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CONTENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

A   *Aṅguttara-nikāya*
AO   *Acta Orientalia*
AM   *Asia Major*
As   *Aṭṭhasālinī*
BEFEO   *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*
BHSD   F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*
BM   *Burlington Magazine*
BSOAS   *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BSR   *Buddhist Studies Review*
CIS   *Contributions to Indian Sociology*
CPD   *Critical Pāli Dictionary*
CSSH   *Comparative Studies in Society and History*
CSLCY   *Chin-so liu-chu yin*, in TC, no. 1015
D   *Dīgha-nikāya*
Dīp   *Dīpavaṃsa*
EA   *Études Asiatiques*
EFEO   Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient
EJS   *European Journal of Sociology*
EI   *Epigraphia Indica*
ERE   *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, Edinburgh,
                T.&T. Clark, 1911
HJAS   *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*
HR   *History of Religions*
IASWR   Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions
IBK   *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū*
IHQ   *Indian Historical Quarterly*
IIJ   *Indo-Iranian Journal*
IT   *Indologica Taurinensia*
JA   *Journal Asiatique*
JAS   *Journal of Asian Studies*
JHR   *Journal of the History of Religions*
JIABS   *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*

JNCBRAS	*Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JNRC	*Journal of the Nepal Research Centre*
JPTS	*Journal of the Pali Texts Society*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JS	*Journal des Savants*
Kv	*Kathāvatthu*
Kv-a	*Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*
MCB	*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*
M	*Majjhima-nikāya*
Mhbv	*Mahābodhivaṃsa*
Mhv	*Mahāvaṃsa*
Mp	*Manoratha-pūranī*
MSMS	Monumenta Serica Monograph Series
Paṭis	*Paṭisambhidā-magga*
PTS	Pali Text Society
RH	*Revue Historique*
RO	*Rocznik Orientalistyczny*
S	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Saddhamma-s	*Saddhamma-saṅgaha*
SLJBS	*Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies*
Sp	*Samantapāsādikā*
SSAC	*Studies in South Asian Culture*
T	The Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon in Chinese (vol. no.)
Th	*Theragāthā*
TMKFTCC	*Tao-men k'o-fa ta-ch'üan-chi*, in TC, no. 1215
TP	*T'oung Pao*
TC	The Taoist Canon, text numbered in accordance with the Harvard-Yenching Index to its titles
TTD	Tibetan Tripiṭaka, sDe-dge Edition
TTP	Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking Edition
UCR	*Univeristy of Ceylon Review*, Colombo
VBA	*Visva-bharati Annals*
Vin	*Vinaya-piṭaka*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*
WZKSO	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost) asiens*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

The Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Buddha-nature
S. Hookham

Contrary to certain currents of widespread opinion both among Eastern and Western scholars, there are two fundamentally different views of the nature of man, the mind and the spiritual path within the Buddhist tradition, each of which has equal claim to orthodoxy.

In this paper, which is exploratory in nature, I shall briefly outline these two views and then ask the question of what the psychological or social effects of holding one or other of these views might be. The views I have in mind are expressed in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as the view of self-emptiness and the view of other-emptiness (*rang-stong* and *gzhan-stong*).

The Buddhist doctrine of emptiness[1]

Although it would be a hopeless task to try to explain self-emptiness and other-emptiness in a few words, roughly speaking self-emptiness is the empty nature of illusory phenomena that are not actually there and other-emptiness is the empty nature of reality which actually is there. Although the term *gzhan-stong* has become strongly associated with Tibetan Buddhist polemics, originally it was coined together with its complementary term *rang-stong* as a means of distinguishing two different kinds of scriptural statement as regards emptiness. This is how the great (yet much maligned) Jonangpa master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen used it in thirteenth-fourteenth century Tibet.

a. Self-emptiness

The term self-emptiness applies when it is said that the ordinary common sense world around us is empty like a dream or an illusion. One immediately focuses on the idea that it lacks reality. One thinks of the fleeting nature of life, how things are insubstantial and likely to disappear at any moment. Self-emptiness means the emptiness of things like this in themselves of themselves as, for example, a dream

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[1] The following description is based on Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso's 'Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness' which is largely based on Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye's 'Encyclopedia of Knowledge' (*Shes-bya-mdzod*).

fire is empty of fire, a dream tiger is empty of tiger. In other words although there was a fire-like or tiger-like experience, there was no fire or tiger as such present. The question remains, however, as to what that fire-like or tiger-like experience was. For those Buddhists who accept only the view of self-emptiness, it was a stream of dependently arising moments of consciousness and mental objects of consciousness empty of the fire or tiger which we imagined was there.

b. Other-emptiness

Other-emptiness (or, more correctly, emptiness of other) means Emptiness as a designation for ultimate reality which is explained in the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras*[2] and elsewhere as the vividness of non-dual awareness/experience complete with all the Buddha qualities. The 'other' it is empty of is both dependently arising and imaginary phenomena. Dolpopa elaborates by explaining that dependently arising phenomena, though appearing real to our deluded mind, in fact lack reality (i.e. they are self-empty). Although the fire-like or tiger-like experience in the dream seems to arise from the dependent arising of a moment of consciousness and its object, Madhyamaka reasoning shows that nothing actually ever arises, so not only is the fire-like experience and the tiger-like experience empty of a fire or a tiger (imaginary phenomena) but the experience itself is empty of a consciousness and an object of consciousness (dependently arising phenomena). So for those Buddhists who accept the other-emptiness view, the fire-like or tiger-like experience is not really a stream of dependently arising events that can be conceptually analysed. It is a direct expression of the Buddha Wisdom Mind (*jñāna*), albeit distorted by ignorant dualistic tendencies into seeming to be a fire or tiger or into seeming to be a dream of a fire or tiger experienced by a dreaming consciousness. This does not mean that Buddhists who accept an other-emptiness view reject the self-emptiness of imaginary or dependently arising phenomena, nor does it mean that they do not understand that even ultimate reality, insofar as it is a concept, is self-empty. Their concern is, however, to stress that ultimate reality (Buddha Wisdom Mind), though empty from the point of view of the mental processes that try to understand it conceptually, is not empty in itself. In other words it is not illusory, false, impermanent, compounded, dependently arising, conditioned and so on.

The two basic models of orthodox Buddhist thought

In this paper I am going to extend the use of the terms self-emptiness and other-emptiness to distinguish two quite distinct models of the nature of mind, of man, of the spiritual path and goal.

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[2] Examples of these sūtras are the *Aṅgulimālīya-sūtra, Avataṃsaka (Buddhāvataṃsaka), Gagana-gañjaparipṛcchā, Gaṇḍavyūha, Ghanavyūha-sūtra, Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra, Tathāgatamahākaruṇā-nirdeśa-sūtra, Mahābheriharakaparivarta-sūtra; Śrīmāladevīsiṃhanāda-sūtra, Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra.*

Of the living traditions found in the West these days the Gelugpa (dGe-lugs-pa) and Theravāda schools typically adhere to what we will be calling the self-emptiness model, while Nyingmapas (rNying-ma-pa; followers of the rDzogs-chen tradition) and Kagyupas (bKa'-brgyud-pa) typically adhere to what we will call the other-emptiness one. The Hua-yen schools of Chinese Buddhism that follow the *Avataṃsaka* and some Ch'an schools seem to follow an other-emptiness model.[3]

(Let me stress again that I am leaving aside the objections of those who are used to hearing these terms used in Tibetan Buddhist polemics. I am not saying that Theravāda and Gelugpas etc. claim that they hold a self-emptiness view nor that all Kagyupas and Nyingmapas claim that they hold an other-emptiness view. Rather I am saying that their view conforms, roughly speaking, to the self-emptiness or other-emptiness model as outlined in this paper.)

It is important that a broad distinction be made between these two apparently equally ancient, widespread and orthodox models of Buddhist thought in order to clarify the whole area of Buddhist thought in general. Only then can we begin to compare different scriptural statements about Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), absolute/ultimate reality (*paramārthasatya*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), *nirvāṇa*, *dharmakāya* and so on. Without knowing which basic model (self-emptiness or other-emptiness) the scripture or statement in question has in mind, there is no hope of arriving at any precision in one's analysis of its meaning.

This spills over into the area of translation. The translator of a Buddhist text, in order to make a coherent translation, has to have some kind of overall model in mind. One often detects that the translator only accepts one or other of these models as valid and this prejudices his use of terms in translation. Hence, one comes across textual statements originally applicable to an other-emptiness model translated in self-emptiness terms or vice versa. More often than not, however, the translation is simply not clear at all because the translator is unaware of the distinction and is experiencing a tension between what he thinks the Buddhist model should be and what his integrity as a translator tells him the text is actually saying.[4]

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[3] See G. Tucci's *Minor Buddhist Texts*, Part II, Rome, 1958, 64–65 for how the Nyingma text *bKa'-t'an-sde-lnga* refer to Bodhidharma and other Ch'an masters and preserve some of the ideas of the Ch'an schools.

Generally speaking Professor Tucci and Professor Ruegg follow the Gelugpa line in trying to make out that the Dzogchen and the Jonangpa other-emptiness doctrines differ radically from those of other Mahāyana schools as if a *gzhan-stong* type of model did not exist in the Mahāyāna main line tradition. In my unpublished doctoral thesis 'Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine according to the Shentong interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhaga*' I show that this is an unjustified and misleading assumption.

[4] A good example of this is found in *Mahāmudrā* by T.T. Namgyal, trans. & an. by L.P. Lhalungpa, Boulder, Shambhala, 1986. Lhalungpa's introduction is based on the Gelugpa self-emptiness model while the main text usually follows Dezhung Rimpoche's explanations based on the other-emptiness model.

In *Kindness, Clarity and Insight*, trans. & ed. by J. Hopkins, Ithaca, 1984, the Dalai Lama (H.H. Tenzin Gyatso) defends Dzogchen from criticism by Gelugpa *geshes* by explaining it in accordance with the self-emptiness model. This is not, however, because the Dalai Lama is ignorant of the fact that Dzogchen actually conforms to the other-emptiness model.

a. The Self-emptiness model[5]
The self-emptiness model has the following features:

1. The mind is a stream of moments of consciousness.
2. A moment of consciousness only exists in dependence on the momentary existence of an object of consciousness.
3. Purification of consciousness means the gradual replacement of 'impure' moments by 'pure' moments.
4. *Nirvāṇa* is the cessation of 'impure' moments.
5. The Buddha's awareness is a stream of 'pure' moments that have 'pure' objects of awareness.
6. A being is a stream of dependently arising events belonging to no lasting self-entity.
7. A being can become Buddha by seeing that everything is dependently arising and cultivating dependently arising Buddha qualities to replace his present dependently arising bad qualities.

This model is roughly speaking that of the various Abhidharmist schools, Cittamātrins, Svātantrika Mādhyamikas and Gelugpa Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas.

b. The other-emptiness model
The other-emptiness model has the following features:

1. Mind is essentially non-compounded.
2. Awareness is essentially non-dual. The belief in objects external to awareness is a mistake.
3. Mind is essentially pure. Purification means the gradual emergence of this pure mind from the mists of confusion.
4. *Nirvāṇa* is the emergence of this pure, non-compounded, non-dual awareness/mind.
5. The Buddha's awareness is this pure, non-compounded, non-dual awareness/mind.
6. A being experiences this pure, non-compounded, non-dual awareness/mind that is his true nature, as impure and compounded. In other words his dualistic habits distort his awareness into a dualistic consciousness of himself versus the world of external objects.

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[5] This analysis derives from material gathered for my doctoral thesis (see n. 3 above) which is due to appear in a book published by SUNY.

7. A being can become Buddha by abandoning his dualistic habits of mind and so allowing the true nature of his being/experience to shine through complete with its inseparable Buddha qualities such as love, compassion, wisdom, vision, power to liberate others etc.

My own research over the last ten years allows me to associate confidently the latter model with the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* and, more tentatively, the early canonical doctrines concerning the clear light nature of mind (*prabhāsvaracitta*), *nirvāṇa* as permanent, bliss, an entity, a place, Dharma as eternal and absolute reality, enlightenment as the purifying of ordinary consciousness until the *Dharmadhātu* is reached and so on.

The self-emptiness and other-emptiness models in terms of Buddhist practice

a. Self-emptiness model
This is the exploratory part of this paper. I suggest that the self-emptiness model is associated with the following features in terms of Buddhist practice:

1. Emphasis on pure versus impure conduct and the need to cultivate good qualities and abandon the bad—hence the shunning of home life and a high regard for monastic discipline (a nun's status being lower than that of a monk).
2. Emphasis on learning and minute analysis in the somewhat intellectual way typical of Abhidharmists and Gelugpas.
3. Faith seen as a lesser faculty to reason.
4. A tendency to feel Buddhahood remote and no longer accessible in the current Dark Age.

b. Other-emptiness model
I suggest that the other-emptiness model is found in association with the following features:

1. Greater status is given to lay practitioners (men and women equally). Since mind and man is essentially pure, the important thing is the abandoning of dualistic concepts of pure and impure, good and bad etc. Although monastic discipline has its advantages, for the true practitioner there is no essential reason to shun the home life.
2. True knowledge arises naturally when the mind relaxes its dualistic tendencies. Much learning is not essential to this process although it can be very helpful for removing doubts and confusion.
3. Faith is a faculty of openness and clarity that allow the practitioner to trust the arising of insight to be none other than the functioning of the Buddha Wisdom Mind. This gives the practitioner the power and

confidence to abandon intellectual doubt. On this level faith is superior to reason, which functions only at the level of intellectual doubt.

4. Since the nature of all experience when free from the distortion of mental effort is the Buddha Wisdom Mind, emphasis is put on feeling 'the presence' of Buddha in one's life, one's being and one's mind. In other words the Buddha becomes mystically accessible through faith and devotion even in the current Dark Age.

Possible historical antecedent[6]

Even before the advent of the Mahāyāna one can see the differences between the Hīnayāna schools of the Mahāsāṅghikas and the Sthaviras. When they split up in around 140 BC we find the following features of resemblance to the above model:

Sthaviras
    i.   Strong emphasis on the monastic life.
    ii. Rigid adherence to the *prātimokṣa* (monastic rule).
    iii. Accent on Arhat rather than Bodhisattva.
    iv. Buddha as human figure, who disappeared at the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.
    v. Faith played down.
    vi. Analysis of experience into 'atoms' called *dharmas*.

Mahāsāṃgikas
    i.   Closer relation with laymen.
    ii. More flexible attitude to monastic rules.
    iii. Accent on Bodhisattva rather than Arhat.
    iv. Buddha as transcendental, but compassionate and always existing.
    v. Faith given a bigger part to play.
    vi. The nature of things is *śūnyatā*.

Though sketchy, enough has been said here to suggest very obvious parallels with the self-emptiness/other-emptiness analysis given above.

Attitudes to the spiritual path

This makes me want to explore further to what extent a person's initial conception of the spiritual nature of man affects his whole outlook on life and whether this has any practical implications in terms of his psychological attitude towards the spiritual life, his lifestyle as a spiritual aspirant and the social organization of religious institutions.

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[6] These points have been extracted from A. Bareau's *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Vehicule*, Saigon, 1955.

a. Self-emptiness model

The self-emptiness model, for example, takes the attitude that man's nature is flawed and in order to attain the qualities of a Buddha, such as wisdom, compassion, the power to liberate others and so on, he has to rid himself of bad and gradually acquire good qualities through a long period of systematic training.

In terms of a person's psychological attitude towards the spiritual life, he will naturally think of himself as starting off as an inferior being, who gradually over years of patient training develops into something 'better'. One would expect the lifestyle of the serious practitioner to be visibly more disciplined than that of ordinary, untrained individuals and for the ideal religious institution to be naturally hierarchical with the most disciplined and most learned of the long serving practitioners to be at the top.

b. Other-emptiness model

The other-emptiness model takes the attitude that man's apparent flaws are incidental to his true nature which is the Buddha Wisdom Mind, a transcendant reality continuous with the nature of the Buddha.

The psychological attitude of a person with such a view would be to look for signs of that 'reality' within his own experience. Such signs would be wisdom and compassion manifesting in his experience (albeit in a confused and limited way because of his obscurations) and the 'flash' of direct experience of the Buddha Wisdom Mind transmitted through the teacher's oral instruction. In a sense he will never become 'better' and efforts at 'self-improvement' are irrelevant or even harmful. In fact, it is only through abandoning of rigid concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, better or worse and so on that the mind can relax and finally allow the splendour of its true nature to shine forth. Therefore, a serious practitioner might follow any number of lifestyles and may not be visibly more disciplined than anyone else. There is no inherent reason why a beginner should feel either inferior or superior to other practitioners and authority might as easily be found outside as within the spiritual hierarchical structure of religious institutions.

Tathāgatagarba doctrine

I mentioned above that in my view the other-emptiness model fits exactly that of the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras*. The difficulty in saying so categorically is that some influential Tibetan Buddhist traditions interpret it according to the self-emptiness model.

'Buddha-nature' is one of the synonyms given for *tathāgatagarbha* which means literally the womb or the embryo of the Tathāgata (an epithet of the Buddha). It is a Sanskrit compound that can and has been interpreted in a number of ways. It could mean the embryo/womb that is the Tathāgata or the Tathāgata's

embryo/womb. In other words it could refer to a nature within us that is continuous with the nature of the Buddha in its totality, or it could refer to a certain aspect of our nature that could develop into a Buddha given the right circumstances. There is an immediate and significant difference here. In the first case we are talking of the Buddha-nature as some kind of absolute—the nature of reality that is dynamic and alive in the world and of which we partake by nature (an other-emptiness view). In the second case we are talking of the Buddha-nature as the empty nature of the dependently arising mind-stream (an other-emptiness view).

In the former case Buddha-nature is Buddha in the sense that it is the non-dependently arising Buddha Wisdom Mind. Attaining Buddhahood is simply to realize what has always been the case. In the latter case attaining Buddhahood is the arising of something new which then continues to act in and influence the world. In the first case we are already Buddha but do not realize it. Our faults and imperfections are merely a mysterious cover that only appears as real. In the latter case our faults and imperfections are a measure of the absence, as yet, of the Buddha qualities in us and the event of enlightenment is the end of a long process of development.

Thus in the other-emptiness model the *tathāgatagarbha* is literally Buddha complete with all the Buddha qualities present in all beings, but this makes no sense in terms of the self-emptiness model. This means that although the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* state quite clearly that the Buddha complete with all the Buddha qualities is present in all beings, those commentators who do not accept other-emptiness as a valid Buddhist doctrine have to give some explanation for the occurrence of such statements. One solution is to heavily interpret the texts, giving each line that seems to imply an other-emptiness view a far from obvious meaning conforming to the self-emptiness model. The other solution is to take the texts at face value and say that it is presenting an inferior view for those who cannot understand the highest view, which, of course, conforms to the self-emptiness model. Either way the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* pose tremendous problems of interpretation.

Professor Ruegg has often drawn our attention to the kinds of solution such commentators adopt. Although they may have different theories, in general they all adopt the line that certain statements are not to be taken literally. The Buddha must either have given such untrue teachings in order to win over those who could not bear to hear the truth or they are the truth albeit expressed indirectly in order to appeal to those who could not bear to hear it put any other way. This latter approach becomes quite convoluted.

The Ratnagotravibhāga—A Commentary on the Tathāgatagarbha sūtras

The *Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyanottaratantra-śāstra* and its Commentary were written in India perhaps in about the 3rd or 4th century AD. Both comment on

the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of such *sūtras* as the *Śrīmāladevī-sūtra*, and the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*. According to Wayman in his introduction to the *Śrīmāladevī-sūtra* the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* were written for a largely lay Buddhist community with powerful women patrons. The queen expounds a doctrine on the nature of *tathāgatagarbha*, emptiness and *nirvāṇa* which sounds very like our other-emptiness model above and she is praised by the Buddha who announces that the *śrāvaka* and Solitary Buddha Arhats do not understand the Dharma as deeply as the queen does. Only the high level Bodhisattvas share her understanding. So we see here the associated social features of an other-emptiness doctrine—a queen given spiritual status above those following the strict renunciate discipline of the Arhat disciples. The psychological effect that this would have on lay men and women practitioners is obvious.

Ratnagotravibhāga on psychological effects of the tathāgatagarbha doctrine

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* (1.156–166) is quite explicit about the psychological effect *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is supposed to have. These verses explain why it is necessary to teach this doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* when, as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* Commentary points out, it is quite clear that not even Bodhisattvas at the highest level realize it fully let alone *śrāvakas* and Solitary Buddhas. One might wonder what hope there is for ordinary beings to understand it at all.

Śloka 1.156 raises the question by asking why, after having been taught in various places in the scriptures that all knowable things (*shes bya*) are empty like clouds, dreams and magical illusions, does the Buddha teach here that all beings have the *buddhagarbha*. *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.157 explains that it is taught because it serves to overcome five faults which develop if beings do not realize they have the Buddha-nature. The five faults are:

Faintheartedness: Some beings may feel so inadequate that they would not presume to aspire to supreme Buddhahood. Thus, they would not take the Bodhisattva vow to bring all beings to Enlightenment, which is essential for developing *bodhicitta*. Knowing that they and all beings have Buddha-nature gives them confidence and encourages them to try to attain Buddhahood.

Looking down on others: Some beings may suffer the opposite fault. They bravely and confidently take the Bodhisattva vow and then feel that since they now belong to the Buddha lineage, they are naturally superior to those who do not. Knowing that all beings naturally belong to the Buddha family undermines this kind of arrogance.

Attachment to what is not real: Those who do not know that the true nature of beings is *tathāgatagarbha* take their faults and imperfections to be their true nature. In this way they fall into the position of setting up something that is unreal as real.

Denial of what is real: By being attached to this unreality, they overlook completely the reality that beings have the Buddha Knowledge (*jñāna*). They deny

that beings have the perfect and unspoiled qualities of the Buddha and thus fall into the position of denying reality to what is real.

Not loving others as oneself: If one realized that the nature of all beings was *tathāgatagarbha*, one would love all beings including oneself equally. Equalness is an important feature of both the Buddha's wisdom and his compassion. If one does not know that all beings have *tathāgatagarbha*, one automatically sees self and others as unequal and separate. When one understands the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, one knows that self and others partake of the one undifferentiable reality, and automatically love and compassion for others arise.

Thus, by being taught about *tathāgatagarbha*, one will have five remedies, instead of the five faults. The five remedies are confidence, respect for others, *prajñā* (in the sense of not taking the unreal to be real) and *jñāna* (in the sense of knowing the real to be real), and Great Compassion. With these five virtues one is able quickly to attain Buddhahood. Clearly the *Ratnagotravibhāga* expects the effect of its doctrine to be a psychological boost for those of low spiritual status and a social levelling in terms of the hierarchy of religious practitioners. It would be too complicated to do justice to a self-emptiness type of explanation of the above verses. Suffice it to say, it is possible to explain them in a way which fits a self-emptiness model although to my mind such an explanation is clearly forced.

The situation in Tibetan Buddhism
We have seen how the features of an other-emptiness model are found in the Mahāsāṅghika lay communities of 140 BC and how the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the third and fourth centuries AD again had the features of the other-emptiness model and is associated with lay practitioners. Looking to the present day, the features associated with both a self-emptiness and an other-emptiness model are seen in Tibetan society.

There are the monasteries and retreat centres where strict discipline is observed often throughout a person's life. There are colleges with strict regimes of study and debate. There are examination systems, granting of 'degrees' and so on. It is all very ordered and fits very well with the self-emptiness model of the nature of the spiritual path.

Side by side with this one finds lay practitioners and even women taking thrones in the assembly above those of senior monks. Great *siddhas* with little learning live outside monastic institutions altogether. Furthermore, there are the enlightened 'mad' yogins who break all social conventions and yet still command respect. All this fits the other-emptiness model.

However, generally speaking, traditional Tibetan society gives higher status to the celibate monk than to the lay practitioner. It likes to see monastic discipline strictly adhered to and holds learning in high esteem. Furthermore, although it is

part of their tradition, most Tibetans seem quite suspicious of 'outrageous' behaviour on the part of even well-recognized *siddhas*.

One would expect, therefore the self-emptiness model to find more favour in traditional Tibetan society. The self-emptiness model conforms to a common sense view of the world and to the way ordinary people think. Anyone can see that we are not yet fully Buddha with all the Buddha qualities. If we were there would be no meaning to the spiritual path and goal—no need for religion and religious institutions. Traditional Tibetan society wants religion, religious institutions and a spiritual hierarchy of learned and older monks to act as the authority in religious matters. Religious institutions of this kind give the ordinary man a sense of confidence that his spiritual welfare is being safe-guarded as he pursues his lay concerns. It seems obvious that most Tibetans are very content with that structure and are quite happy to postpone their own Buddhahood to a future life. For most, it is sufficient for the present to make offerings and to store up spiritual merit. Whether one is at the top or the bottom of the hierarchy it is congenial and easy to manage such a system in social terms. The religious take care of religious concerns and do not compete in the worldly sphere. Being celibate they do not have children to compete for the family inheritance.

The other-emptiness model challenges common sense. Obviously there must be some sense in which we are not already Buddha since if we were there would, indeed, be no use for a spiritual path and goal. Taking it as given therefore that there is some obvious difference between ourselves and Buddha, the advocates of other-emptiness say that the difference is incidental and merely apparent. There is, in other words, no real or essential difference between beings and Buddhas (in terms of having the countless Buddha qualities).

In social terms this has the disconcerting effect of putting everyone on an equal footing with equal responsibility in terms of the religious life. The true practitioners are hard to recognize and may play any role in society. Such a view is a threat to the established hierarchy of religious institutions. It is a threat to the layman who wants an easy way of shifting the weight of spiritual responsibility on to someone else. It is a threat to the holders of wealth and power because they can no longer buy the goodwill of the spiritual community by supporting easily-controlled monasteries. The bizarre and unconventional behaviour of 'mad' yogis is a threat to the social order.

Not surprisingly, therefore, do we find the ruling powers of Tibet from the earliest times advocating the gradual, disciplined, monkish path associated with a self-emptiness model rather than the anarchical, sudden path associated with the other-emptiness view. Tibetan official history attacks the Chinese master Hwa-shang Mahāyana who seems to have advocated a sudden path to Enlightenment based on simply relaxing all conceptual thought. From the accounts in early

Nyingmapa texts it seems that this view was a version of the other-emptiness model based on the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* and akin to the Nyingmapa rDzogs-chen view.[7] The Nyingmapas themselves have never aspired to political prominence in Tibet and have always favoured communities of lay practitioners over large monastic institutions. The Sakyapas held political power for a long time and are famous for their constant attack on other-emptiness type doctrines. For the last few centuries the Gelugpa school has been the main wielder of political power and they too attack the other-emptiness doctrine—especially that of the Jonangpa school, which they claim to be a non-Buddhist view that will lead one to hell. The Kagyupa school has from time to time achieved political prominence—some of its main lineage holders have been great advocates of the other-emptiness view while others have attacked it. It would be interesting to see to what extent religious view and political aspiration coincided in the history of the Kagyupas.

Generally speaking therefore it seems that the social and political forces within Tibetan society work against an other-emptiness view. Tibetans love to read and hear about the outrageous and unconventional behaviour of the yogis of the past, but seldom appreciate them in the present. It was noticeable, for example, that although lip-service was paid to Trungpa Rimpoche's status and behaviour as a yogi by the Tibetan community in India, few actually approved of him or continued to follow him once he adopted the outrageous behaviour so admired in the great Tibetan folk heroes of the past such as Drugpa Kunleg,[8]

One could argue in its favour that such an attitude protects Tibetan society from charlatans posing as 'mad' yogis who might otherwise undermine social values, while the oral and literary tradition extolling the virtues of the outrageous yogi protects it from too deeply entrenched prudery.

I shall conclude on a personal note. Having spent ten years of my life conforming to traditional Tibetan values as a Kagyupa nun, I can vouch for the fact that it instils in one a sense of personal 'purity' and aloofness from the common herd. There is a strong sense of being on the lower rungs of a great spiritual ladder and a tendency to depreciate one's own experience in the wish to conform to the gradualist party line. Yet what I find most curious is that the underlying view on which my practice was based was other-emptiness. Nothing was stressed more than faith and the key role of the *guru*, his oral instruction and direct mind-to-mind transmission. There was a sense of irony and play going on between the two models of the spiritual path—outwardly one adhered to the self-emptiness model and all its associated features and yet all the time there was a

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[7] See G. Tucci *Minor Buddhist Texts*, Part II, 103. According to Chinese sources published by P. Demiéville the winner of the debate between the Indian Kamalaśīla and the Chinese Hwa-shang was Hwa shang.

[8] K. Dowman, tr., *The Divine Madman*, London, Rider, 1980.

sense that this was not actually the point. It was almost as if there were a smoke screen of respectability behind which the real work of the yogi continued more or less in secret.