

THE GREAT PERFECTION AND THE CHINESE MONK: RNYING-MA-PA DEFENCES OF HWA-SHANG MAHĀYĀNA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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1. *Simultaneism, gradualism and polemics*

A controversy over two apparently opposed approaches to enlightenment runs throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhist thought. Broadly stated, the first position, “the simultaneous approach” (*cig car gyi 'jug pa*) was that the cessation of dualistic conceptualisation in meditation was sufficient cause for enlightenment, without any need for the graduated, and much more lengthy, practices of the six *paramitā*. On the other hand, the second position, “the gradual approach” (*rim gyis 'jug pa*) was that those practices were indispensable.¹

The conflict between these two approaches was, according to Tibetan tradition, settled in the eighth century in a formal debate. Whether the debate actually occurred as such has been called into doubt, but there is no question of the importance of the legend of the debate to the Tibetan tradition. According to the Tibetan histories, the debate was arranged in bSam-yas temple in the late eighth century CE to determine whether Tibet would accept Indian or Chinese Buddhism as normative.² In the stories of the debate, the Indian side was identified with gradualism and the Chinese side with simultaneism, a greatly simplified version of the complexities of early Buddhist influences on Tibet which nonetheless became widely accepted in Tibet. According to tradition, the Indian Buddhist scholar Kamalaśīla, arguing for the gradualist position, opposed an Chinese monk called Hwa-shang Mahāyāna, who was arguing for the simultaneist position. In the Tibetan versions of the story, Hwa-shang was defeated, and his method rejected.

For Tibetan scholars of later generations, Hwa-shang Mahāyāna came to be an emblem for a particular kind of erroneous doctrine, the belief in an simultaneous realisation caused by the mere cessation of concepts (*mi rtog pa* or *mi bsam pa*), which became a standard object

¹ In this context, “simultaneous” indicates that all methods are encompassed by a single method, and all stages of realisation are traversed at once. The secondary signification is a time-based distinction: immediate, sudden accomplishment versus gradual, slow accomplishment. The Chinese words are *tun-wu* (gradual enlightenment) and *chien-wu* (simultaneous enlightenment), the respective schools of thought being *tun-men* and *chien-men*. These terms and their translation has been discussed in Stein 1987, pp46-51.

² On the questions regarding the historical occurrence of the debate, see Gomez 1983 and Ruegg 1992, which also summarize previous discussions of this topic. Whatever the debate occurred as a historical event or not, the stories of the debate had particular symbolic significance for later generations of Tibetans.

of rebuttal. Later, Hwa-shang's defeat was put to polemical use against certain Tibetan practice traditions, in particular the Mahāmudrā (*phyag chen*) of the bKa'-brgyud school and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) of the rNying-ma school.³ The Great Perfection's teachings on technique-free meditation were subject to accusations of being no more than the simultaneous method of Hwa-shang. rNying-ma scholars were often forced to defend the validity of the Great Perfection against this accusation in polemical texts. The following passage by mKhas-grub-rje (1385-1438) is a good example of the kind of criticisms levelled against rNying-ma practitioners:

[Moreover,] many who hold themselves to be meditators of the Snow-mountains [of Tibet] talk, in exalted cryptic terms, of theory free from all affirmation, of meditative realisation free from all mentation, of [philosophical] practice free from all denial and assertion and of a fruit free from all wishes and qualms. And they imagine that understanding is born in the conscious stream when – because in a state where there is no mentation about anything at all there arises something like non-identification of anything at all – one thinks that there exists nothing that is either identical or different. By so doing one has proclaimed great nihilism where there is nothing to be affirmed according to a doctrinal system of one's own, as well as the thesis of the Hwa shang in which nothing can be the object of mentation.⁴

In view of this kind of criticism it is perhaps surprising to that some rNying-ma writers, rather than simply defending themselves against such accusations by distancing their own teachings from those of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna, attempt a balanced judgement of the simultaneist doctrine and sometimes go so far as to express approval. Rather than repeating the standard presentations of Hwa-shang's beliefs as a misguided straying from the true path, as most were content to do, certain rNying-ma scholars continued to engage with the problem of simultaneous versus gradual approaches, and its relationship to their own Great Perfection practices.

This article is an examination of the treatment of Hwa-shang by two eighteenth-century writers. The first is Ka'-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu (1698-1755), who deals with the teachings of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna in his history of the Chinese simultaneist school. The second is

³ One early and influential polemical statement is found in the Sa-skya Paṇḍita's (1182-1251) treatise *sDom gsum rab byed*, which criticised the teaching of a doctrine of simultaneous realisation called “the white panacea” (*dkar po cig thub*) in Mahāmudrā, and, in passing, directed a similar criticism towards rDzogs-chen as a “Chinese tradition” (*rgya nag lugs*). There have been several discussion of this subject, of which perhaps the best are Seyfort Ruegg 1989 and Jackson 1994.

⁴ Translation in Ruegg 1981, p223. The text is the *sTong thun skal bzang mig byed*, f.152, in volume *ka* of the *gSung 'bum* (Zhol edition). mKhas-grub-rje's presentation of the faulty doctrine in terms of view, meditation, activity and fruit identifies it as the Great Perfection, as these are standard definitions of the Great Perfection found in many of the texts of that system. The polemics directed against the Great Perfection are also discussed in Karmay 1988, pp121-133, 178-184, 186-189, 195-197. See also Jackson 1994, p53 n.118, on Rong-zom Chos-kyi bZang-po's defence of the Great Perfection.

'Jigs-med Gling-pa (1730-1798), in whose *Kun mkhyen zhal lung*, a discourse on the “three liberations” of the Great Perfection, there is an annotation defending Hwa-shang. This annotation, along with an even more brief comment by Klong-chen-pa (1308-1363), has been taken by some as evidence of the rNying-ma school's longstanding connection with Chan Buddhism.⁵ In fact, these eighteenth-century texts tell us little or nothing about the original connections between the Great Perfection and Chan, but a great deal about rNying-ma scholars' attempts to deal with the perceived connection. As will be seen, these two scholars deal with it in quite different ways, but I will suggest that they share a similar motivation, connected to the political events in central Tibet in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

2. *Ka'-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu*

Ka'-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu (1698-1755) was the head of Ka'-thog monastery, and ranks as one of the most impressive scholars of eighteenth-century Tibet. His studies took in both the texts of the rNying-ma and those of the new schools; he exchanged rNying-ma for bKa'-brgyud teachings with the Twelfth Karmapa, Byang-chub rDo-rje (1703-1732),⁶ and wrote a history of the transmission of Mahāmudrā. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu studied and championed the forbidden Jo-nang doctrines, writing several works on the “empty of other” (*gzhan stong*) theory and on the Kalacakra tantra, the source of “empty of other” in the tantric corpus. He also wrote some non-religious works on history and geography and travelled widely, making several journeys to Nepal.⁷

In his *Sa bon tsam smos pa*,⁸ a study of the Chinese lineage which begins with Bodhidharma and includes Hwa-shang Mahāyāna, Tshe-dbang Nor-bu makes use of a number of old sources including the then rare ninth-century treatise *bSam gtan mig sgron* by gNubs Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu cites two statements from the *bSam gtan mig sgron*. The first is that it is important to write about the simultaneous path because of its similarities with the Great Perfection, which could cause a mistaken identification of the two. The second and more controversial statement is that the path of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna is a pure path.⁹ In the *bSam gtan mig sgron* itself, the simultaneous path is ranked above the gradualist path, but below the Vajrayāna and the Great Perfection. This is the

⁵ The passage by Klong-chen-pa is in his *sDe gsum snying po*, a commentary to the *gNas lugs rin po che'i mdzod*, from the *mDzod bdun* collection. This passage is used to show rNying-ma and Chan affinities in Guenther 1989, pp140-141, n.2 and Karmay 1988, p96.

⁶ Thinley 1980, p114.

⁷ Smith 1969, pp8-9.

⁸ *rGya nag hwa shang gi byung tshul grub mtha'i phyogs snga bcas sa bon tsam smos pa: Collected Works*, vol.V pp419-450.

⁹ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p434: dgos pa ni rdzogs chen dang cha 'dra bas mi nor ba'i tshad du yin par gsung ba dang| hwa shang gi chos de yang yang dag pa'i lam du bzhed pa'o||

model followed by Tshe-dbang Nor-bu, who stresses that the simultaneous path is based on the sutras, specifically, on the sutras of the third turning of the wheel. He defends this statement against the objection that, according to all of the sutras, enlightenment is achieved only after a number of incalculable aeons, with a quotation from the Chinese translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* sutra:

If one who is skilled in means applies himself diligently to this sutra, that sage will reach perfect enlightenment, unsurpassable and totally pure, before very long.¹⁰

Having established the legitimacy of the simultaneous path, Tshe-dbang Nor-bu is keen to show that it is inferior to the Vajrayāna. He states that when the sutras speak of buddhahood, it is intentional, and goes on to discuss the progress towards the goal according to the Pāramitāyāna (or sutra path) and Vajrayāna (or mantra path).

Having initially travelled the paths of accumulation and application by the sutra path alone, at the stage of attaining the first *bhūmi* most enter the mantra path. Those who do not enter do exist, but after the eighth *bhūmi*, where one is initiated by the Teachers, they will have entered into mindfulness under their own power without relying on external conditions in the manner of the mantra path. Thus although we teach the importance of entering the mantra path rather than the sutra path, from the level of the eighth *bhūmi* onwards one is on the path of the initiation into the state of awareness where there is no opportunity to negate or purify. This is the case whichever the original entrance gate, sutra or mantra, but because one need practise for a shorter time with mantra, the time when one attains the fruit of perfect and totally pure buddhahood is the distinction between sutra and mantra. There is no difference in the buddhahood itself, so there is no harm in the indirect teachings.¹¹

Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's position is that whether one starts on the sutra or mantra path is irrelevant from the point of view of the goal. It is possible to progress through all ten *bhūmis* on the sutra path, but from the eighth *bhūmi* onwards the practitioner is in effect on

¹⁰ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* pp435-436: de bas na shin tu thabs mkhas pas mdo sde 'di la brtson 'grus su nan tan byas na skyes bu de ni ring por mi thogs par bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub par 'gyur rol||

¹¹ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p.437: thog mar tshogs sbyor gyi lam mdo lam 'ba' zhis pas bsgrod nas sa dang po thob pa'i skabs su sngags lam la 'jug par shas che zhing gal te tshul ston gyi dbang gi sa brgyad pa'i bar du mi 'jug pa dag yod srid kyang sa brgyad pa nas gzhan rkyen la ltos pa ma yin par sngags kyi ngang tshul rang stobs kyi shes bzhin du 'jug tu yod pa yin pas des na mdo lam du sngags la 'jug dgos so zhes la bstan kyang sa bgyad pa yan chad nas ngang gi shes pa'i dbang gi lam la 'tshang pa dang chad pa'i go skabs med la| gzhan yang thog ma'i 'jug sgo mdo sngags gang yin kyang rtung mthar sngags la gzhol dgos pas yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi 'bras bu thob tshe mdo sngags tha dad kyi sangs rgyas bye du med pa'i phyir de ltar dgongs te gsungs pas skyon med pa'o||

the mantra path. The benefit of entering the mantra path at the first *bhūmi* is that one will attain the goal more swiftly. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu apparently ignores certain characteristics of the simultaneist doctrine of Hwa-shang in order to fit it to the model of the standard Pāramitāyāna. In contrast to an orderly progression through the ten *bhūmis*, Hwa-shang is said to have spoken of direct access to the tenth *bhūmi*.¹² Tshe-dbang Nor-bu seems to be aware that this treatment is not altogether adequate: remarking on its brevity, he writes that there is no need to elaborate further merely for the sake of a few doubts.¹³

Tshe-dbang Nor-bu also touches on the contemporary situation in the following passage:

Even today in China there are Hwa-shangs of the Chan school who teach only in the *tsung men* style.¹⁴ Here in Tibet too, there are a declining few who assert that one should from the beginning aim for the deep inner meaning, saying: “Listen to the instructions on the mind without distinguishing discipline and wildness.” However they have no more than a partial similarity to each other.¹⁵

Tshe-dbang Nor-bu appears to be pointing to certain contemporary Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā teachers who spurn the gradual path – with the interesting aside that these types are in decline. His main point is that there is no more than a partial similarity between the Chinese and the Tibetan teachers. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's opinion is that the Chinese teachers abandon the stages of hearing and contemplating (*thos bsam*) and make meditation (*bsam gtan*) the entire path, while the Great Perfection contains all three stages. As evidence for the presence of gradual stages in the Great Perfection he invokes the scriptural authority of the *Nyi zla kha spyor*, one of the *Seventeen Tantras*, in which, he says, seven stages of activity are taught as well as the one essential point which encompasses them.¹⁶

Finally, Tshe-dbang Nor-bu also sets down what he sees as the correct use of the terms “simultaneist” and “gradualist”. He argues that, while the Chinese Hwa-shangs distinguish between two types of practitioner, the simultaneist and the gradualist, there is no such distinction found in the Indian teachings which came to Tibet. In the non-Chinese context, the only correct use of the terms is to say that (in Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's words):

Indian teachers of the past such as the great monk Jñānendra who relied on the teaching of the threefold *prajñā* are the gradualists, and the followers of the Chinese

¹² *sBa bzhed*, p68 and other sources. See Faber 1986 pp47-48.

¹³ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p437.

¹⁴ *tsung men* is one of the Tibetan transliterations of Chinese *chien min*.

¹⁵ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p438: da lta yang rgya nag tu bsam gtan mkhan hwa shang tshung men rnam tshul kho na yin 'dug la| bod 'dir yang btsun pa dang khyim pa ris su med par sems khrid nod do zhes thog ma nas zab mo nang don la gzhol bar 'dod pa phal cher 'di nyams kyang de dang cha mthun pa las gzhan du ma dmigs so||

¹⁶ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p438.

sage Mahāyāna, because they apply themselves to contemplation alone, are known as simultaneists.¹⁷

Tshe-dbang Nor-bu believes that to use the terms simultaneist and gradualist within the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism is an error. Simultaneism is a Chinese phenomenon, unknown to the mainstream Indo-Tibetan tradition. Thus his position is ultimately an orthodox one, although, like gNubs Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, he does not reject the simultaneous path of Chan, rather he merely attempts to put it in its proper place.

3. 'Jigs-med Gling-pa

'Jigs-med Gling-pa (1730-1729) has an important place in the rNying-ma tradition as the redactor of a very popular treasure cycle, the *Klong chen snying thig*, as the author of a comprehensive exposition of the Buddhist path as it is known to the rNying-ma school, the *Yon tan mdzod*, and as the editor of one of the best editions of the collected tantras of the rNying-ma school. In most of his endeavours he saw himself as reviving the activities of the great fourteenth-century scholar Klong-chen-pa (1308-1353). The *Klong chen snying thig* cycle contains several tantras and *sādhana*s, which said to derive from the eighth century, as well as numerous commentaries upon these texts, the authorship of which is claimed by 'Jigs-med Gling-pa himself. In one of these commentaries, called *Kun mkhyen zhal lung*, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa attempts a response to the criticism that the Great Perfection is equivalent to the non-conceptualisation taught by Hwa-shang Mahayana.

'Jigs-med Gling-pa's differentiation of the two approaches is based on the distinction, particular to the Instruction Series (*man ngag sde*) of the Great Perfection, between *sems*, the samsaric, conceptual mind, and *rig pa*, the nirvanic, non-conceptual mind. The meditation practices of the Instruction Series found in the *Klong chen snying thig* proceed on the basis of this distinction, which comes from the earliest Instruction Series scriptures, the *Seventeen Tantras*.¹⁸ Therefore it is not surprising that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa insists upon the importance of the distinction. He argues that, if the meditator attempts to stop conceptual activity without distinguishing between *sems* and *rig pa*, the result is a blank indeterminacy (*lung ma bstan*). In *rig pa*, he argues, conceptualisation is neutralised in a state that is “like a crystal ball”, a simile which points to clarity and vividness, rather than indeterminacy and blankness.¹⁹

'Jigs-med Gling-pa's insistence on this distinction between the the simultaneist doctrine and the Great Perfection makes the note he attaches to this passage quite surprising.

¹⁷ *Sa bon tsam smos pa* p439: des na sngon gya gar mkhan po zhi ba 'cho yi rjes su brangs ba bandhe chen po ye shes dbang po la sogs pas shes rab gsum bsgrags mar mdzad pa la brten rim gyis pa dang rgya nag mkhan po ma ha yā na'i rjes brang rnam kyī bsam gtan kho na la gzhol bas cig char bar grags pa shes par bya'o|

¹⁸ *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*.

¹⁹ *Kun mkhyen zhal lung* pp527-528

Stepping outside of the standard model of accusation and rebuttal, he goes on to defend Hwa-shang:

You have made the assertion that the view of Ha-shang²⁰ was like this, based on refutations such as the similarity of non-mentation to an egg.²¹ Yet scriptures such as the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* were known to Ha-shang. During the debate, Kamalaśīla asked what was the cause of *samsāra* by the symbolic action of whirling his staff around his head. [Ha-shang] answered that it was the apprehender and apprehended by the symbolic action of shaking his robe out twice.²² It is undeniable that such a teacher was of the sharpest faculties. If the non-recollection and non-mentation entail the offense of rejecting the wisdom of differentiating analysis, then the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* of the Conqueror also entail this fault. Therefore, what the view of Ha-shang actually was can be known by a perfect buddha, and no one else.²³

In his defence of Hwa-shang, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa had a precedent in the works of Klong-chen-pa. In one section of his *sDe gsum snying po*, Klong-chen-pa writes on the subject of the transcendence of the consequences of positive and negative actions in the context of Great Perfection practice. There is a famous statement attributed to Hwa-shang Mahāyāna on this same subject, that virtue and sin are like black and white clouds, in that both cover up the sun. Rather than distancing himself from this, Klong-chen-pa uses the same metaphor, and then goes on to say:

When the great master Ha-shang said this, those of lesser intellects could not comprehend it, but he was in accordance with the [ultimate] truth.²⁴

²⁰ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa and Klong-chen-pa prefer the spelling Ha-shang, at least in the editions available to me.

²¹ This appears to be a reference to the summary of the refutations of Hwa-shang's position in the *sBa bzhed* (pp71-72) where it is spoken by Ye-shes dBang-po.

²² This is a reference to the account of the first meeting of the two opponents before the debate had taken place. It is found in the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (see Sørensen 1994, p401 and Tucci 1978, p365), where the text has Hwa-shang casting his robe to the ground (*sa la brdabs*) rather than shaking it (*sprugs*). The story is also found in the *sBa bzhed* (pp66-67), to which 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's account has a greater similarity.

Note however that while this version has Hashang throwing his robe to the ground (*sa la brdabs*), 'Jigs-gling's has him shaking the folds out of it (*sprugs*).

²³ *Kun mkhyen zhal lung* pp527-528: khyed cag gi 'dod pa ha shang la lta ba nor 'di lta bu zhig yod de snyam pa ci yang mi sems pa sgo nga lta bu'i phyogs snga ji bzhin 'dir bkod nas brjod kyi gzhan du na sangs rgyas phal po che la sogs pa'i gsung rab mang po ha shang gi blo la bzhugs shing| kā ma la shi las sgra rtsod dris pa'i tshe phyags shing klad la bskor ba'i brdas 'khor ba'i rgyu dris pa na| ber gyi thu ba gnyis sprugs nas gzung 'dzin gyis lan bya ba'i brda lan ston nus pa sogs dbang po shin tu rnon po'i gang zag yin par bsnyon du med la| gang dran pa med cing yid la byar med pa la so sor rtog pa'i shes rab spangs pa'i nyes pa 'jug na skyon 'di rgyal ba'i yum la'ang 'jug pas don dam par ha shang gi lta ba yin min rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kho nas mkhyen gyis gzhan gyis ma yin no|

²⁴ *sDe gsum snying po* p97: |slob dpon chen po ha shang gis gsungs pas de dus blo dman pa'i blur ma shong yang don la de bzhin du gnas so|

'Jigs-med Gling-pa held Klong-chen-pa in great reverence and was certainly familiar with the *sDe gsum snying po*. Klong-chen-pa himself was also following a precedent, set by the twelfth-century rNying-ma-pa Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer (1124-1192), in his *Chos 'byung me tog snying po*. Nyi-ma 'Od-zer states that there is no difference in [ultimate] truth (*don*) between the two paths, but that for those of the best faculties (*dbang po*, skt. *indriya*), there is the simultaneous method of Hwa-shang, and for those of medium and below there is the graduated path.²⁵

It is interesting to note that, in categorizing Hwa-shang as a particularly astute practitioner of a bygone era, Klong-chen-pa and 'Jigs-med Gling-pa are treating him in the same way as they treat the early Indian masters of the Vajrayāna lineages of the rNying-ma school. An example of the way these early Indian masters are categorized is found in another of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's explanatory texts from the *Klong chen snying thig*:

Those trainees of the very sharpest faculties like dGa'-rab rDo-rje, Self-arisen Padmasambhava and Indrabhūti, who were lords of the *maṇḍala* while seeming to be ordinary students, were spontaneously liberated upon hearing, but gradualist people will not reach the goal in that way. So in this situation there is some further striving for complete liberation.²⁶

In this, once again, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa is following Klong-chen-pa's lead, as the following passage by Klong-chen-pa shows:

The great yogis who arrived at that state [of enlightenment], like Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Telopa, taught directly, without cause and effect, virtue or sin. Even if we understand this intellectually we have not reached it through becoming truly accustomed to it, so we are taught it after we have distinguished the subtle

²⁵ Meisezahl 1985, p.294, f.435b: de nas btsan po'i zhal nas don la mi thun pa tsam mi 'dug ste lam spyong lugs la ha shang gi chos cig char du 'jug mchis pa'o| dbang po yang rab sbyangs pa can gyis chos yin la| dbang po 'bring yan chad chos spyod bcu la skyon bskal|

²⁶ *Padma dkar po* p478: de yang dbang po rnon mchog gi gdul bya dga' rab rdo rje dang| rang byung padma indra bhū ti sogs pa ni dkyil 'khor gyi bdag po nyid thun mong gdul bya'i snang ngor lam la 'jug pa'i tshul bstan pa tsam yin phyir rang byung thos grol du gyur kyang| gang zag rim gyis pa la ni| de lta'i reg pa mi 'gro ste| de'i phyir skabs 'dir yang grol ba don du gnyer ba zhig yin phyin chad|

²⁷ This passage is cited in 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's *Ye shes bla ma* p332: gshis der phebs pa'i rnal 'byor pa chen po rnams la rgyu 'bras dge sdig med pa thod drang du bshad de padma dang| bi ma la dang| te lo pa la sogs pa bzhin no| rang cag rnams la blos de ltar rtogs kyang goms pas thog du ma 'phebs pas| gshis la mi skrag cing I have not been able to locate the passage in Klong-chen-pa's works.

²⁸ The equivalence between the realisation of Chinese simultaneists and Great Perfection meditators is also asserted in the *Blon po bka' thang*, the *gter ma* of O-rgyan Gling-pa (1329-1367), which has been translated in Tucci 1978

aspects of cause and effect and are no longer afraid of that state.²⁷

'Jigs-med Gling-pa uses the distinctions between the faculties of trainees in his *Klong chen snying thig* texts as a way of placing the simultaneous aspects of the Great Perfection beyond the reach of contemporary practitioners. The simultaneous actualisation of the Great Perfection is stated to be possible only for those of the sharpest faculties, and 'Jigs-med Gling-pa makes it clear that in his view such types are very rare nowadays, if any exist at all. This qualification would also put the simultaneist path of Hwa-shang, described by 'Jigs-med Gling-pa as being for those of the sharpest faculties only, in a purely theoretical role.

Thus Klong-chen-pa and 'Jigs-med Gling-pa seem to have been tempted to place Hwa-shang, as an individual, in the same category as the great masters of the Indian lineage who are said to have achieved enlightenment in an immediate fashion. However, the simultaneist approach of Hwa-shang is, by this same move, placed outside the realm of possibility for ordinary practitioners. In this, as we have seen, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa is restating themes from Klong-chen-pa's works. Perhaps 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's really original contribution in the *Kun mkhyen zhal lung* is his contention that there is a scriptural basis for the simultaneous path as much as for the gradual path in the *Prajñāparamitā* sutras, an insight which appears to be based on comparative readings of texts, rather than the standardised rubrics of Tibetan scholarship.

4. Comparisons

'Jigs-med Gling-pa and Tshe-dbang Nor-bu represent two different approaches to the simultaneist teachings of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna. The first approach, represented by Klong-chen-pa and 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, treats Hwa-shang Mahāyāna more as an individual than as the representative of a school, and suggests that his realisation might be equal to the realisation of a Great Perfection practitioner.²⁸ They imply that the simultaneous method followed by Hwa-shang is similar to the approach of the early Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā masters such as Vimalamitra and Telopa. However, this method is said to be beyond the reach of most, if not all, contemporary practitioners.

The second approach, that of gNubs Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes and Tshe-dbang Nor-bu, is to deal with Hwa-shang Mahāyāna as the representative of a Chinese school of Buddhism which he calls simultaneism (*cig char 'jug pa*), *tseñ min*, or the teaching of the Chan masters (*bsam gtan gyi mkhan po*). This school is accepted to represent a valid method, which is placed in a hierarchy where it has a status higher than the gradual path but lower than the higher tantras of the Vajrayāna and the Great Perfection.

'Jigs-med Gling-pa's approach is based on what might be called a yogic point of view, wherein the individual paths are seen from the perspective of the goal, ultimate truth, and there is an emphasis on the individual realisation of the exponents of these paths rather

than the categorisation of their doctrines. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's approach is primarily doxographic, and the aim is the classic scholarly Tibetan one of ranking different paths into an inclusive hierarchy. The Great Perfection, and other Tibetan teachings, are protected from contamination by more questionable doctrines.

Neither 'Jigs-med Gling-pa nor Tshe-dbang Nor-bu make any attempt to identify Great Perfection with the simultaneous path. In fact both writers are careful to distance the approach of the Great Perfection of their time from the eighth-century simultaneism of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna, and Tshe-dbang Nor-bu also takes care to make the distinction between the Great Perfection and the Chinese Chan teachings of his own time. For Tshe-dbang Nor-bu, the Great Perfection is inherently a gradual path, and simultaneism is restricted to the Chinese Chan schools. For 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, the Great Perfection can be a simultaneous path, but only for the those of the very sharpest faculties, and he makes it clear that few if any contemporary practitioners fall into this category; thus his position is actually very close to that of Tshe-dbang Nor-bu.

There remains the question of why these two eighteenth-century rNying-ma writers, both aware of the criticisms of the Great Perfection from other schools which had occurred through the preceding centuries should open themselves to further criticism by discussing the doctrines of Hwa-shang in any sort of positive light at all. Both 'Jigs-med Gling-pa and Tshe-dbang Nor-bu were writing within a tradition of openness towards these doctrines, supported by the writings of past scholars from their school. While Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's interest in early sources brought him to the *bsam gtan mig sgron*, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's general enthusiasm for what was unique in the doctrines of the rNying-ma brought him to the comments on Hwa-shang Mahāyāna by Klong-chen-pa. Thus both were maintaining what they saw as the particular approach of the rNying-ma tradition to this matter.

Such a motivation may be seen as arising from the developments in the seventeenth century, when the monastic presence of the Nyingma school dramatically increased in Tibet, and certain influential figures such as gTer-bdag gLing-pa (1646-1714) and Lo-chen Dharmaśrī (1654-1717) gathered together and standardized a corpus of rNying-ma texts. On the other hand, the rNying-ma was also subject to considerable persecution at the hands of the Dzungar invaders, who sacked several of the monasteries in Tibet and killed many of the lamas, including Lo-chen Dharmaśrī (1654-1717).²⁹ Some kind of persecution continued through to the lifetimes of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa and Kah-thog Tshe-dang Nor-bu; the latter composed a letter written to the Seventh Dalai Lama, dated at around 1750, which makes a plea for an end to the persecution of the rNying-ma.³⁰ The combination of an increasing confidence and self-consciousness within the rNying-ma school, and intermittent persecutions, suggest a climate in which rNying-ma writers might well be concerned to present and support the unique and unusual aspects of their own school.

²⁹ See Petech 1950 for an account of this period.

³⁰ Ka'thog Tshewang Norbu, *Selected Writings*, pp743-758.

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