

GORAMPA'S CONTROVERSY ON TSONGKHAPA'S TWO TRUTHS OF MADHYAMAKA

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Abstract: From the 14th century to the 15th century, important figures in various sects of Tibetan Buddhism had a profound understanding and subjective choice of the thoughts of various sects of Indian Buddhism. They came on stage, expressed their opinions and argued with each other, and formed an academic atmosphere of independent portal and contention among various schools. This is also a period of in-depth development of the localization and Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, among them, the discussion and evaluation of Tsongkhapa's Prajna Middle Way thought by the eminent monk Gorampa of Sakya sect is a typical example of this series of events. This paper attempts to take the relevant famous works of Gorampa and Tsongkhapa as the text basis, take historical materialism as the guidance, and use the theoretical perspective of philosophical hermeneutics to deeply explore Gorampa's comment and debate on the meaning of "two truths" in Tsongkhapa Prajna Middle Way thought. This paper gives readers a glimpse of the historical process and main characteristics of the localization and Sinicization of the concept of Prajna Middle Way thought in Tibetan Buddhism.

Keywords: Gorampa, Tsongkhapa, Madhyamaka, Tsongkhapa's two truths, Hermeneutics

From the 14th century to the 15th century, various sects of Tibetan Buddhism have formed. The eminent monks and virtues of these sects have their own unique understanding and interpretation of various ideas, cultivation methods and commandments of Indian Buddhism, and formed their own opinions, which reflects the localization and Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism from the perspective of Buddhist thought. Among them, the discussion and judgment of the eminent monk of Sakya sect Gorampa, on the Prajna Middle Way thought of the eminent monk of Gelug Sect Tsongkhapa, is a typical representative. Gorampa is a scientific and rational figure of Sakya school in the 15th century. He is famous for his unique Buddhist thought and sharp critical spirit. At present, there is little research on this figure and his thought in domestic academic circles.

In his book "Distinguishing the Right Views", Gorampa discusses Tsongkhapa's Middle Way thought from two angles: first, he summarizes Tsongkhapa's theory; and second, he criticizes Tsongkhapa's theory. This paper focuses on Gorampa's discussion and criticism of Tsongkhapa's two truths theory. On this basis, it further excavates, combs and summarizes their interpretation path and theoretical context of Prajna Middle Way's two truths, makes a comparative study, and explains Gorampa's critical cognition of Tsongkhapa's two truths.

1. Gorampa's understanding and interpretation of the two truths in Tsongkhapa

Tsongkhapa and Gorampa are two figures with milestone significance in the ideological history of Tibetan Buddhism. Based on their understanding and interpretation of Prajna Middle Way thought derived from Indian Buddhism, they creatively gave full play to the Prajna Middle Way of Indian Buddhism. Both of them listed Prajna Middle Way thought as the most abstruse and core content of all Buddhist thoughts. What is more interesting is that although both of them claimed that their Prajna theory is the truest one, their interpretations of the Middle Way are quite different. In the words of Gadamer, a philosophical hermeneutist, "when we understand something, we always understand it in different ways."¹ This shows that the original meaning of the same text and the original intention of the author are different for each reader in different time and space situations, which demonstrates that the characteristics of the times and localization of the original meaning of the foreign text and the original intention of the author are inevitable

¹ Gadamer, translated by Hong handing: truth and method, Volume II, Beijing, commercial press, 2013 edition, page 20.

and reasonable in different nationalities and regions. In the history of Tibetan Buddhism, there are different understandings and interpretations of Prajna Middle Way in Indian Buddhism between Gorampa and Tsongkhapa, which just explains this principle of philosophical hermeneutics.

(1) Discussion of the ultimate truth

In “Distinguishing the Right Views”, Gorampa outlines and concisely summarizes his interpretation of Prajna Middle Way thought, selects the main meaning of Tsongkhapa's creative interpretation of Prajna Middle Way theory, lists and discusses it in detail. These listed topics are also the crux of Gorampa 's criticism of Tsongkhapa's Prajna theory, so as to criticize one by one.² As we know, one of the contents of the Nagajuna Prajna Middle Way system is the distinction between “conventional truth (kun rdzob bden pa)” and “ultimate truth (don dam bden pa)”, as well as the understanding and definition of their relationship. Gorampa and Tsongkhapa had different understanding of the two truths, which prompted them to have their own characteristics and colorful interpretation paths and publicity ways for the overall Buddhist thought, which laid an ideological foundation for later scholars to constantly think, discuss and debate this important topic.

In Distinguishing the Right Views, the creative elucidation of Tsongkhapa's ultimate truth can be summarized into two aspects: one is the view that “negating the emptiness of reality” is the ultimate truth; The second is the view of “there exist on the conventional level and there no exist on the ultimate level”. On the first aspect, Gorampa pointed out that when Tsongkhapa discussed the ultimate truth of Prajna, its classical basis was traced back to the works of Nagajuna and Deva, the originator of Prajna Middle Way thought, and clarified that “persistent real ignorance” of all things is the root of all sentient beings' suffering, because “persistent real ignorance”, that interior and exterior things have inherent existence, regulation and substantiality.

Tsongkhapa defines this as an incorrect understanding of things and the object of negation of Prajna theory. Therefore, Tsongkhapa believes that the “ultimate emptiness”, is the understanding and grasp of the essence of things, that is, the so-called understanding of the “emptiness” of true reason, which is the

² Tashi Namgyal: gorampa's comment on Tsongkhapa's Prajna Middle Way theory - Interpretation from the perspective of hermeneutics, journal of southwest university for nationalities (humanities and social sciences edition), No. 3, 2020, P. 59.

truth that the Madhyamika-Prasangika school wants to achieve. In this regard, the so-called truth should not be abandoned even if you have a persistent heart for it.

In terms of the viewpoint of "there exist at the level of convention and no exist at the ultimate level", Gorampa puts forward Tsongkhapa's view of "abandoning four sides" advocated by Nagajuna, which does not take this classical discourse as the teaching of the ultimate truth, to understand according to the literal expression of the text as the true meaning. However, with "ultimately no existent, conventionally existent", it holds that in terms of the understanding of conventional level, all things have internal and external causes, so ordinary beings have established conventional truth.

From the perspective of essence, all things have no qualitative stipulation, entity and inherent nature, so it is called "non-self-nature" emptiness. From this perspective, the emptiness is "no exist at the ultimate level". Therefore, Tsongkhapa emphasizes understanding and explains "abandoning from the four sides" from the perspective of "abandoning from the two sides", to achieve the true meaning of the real emptiness, the meaning of "Dependent Origination and the Emptiness of Nature" advocated by Tsongkhapa.

From the perspective of dialectical materialism, "ultimate emptiness" and "no exist at the ultimate level" belong to the category of essence, and "dependent existence" and "wonderful existence" belong to the scope of phenomena. Whether it is Gorampa or Tsongkhapa, they have deeply realized the pair of categories that reflect the inner essence and outer phenomenon of things, but the lack of it is that they regard the inner essence of things as insubstantial "emptiness". This point should arouse our attention. According to the perspective of dialectical materialism, the essence of everything has its qualitative stipulations, otherwise, everything will fall into nothingness. This is a theoretical problem that our academic circles need to rationally treat Buddhism.

(2) Discussion on conventional truth

In Gorampa's discussion of Tsongkhapa's facilities and establishment of "conventional nominal", Tsongkhapa believes that all object worlds are constructed and established by "nominals", which is the so-called "conventional truth". This is Tsongkhapa's emphasizing that at the level of convention have quantitative standards. The famous view of "achieved by nominals (tha sngad tshad grub)". Based on this recognition, Tsongkhapa explored how to establish a causal

connection at the level of conventional truth.

He said: *The method of establishing "karma" is to create karma in an instant and then disappear instantly. When the "karma" cannot last until the "result", then the karma has disappeared for a long time. How can it produce results? Here, "the thing of destruction" arising from karma. From this the arising of karma is the secret key to the Madhyamaka School.*³

Here Tsongkhapa proposes that in the level of conventional truth, things themselves or between things grow back and forth, and the laws of causality and karma-effect relationships that are related to each other are the so-called "the thing of destruction" (zhig pa dngos po) is realized as an intermediate link linking "karma". This is Tsongkhapa's novel and unique interpretation of Prajna Madhyamaka thought.

It can be seen from this that Tsongkhapa's unique interpretation of Prajna Madhyamaka is mainly manifested in his knowledge and understanding of the "two truths". After Tsongkhapa made a unique interpretation of the "Two Truths", many Buddhist theories based on the Two Truths have naturally obtained creative expression and interpretation, making the internal principles of Buddhist thoughts integrated and self-contained. Tsongkhapa's unique understanding and interpretation of Prajna Madhyamaka's "Two Truths" did not happen overnight or one step in place, but went through a very tortuous process of hearing, thinking, and practicing. It is recorded in "The Origin of Tub ksan Sect" that when Tsongkhapa asked Manjushri what is the real Madrasah, Manjushri specifically instructed him: *"There are two things in emptiness and no one should be given priority, especially if there is one, we should pay attention to it!"*⁴ We can discover through this theory of religious mystery that Tsongkhapa has undergone the teachings of the so-called Manjusri Bodhisattva before he has a fundamental turn in the interpretation of the relationship between the "conventional truth". As mentioned above, Tsongkhapa's later thoughts particularly emphasized the importance of "conventional truth", and advocated that there is also the standard and truthfulness of "quantity" at the level of conventional level, and it has the same important role and position as "truth". Tsongkhapa gave the famous quote a very high status, claiming that it has truthfulness and ontological significance, which is quite referential and enlightening in comparison with Gadamer's understanding and definition of language by the Western philosophical hermeneutics, he said: *"The*

³ Distinguish the right views (lta b'i shan 'byed), Guorampa Collection, China Tibetology Publishing House, p.461.

⁴ Tu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, translated by Liu Liqian, notes: origin of tuguan sect, Tibet people's publishing house, 1999 edition, page 13.