and Cittamātra are the same system nor that Madhyamaka is

limited only to the system of Niḥsvabhāvavāda. Although he accepts the twofold division of Yogācāra into Alīkākāravāda and Satyākāravāda, he identifies Satyākāravāda as synonymous exclusively with Cittamātra, and Alīkākāravāda as a subdivision of Madhyamaka on an equal footing with Niḥsvabhāvavāda and surpassing Cittamātra. In his opinion, Alīkākāravāda is *both* Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. While seemingly simple, this approach in fact consists of an intricate web of ideas, such as the structure and meaning of Buddhist philosophical and contemplative systems, continuities and discontinuities between tantric and non-tantric forms of Buddhism, reality of self-cognition, transition from conceptual to nonconceptual understanding of emptiness, and disparate approaches to abandoning obscurations, to mention just a few. By placing the system of Alīkākāravāda on the level of Madhyamaka, and showing its important differences, compatibility, and interdependence with the system of Niḥsvabhāvavāda, Shakya Chokden attempts nothing less than a thorough reconsideration and reconfiguration of the fundamental Buddhist categories. His key innovation is to elevate Alīkākāravāda Yogācāra to a position that is comparable, if not superior, to that of Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka.

Shakya Chokden's approach to Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda is a unique attempt to reconcile the views of these two important Mahāyāna systems. Nevertheless, this reconciliation is far from the much more common Tibetan attempt to integrate Yogācāra presentations of the stages of the path (with some unavoidable modifications) with the Niḥsvabhāvavāda view of emptiness.[18] Rather, Shakya Chokden struggles to accept Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda on their own terms as compatible systems, despite their considerable divergences and reciprocal critiques. A dominant theme in the works he composed from his early fifties is a reconciliation of the two systems based upon an acknowledgment of their differences. He provides a detailed analysis of their mutual polemical refutations, yet goes on to argue for their fundamental compatibility and shared vision. He concentrates specifically on this issue in the *Profound Thunder amidst the Clouds of the Ocean of Definitive Meaning: Differentiation of the Two Systems of the Great Madhyamaka Deriving from the Two Great Chariot Ways*[19] and its auto-commentary the *Rain of Ambrosia: Extensive [Auto-] Commentary on the 'Profound Thunder amidst the Clouds of the Ocean of Definitive Meaning.'*[20] Another important text addressing this topic is the *Great Path of Ambrosia of Emptiness: Explanation of Profound Pacification Free from Proliferations*.[21] The question of the meaning and relationship of Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda is also addressed by Shakya Chokden in other works used in this study.

Shakya Chokden's techniques are simultaneously constructive and deconstructive. By questioning tenet boundaries that he deems unimportant or wrong, he releases the giants of Yogācāra thought from the confines of the Cittamātra classification into the open space of Madhyamaka. To this end, he sets out to solve problematic questions left unanswered by other systems of thought; reconsider Buddhist intellectual histories; and defend important tantras, practice lineages (*sgrub brgyud*), and their practitioners from polemical attacks. His main objective is clear: to bring Yogācāra back from obscurity, present it in a positive light, and correct its misinterpretations by Tibetan thinkers.[22] Despite the polemical tone he often assumes, Shakya Chokden appears to be primarily motivated by his genuine interest in Yogācāra philosophy.[23]

Shakya Chokden is thus a major resource for scholarly research on the historical and philosophical development of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. His interpretations of different Yogācāra systems are particularly refreshing and enriching. His explanatory approach clarifies the most intricate elements of Yogācāra, particularly in juxtaposition with other forms of Mahāyāna thought. As a result, his writings serve as an invaluable tool for illuminating Yogācāra theory and practice in ways that transcend the more stereotypical approaches found in most Tibetan corpora. Indeed, a half millennium later, at the end of the 1990s, they sparked a lasting interest in my own mind, when by sheer chance I encountered Shakya Chokden's writings in a library of the Dzongsar Institute in Bir, India, where I was studying with the late senior abbot (*mkhan chen*) Künga Wangchuk (*kun dga' dbang phyug*) and my other Tibetan teachers from the Sakya tradition.

Many of Shakya Chokden's ideas addressed in this book sparkle with an aura of novelty and originality, especially when considered against the background of fifteenth-century Tibet or looked at through the lenses of twentieth- and twenty-first-century traditional Tibetan or academic scholarship. These ideas include the view that ultimate reality according to Madhyamaka is an impermanent phenomenon; conventional existence entails nonexistence, and if something exists it has to exist in reality; no genuine ultimate truth was taught in most of the main Niḥsvabhāvavāda works, and yet Niḥsvabhāvavāda teachings outlined in those works are sufficient for achieving buddhahood; the Yogācāra system of Alīkākāravāda is Madhyamaka while Satyākāravāda is not; Niḥsvabhāvavāda is much more remote from the Tantric approach to reality than Alīkākāravāda; and so forth. These and other ideas analyzed below show clearly that Shakya Chokden is a unique thinker, and indeed they provoked controversies during

his life. Nevertheless, I would argue that Shakya Chokden's thought is a coherent system, as compelling and important as systems developed by such original Tibetan thinkers as Tsongkhapa, Gorampa, and Dölpopa. It is not my intention to explain Shakya Chokden's views in general. Nevertheless, because many of his ideas are built on his unique approach to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, my explanation of this approach also attempts to shed light on his intellectual world as a whole.

2. Introducing the Chapters

The five chapters of this book proceed from a broad, general, overarching discussion to an increasingly focused and detailed analysis. I gradually unpack and explain Shakya Chokden's ideas by discussing (1) the historical, cultural, and biographical elements that formed the background for development of his views, (2) the intellectual milieu from which his ideas grew and to which he dynamically responded in his writings, (3) his (re)positioning of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka within the overall structure of the Buddhist systems, (4) his presentation of Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda as involved in a tense but mutually complementary relationship, and (5) his exploration of primordial mind (*ye shes*, *jñāna*), which in his view is the ultimate reality in all Mahāyāna systems.

The first chapter forms a background for an in-depth analysis of Shakya Chokden's interpretation of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in the following four chapters. *(1.1)* In its first section I argue that there are clear connections between the style and character of Shakya Chokden's intellectual output and the nature of institutional, political, and intellectual features of his time. To shed light on those connections, I provide a brief sketch of the political and religious climate of fifteenth-century Tibet. *(1.2)* Next, I turn to Shakya Chokden's biography, focusing on those elements of his life that are relevant to the discussion in the following chapters: his education, teachers and patrons, people who influenced his thinking, his connections with other important intellectuals of the time, as well as his activities as a prolific writer and influiential teacher. *(1.3)* I then provide chronological and topical lists of his writings, presenting his works in historical sequence and showing the main foci of his scholarship.

The second chapter puts Shakya Chokden's views into the broader context of Indian and Tibetan approaches to Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. *(2.1)* First, I highlight two tendencies in the development of

Madhyamaka and Yogācāra thought: the tendency toward separating and distancing the two systems from each other and the tendency toward bringing them close to each other and harmonizing. I specifically focus on the works of several influential Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thinkers who despite coming from different backgrounds, traditions, and times, share the common position that the systems of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are very close to each other—if they do not actually overlap. *(2.2)* I then provide a brief outline of Shakya Chokden's own approach to Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. *(2.3)* In order to further clarify the nature, objectives, and context of his writings, I focus on those passages in his own works where he describes various changes in the religious and intellectual climate of his time as he perceived them. *(2.4)* Shakya Chokden's sympathetic approach to Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda naturally raises the question about what his *own* view is, and whether it falls under any one of the categories he explores, such as the system of "self-emptiness" (*rang stong*) or "other-emptiness" (*gzhan stong*). I argue that his views were heavily misinterpreted by subsequent thinkers, and demonstrate that for the last thirty years of his life, when he clearly articulated his unique position with regard to the Mahāyāna systems, Shakya Chokden embraced both views equally.

The third chapter focuses on the key elements of Shakya Chokden's thought that are crucial for an in-depth understanding of his interpretation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. It places his thought within the broader perspective of Buddhist doxographical writings, and suggests a new look at philosophical classifications and their advocates. *(3.1)* I show how Shakya Chokden not only reconsiders the meaning of Buddhist systems, but also develops a unique approach to the tenet categories themselves, distancing Alīkākāravāda from Satyākāravāda, presenting Alīkākāravāda as Madhyamaka, and arguing that the Alīkākāravāda system is as soteriologically efficient as Niḥsvabhāvavāda. *(3.2)* I introduce his argument that there are two ways of identifying the Madhyamaka view: one originating from the works of Maitreya with his followers that teach Yogācāra, and the other originating from the treatises of Nāgārjuna with his followers that teach Niḥsvabhāvavāda. *(3.3)* Because the views of Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda are distinguished as those of "other-emptiness" and "self-emptiness," respectively, I clarify the meaning of these important categories, and show that Shakya Chokden's interpretation of self- and other-emptiness dramatically differs from the positions of other seminal Tibetan thinkers, such as Dölpopa and Tsongkhapa. *(3.4)* I further explain why, in his overall approach, differences between *Svātantrika

(*rang rgyud pa*, Autonomists) and *Prāsaṅgika (*thal 'gyur ba*, Conse-
quentialists)—commonly accepted as the two main if not only types
of Madhyamaka—lose their relevance. Arguing that their final views
are identical, he denies that these two categories are unproblematic
subdivisions of Madhyamaka. *(3.5)* I also address a problematic issue
entailed by his system: whether Shakya Chokden accepts two types
of Yogācāra Madhyamaka, one based on Niḥsvabhāvavāda and the
other on Yogācāra writings. *(3.6)* Given the fact that he treats most
well-known Yogācāra thinkers as Alīkākāravādins, I also explain
how he handles a conspicuous absence in his system of any works
that can be identified as writings of Satyākāravādins. *(3.7)* Finally, I
explain how Shakya Chokden augments his view of the compatibility
of Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda by placing all key Indian
Mahāyāna thinkers into the same Madhyamaka camp and arguing that
they all explicitly or implicitly agree that the systems of Alīkākāravāda
and Niḥsvabhāvavāda come down to the same point.

The fourth chapter explores in detail the main topic of this book:
Shakya Chokden's unique approach to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka
based on reinterpretation of their nature and subcategories. *(4.1)* I
show how making a sharp distinction between Alīkākāravāda and
Satyākāravāda enables him to argue that Satyākāravāda cannot belong
to Madhyamaka and Alīkākāravāda cannot be subsumed under the
category of Cittamātra. *(4.2)* I likewise explain how his interpretation
of Alīkākāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda allows him to claim that
Alīkākāravāda should be treated as a legitimate category of Madhya-
maka alongside Niḥsvabhāvavāda. In this context, I elaborate on his
main argument: despite different approaches to, and descriptions of,
reality by Niḥsvabhāvavādins and Alīkākāravādins on the conceptual
level, they realize the same ultimate reality through direct meditative
experience. *(4.3)* I explain in detail how Shakya Chokden supports
this position by referring back to different sets of teachings of the
Buddha and their interpretations by influential Indian writers such as
Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, as well as later thinkers who further shaped
and modified Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems. *(4.4)* The last sec-
tion of this chapter demonstrates that despite the mutual efforts at
polemical refutations of Niḥsvabhāvavāda and Alīkākāravāda, Shakya
Chokden himself does not side with either system but argues for their
compatibility as equally valid subdivisions of Madhyamaka, choosing
to follow what I call the "middle way between the two conflicting
middle ways."

The fifth chapter explores the nature of ultimate reality described
by Shakya Chokden as the self-cognizing primordial mind. *(5.1)* He

argues that the main point of disagreement between Alīkākāravādins and Niḥsvabhāvavādins is their approach to primordial mind: the former believe it is real and existent, while the latter see it as unreal and nonexistent. In that context, I explore such problematic issues as whether the nonexistence of primordial mind in the face of reasoning necessarily fills the role of nonexistence, what the meaning of "ultimate existence" of primordial mind is, and whether the true existence of ultimate reality has to be negated in order to abandon grasping at that reality. *(5.2)* I further focus on one of the most controversial elements of Shakya Chokden's system that stands in sharp contrast to the positions of other Tibetan thinkers: his argument that primordial mind, ultimate reality, is an *impermanent* phenomenon, and that as such it is accepted not only in the Yogācāra system but in other systems of sūtras and tantras as well. *(5.3)* Shakya Chokden's approach to primordial mind as the self-cognizing ultimate reality of consciousness raises the following question: will it not absurdly follow that this ultimate mind itself experiences sufferings, dualistic appearances, afflictions, and all other factors that pertain to dualistic consciousness? I address in detail his sophisticated response based on a sharp distinction between the self-cognizing primordial mind and dualistic consciousness. *(5.4)* Shakya Chokden's position entails yet another problematic question: because everybody has the self-cognizing primordial mind, will it not also absurdly follow that everybody realizes ultimate reality? I explain his response based on subtle distinctions between self-cognizing, self-realizing, and self-experiencing, and the argument that self-cognition does not necessarily entail realization of itself by itself. *(5.5)* In the final section, I explain how Shakya Chokden uses primordial mind as the bridge between Yogācāra and Tantra, treating it as the quintessence of yogic contemplative practices in all sūtric and tantric Mahāyāna systems. Arguing that the Alīkākāravāda view of ultimate reality as primordial mind agrees with that of Tantra, he utilizes the authoritative view of tantric Madhyamaka to support, augment, and legitimize his presentation of Alīkākāravāda as a valid Madhyamaka system. Thereby, Shakya Chokden further strengthens his claim of compatibility of direct meditative experience of reality in all forms of Madhyamaka—the very foundation of his conciliatory approach to Mahāyāna systems.

Based on the analysis of the multifarious web of interrelated elements of Shakya Chokden's views addressed in the five chapters of this book, I conclude that his works articulate nothing less than the grand unity of Mahāyāna systems, all of which—if we take Yogācāra as a single unit with the Alīkākāravāda view as its final view—provide

valid and complete means of achieving buddhahood. I also explain why Shakya Chokden's thought has remained so controversial and underexplored for more than five centuries, and what contributions I hope my analysis of his thought makes to the broader field of Buddhist studies.