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Je Tsongkhapa and the *Lamrim Chenmo* in Context

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Introduction

This brief note is intended to provide you with some background information about the *Lamrim Chenmo* ("LRCM") and its author Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). It provides some historical, cultural and philosophical context to Tsongkhapa's life and times and the events that influenced him in writing the LRCM. This note also provides a brief introduction to the structure and content of the LRCM that may assist you in navigating this wonderful and transformative text. Of course, this note is merely intended to supplement the formal teachings about Tsongkhapa and the LRCM that we will receive over the next two years. I've written this in a casual, non-scholastic way and so there are no footnotes!

The Author – Je Tsongkhapa

What does his name mean?

Literally translated, "Tsongkha" means something like "Land / Field of Onions" and "Tsongkhapa" therefore means "the man from the Field of Onions" after the onion fields cultivated in the region at the time. It's unlikely this was the name given to him by his parents after his birth in 1357 in the Amdo region of Tibet, but for whatever reason, the name stuck. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, when a person becomes ordained as a monk or nun, he or she is given a new "Dharma name". When Tsongkhapa was about 7 years of age, he received novice ordination vows and was given the name "Losang Drakpa" (*Blobzang grags pa*). "Losang" means 'generous' or 'noble-hearted' or 'learned' while "Drakpa" means 'accomplished', 'celebrated' or 'renowned'. Sometimes, you will see Tsongkhapa referred to as "Tsongkhapa Losang Drakpa" and other times you will see him referred to as "*Je Rinpoche*". "Je" (*rje*) means 'Lord' or 'Master' while "Rinpoche" means precious one". Thus, in many commentaries and teachings, Tsongkhapa is sometimes referred to as "the Precious Lord".

What was Tsongkhapa Like?

Tsongkhapa exerted a huge influence over the development of Tibetan cultural, religious and social life and so it's not surprising that in the centuries following his death in 1419, some forty "biographies" were written. However, it's important to note that these are not biographies as we understand them today. Rather, they belong to a particular "genre" or type of religious literature called *namthar* – literally "liberating stories". They are less portraits of the day to day, "warts and all" life of an individual, but more of a religious hagiographic; "Lives of the Saints" narrative intended to inspire and edify readers.

To read these biographies of Tsongkhapa is to encounter an almost superhuman scholar, a Buddhist prodigy from his earliest days, whose birth had been predicted by the Buddha himself, a person who effortlessly mastered the entire corpus of Buddhist sūtras and śāstras (commentaries) while also engaging in religious retreats involving millions of prostrations, mandala offerings and mantra recitations resulting in direct, unmediated visions of the great bodhisattvas. These supernatural qualities are depicted in almost all artistic representations of Tsongkhapa. Interestingly however, one seemingly miraculous story concerning Tsongkhapa's birth appears to have been verified by Western travellers to Tibet up till the Chinese invasion in 1959.

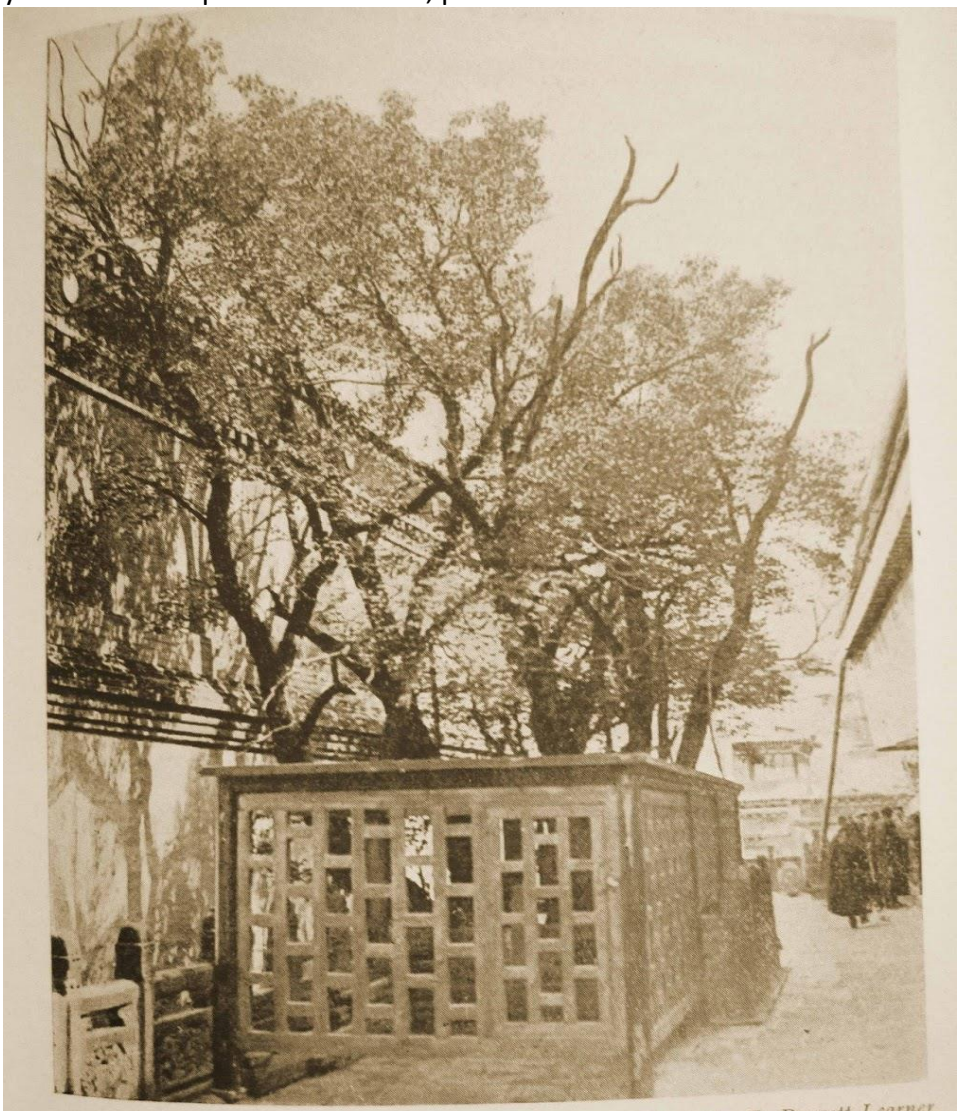
This story concerns a sandalwood tree that was said to have grown over the spot where a portion of the new-born Tsongkhapa's blood, hair or placenta (accounts vary) was buried by his father. This tree was known as the "Tree of Ten Thousand Images" because of visible Tibetan characters that appeared on its many thousands of leaves. It is also known as the "Tree of Kumbum" because of Kumbum Monastery that was established on the site. "Kumbum" is the anglicised reference to the Tibetan *skum 'bum* (or "10,000"). The leaves were said to bear the characters of the mantra of Mañjushrī ("*om a ra pa ca na dhi*") or images of the Buddha. The tree apparently remained in existence for hundreds of years, cared for by the monks of Kumbum monastery until it either died in the early part of the 20th Century, or was destroyed by the Chinese PLA along with the monastery itself.

However, the tree *was* visited by several Western missionaries, travellers and explorers throughout the 17th- 19th centuries and who wrote about their encounter. These Western visitors usually start their experience by expressing great scepticism about the existence of the tree before recounting their "absolute consternation of astonishment" upon actually viewing the tree itself and the leaves imprinted with mantras and images of the Buddha. In 1844, French Catholic missionaries Évariste Régis Huc and Joseph Gabet visited the tree and to their disbelief, saw the characters on the leaves. They later wrote of their visit to the monastery:

> It is called Kounboum, from two Thibetian words signifying Ten Thousand Images, and having allusion to the tree which, according to the legend, sprang from Tsong-Kaba's hair, and bears a Thibetian character on each of its leaves. It will here be naturally expected that we say something about this tree itself. Does it exist? Have we seen it? Has it any peculiar attributes? What about its marvellous leaves? All these questions our readers are entitled to put to us. We will endeavour to answer as categorically as possible.

> Yes, this tree does exist, and we had heard of it too often during our journey not to feel somewhat eager to visit it. At the foot of the mountain on which the Lamasery stands, and not far from the principal Buddhist temple, is a great square enclosure, formed by brick walls. Upon entering this we were able to examine at leisure the marvellous tree, some of the branches of which had already manifested themselves above the wall. Our eyes were first directed with earliest curiosity to the leaves, and we were filled with an absolute consternation of astonishment at finding that, in point of fact, there were upon each of the leaves well-formed Thibetian characters, all of a green colour, some darker, some lighter than the leaf itself.

In the late 1920s, American missionary Frank Doggett Learner also visited Kumbum monastery and took this photo of the tree, published in 1933.



[*Photo by F. Doggett Learner*

THE SACRED SYRINGA AT KUMBUM
The tree is said to have sprung from the shorn hair of Tsong K'aba.

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A more human Tsongkhapa

So, while there is certainly some truth to the miraculous accounts of Tsongkhapa's life, other, more neutral records portray him in a more human and perhaps more relatable context. Like many of those born in the Amdo and Kham regions Tsongkhapa was described as a relatively tall fellow (*sku gzugs shin tu che*) estimated to be around 6 feet tall according to Tibetan standards and possessing a large nose (*sna bo che*). This is more likely to be a large nose *bridge* rather than a physically large nose. He apparently spoke with a strong Khampa accent, probably with the Tsongkha dialect which differs from the Amdo dialect. It was said that Tsongkhapa spoke with a full voice which was rather sweet and melodious.

He was known to speak very respectfully and gently to everyone he met and was able to explain very difficult philosophical points with clarity, calm and grace – with none of the breathy or obsessive air that usually accompanies most academic or teaching events. From my own experience at Oxford and Harvard, I've witnessed these characteristics associated with people who have a penetrating *brilliance* and *complete mastery* over their field. They do not feel threatened by opposing views and do not feel the need to reinforce their brilliance through aggressive or passive-aggressive strategies.

These accounts of Tsongkhapa speak of a deeply compassionate and brilliant monk-scholar, but also reveal a more vulnerable person who suffered from bouts of depression, self-doubt concerning the accuracy of his understanding of Madhyamaka philosophy and chronic backpain that troubled him for much of his life. Despite these very human difficulties, and by all accounts, Tsongkhapa remained a gentle, wise and humble person throughout his life.

Tsongkhapa and his LRCM in wider historical context

Tsongkhapa composed the LRCM (*Byang chub lam rim kyi chen mo*) "The Greater Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment" in 1402 when he was 45 years of age. Traditional presentations of Tsongkhapa's life naturally enough focus on his position and influence within Tibetan society. However, contemporary scholars and researchers have begun to view Tsongkhapa as belonging to the global phenomenon of the Pan-European Renaissance of the 14th – 15th Centuries. It might therefore be interesting to view Tsongkhapa and the LRCM within the wider scope of history, enabling us to think about him and his text in a wider cultural and historical context.

In the decade before Tsongkhapa was born, much of Eurasia and the European world had been decimated by the "Black Death" – the Bubonic Plague (*yersinia pestis*). Intriguingly, modern genomic sequencing of the plague suggests that it originated in the Tibetan – Quinghai Plateau and spread initially by fleas on Himalayan marmots and then by rats. When Tsongkhapa was 21 (1378) French and Italian Cardinals voted for separate Popes of the Catholic Church with the Italian Pope (Urban VI) in the Vatican in Rome and the French Pope (Clement VII) located in Avignon, thereby creating a schism in the Church. The interminable "100 Years War" between England and France temporarily ceased when Tsongkhapa was 32 (1389) after a truce was declared and a year later, Geoffrey Chaucer composed "Canterbury Tales".

By the time Tsongkhapa was 40 (1397), an ambitious Giovanni di Medici had established the Medici Bank in Florence and began paving the way for the Italian Renaissance. At the time he wrote the LRCM in 1402, historians observe a gradual decline in Medieval Scholasticism and the emergence of Renaissance Humanism. In 1415, four years before Tsongkhapa's death, English King Henry V invaded France where his archers inflicted a devastating defeat on the troops of French King Charles VI in a little field near a castle named "Agincourt". Tsongkhapa passed away at 62 years of age (1417) and his body was placed in a ceremonial stūpa at the newly established Ganden Monastery. There is rested until 1959 when soldiers of the invading Chinese "People's Liberation Army" destroyed the monastery and stūpa, forcing a monk to throw Tsongkhapa's mummified body onto a blazing fire burning thousands of scriptures and commentaries. It is reported that the monk later managed to retrieve Tsongkhapa's skull and some ash.

The Text Itself – Why is it so special?

Tsongkhapa wrote a large number of texts during his lifetime and they span 18 Tibetan volumes. In the West, Tsongkhapa is most associated with his philosophical and tantric texts. However, he also composed a large number of devotional poems, items of religious prose and numerous praises, particularly to the Bodhisattva Mañjushrī who was said to have appeared to Tsongkhapa, giving him both reassurance and extensive teachings on the finer aspects of Madhyamaka philosophy. Tsongkhapa was thus a monk, poet, author, philosopher and teacher, well fitting the description "Renaissance man" applied to his contemporary polymaths in Europe at the time.

While it is not Tsongkhapa's most difficult philosophical text in the manner of his "Illumination of the Thought" (*dgons pa rab gsal*) (commentary on Candrakirtī's *Madhyamakāvatāra*) and his hermeneutical text "Essence of Eloquence" (*legs bshad snying po*) the LRCM occupies a very special place in Tibetan literature specifically and world philosophical literature generally. It was the first major Tibetan Buddhist text to be translated (but not published) into any European language - in the 1730s by the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733)- and was the first to be published in Europe in summary form at least, in 1838 by the equally remarkable Hungarian explorer and scholar Sándor Csoma de Koros (1784-1842). When he fled the invading Chinese army in 1959, one of the few, precious possession His Holiness the Dalai Lama was able to carry was a copy of the LRCM.

What makes the LRCM so special? There are many reasons, but the following are some of the most commonly accepted. **First**, the LRCM presents the entire Buddhist Path to Enlightenment in a coherent and systematic way, leading practitioners step-by-step from the most foundational Buddhist teachings to the most profound. Tsongkhapa did not invent this graduated path to enlightenment literature and he drew upon earlier proto Lam-Rim texts, especially Atiśa's (982 – 1054 CE) text *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*Byang chub lam sgrom*) ("Lamp for the Path") in composing his own LRCM.

This more "gradualist path" approach to Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy almost didn't happen in Tibet were it not for a debate (or series of debates) at Samye (*bSam yas*) monastery in the late 8th Century between a Chinese Ch'an monk-scholar Hwa shan Mahāyāna who advocated for a non-analytical approach to "sudden enlightenment" and Kamalaśīla, a monk from the Indian tradition who advocated for a more gradual approach to enlightenment that combined *both* meditative serenity and analytical rigour. Kamalaśīla was declared the winner meaning that Tibet followed the Indian, gradualist approach.

This background explains why Tsongkhapa goes to great lengths in the LRCM to emphasise the need for *both* meditative serenity *and* analytical meditation leading to direct, experiential insight. It also explains why the LRCM has been described (by scholar DS Ruegg) as "an independent *summa* and synthesis of Buddhist ethical, religious and philosophical thought and practice". Ruegg's reference to "summa" is probably a reference to the monumental *Summa Theologica* written by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1275) in which Aquinas offers a systematic presentation, explanation and defence of the Christian religious tradition. Like Aquinas' *Summa*, and following the Indian, gradualist approach, the LRCM is presented in the scholastic format of explanation, qualm (question) and reply (answer), especially in the chapters concerning meditative serenity and insight (Vol 3). Despite this scholastic format, the LRCM is in fact very clearly written.

Second, and consistent with the above, even though the LRCM is one of Tsongkhapa's (relatively) earlier works, it is one of his most thorough. In writing it, Tsongkhapa drew upon and quotes from an astonishing number of classical Indian sūtras and śāstras (commentaries). Tsongkhapa was able to do this because by 1402 (when he wrote the text), he was the beneficiary of the "second wave" (*phyi dar*) of Indian texts and Indian Buddhist commentaries translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan and then commented upon by different Tibetan scholars. Crucially, Tsongkhapa had access to translations of Candrakirtī's *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Prasannapadā* - important Madhyamaka (Middle Way) texts which enabled him to engage with and critique the earlier dominant Yogacāra-Madhyamaka interpretative "school" of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśila and to assert the superiority of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka interpretative "school".

It was Tsongkhapa's access to Candrakirtī's (relatively) newly translated texts that enabled him to argue that differences between Svātantrika-Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka were much, *much* deeper than whether to use syllogisms or consequences as the logical tool for developing valid inferential cognition into emptiness (*śūnyatā*) (*stong pad nyid*) a hidden phenomenon. For Tsongkhapa, Svātantrikas' acceptance of the inherent existence of conventional phenomena meant that the subject, predicate, forward and counter pervasions of the syllogism posited by Svātantrikas actually transformed those syllogisms into impermissible *autonomous syllogisms*. The inevitable result (according to Tsongkhapa) was that Svātantrikas fail to accurately identify the relevant object of negation (they negate too little), do not develop the final view and thus do not generate the depth of wisdom necessary to escape cyclic existence. This is one reason for the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka interpretative "school" claiming that it alone holds the most subtle and final view of emptiness.

Tsongkhapa develops these views throughout Volume 3 of the LRCM which is perhaps the most difficult part of the entire text. As I noted above, this was not simply an exercise in scholastic nit-picking because for Tsongkhapa, only by using the correct philosophical approach in bringing a person to the wisdom that realises emptiness will they reach enlightenment. And according to Tsongkhapa, every Middle Way interpretative school below Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka either failed to go far enough in negating a "self" of persons or failed to extend the analysis beyond persons to all other phenomena that ignite attachment, aversion and all the other afflictions that lead to suffering and further rebirth within cyclic existence. In addition, Tsongkhapa was unhappy with the way past and present Mādhyamikas engaged with Middle Way philosophy. He thought many of them were philosophical naive and overly sceptical about the ability of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka reasoning to lead to liberation and enlightenment and he wanted to correct these views.

Tsongkhapa was also convinced that by supporting his discussion and reasoning with extensive Indian Buddhist texts, his LRCM would not only be an authentic transmission of Buddhist philosophy, but actually enable a practitioner to easily "find the Conqueror's intent" (LRCM 1:53) – ie – to discover the Buddha's actual intent behind the teachings. This special feature of the LRCM is more explicitly noted in Tsongkhapa's short, 25-verse "Songs of Experience" (*lam rim bsdu don*) in which he affirms: "And because it combines the streams of thousands of scriptural texts, it is indeed an ocean of excellent and correct explanation".

Finally, Tsongkhapa structured and wrote the LRCM in a way that enables practitioners of whatever disposition, inclination or stage of development, to begin the process of spiritual evolution from where they are, progressing from stage to stage in seeking enlightenment. When approached correctly, the entire LRCM functions as personal advice for practice from Tsongkhapa. He alludes to this in the LRCM when he said that every part of it is intended to be instructions for practice. (LRCM 1:50). Tsongkhapa really did mean for us to approach the LRCM as if he were personally giving us instructions - not long before he passed away, he said:

> For those future students who might be saddened by not having met me in person, I would say this: Read the two syntheses I have written, one on Sūtra (the LRCM) and the other on Tantra. If you do so, this will be no different from having met me in person. In these texts, I have condensed the essence of all eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha and explained them in an integrated way. So even if you had met me in person, I would have had nothing more to say beyond what is found in these works." (Jinpa - *Tsongkhapa: A Buddha in the Land of Snows* at 320-321).

What's in the Box? Unpacking the *Lam Rim Chenmo*

Understanding the Classical Buddhist World View

We've seen that Tsongkhapa composed the LRCM as a detailed instruction manual intended to guide practitioners through a series of sequential mental trainings with the goal of attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. To understand how the structure and content of the LRCM is intended to achieve this transformation, it is important to understand that Tsongkhapa assumes his readers hold a classical Buddhist world view. Once the principal features of this classical Buddhist world view are identified, it becomes much easier to understand how the different parts and chapters of the LRCM fit together.

What is this classical Buddhist world view that Tsongkhapa assumes we all possess? The foundations of this view are found in the fundamental Buddhist teachings of the "Four Noble Truths" and "Noble Eightfold Path" – set out in the Pāli Canon in the *Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta* and the relational mechanics of the entire process set out in the Buddha's teachings on the "Twelve Links of Dependent Origination" – set out in the Pāli *Nidānasaṃyutta Sutta* and in the Sanskrit *Śālistamba Sūtra* ("Rice Seedling Sutra").

Essentially, it involves sentient beings (not just humans) enduring various forms of suffering, limitations and privations as they experience birth, ageing, sickness, death and uncontrolled rebirth through different realms of existence. These repeated cycles of embodied (or disembodied) rebirth and "redeath" constitute *saṃsāra* (cyclic existence) and all sentient beings experience different realms of *saṃsāra* according to their mental states and karma.

Karma is understood as volitional (intentional / willed) actions of body, speech and mind that in turn, function as the causes for certain ripening effects at a later stage, whether in the present life or the next. "Karma" is not the experience of suffering or pleasure because that is the ripening effect (or fruit) of karma. Karma is the mental state, the intentional volition that sets the action of body, speech and mind in motion. Under the deeply habitual influence of ignorance, sentient beings generate attachment, grasping and aversion which motivate actions of body, speech and mind.

If the volition behind an action is unwholesome, conduct motivated by it will later ripen as the experience of suffering, as a tendency to repeat the unwholesome behaviour and ultimately act as the cause of uncontrolled rebirth within *saṃsāra*. Similarly, if the volition behind an action is wholesome, conduct motivated by it will later ripen as the experience of happiness, as a tendency to repeat the conduct and ultimately as the cause of uncontrolled rebirth within *saṃsāra*. Whether wholesome or unwholesome, volitional actions of body, speech or mind pervaded by ignorance generate karma that ripens as uncontrolled rebirth within *saṃsāra*.

Therefore, the root cause of this sorry dynamic of *saṃsāra* is ignorance of impermanence and of the origin of persons and phenomena in dependence upon their parts, causes and conditions and ultimately upon mere imputation of name and form.

The basic idea is explained by Hopkins and Sopa:

> "the perspective is that the afflictive emotions, such as desire, hatred, enmity, jealousy and belligerence that bind beings in a round of uncontrolled rebirth, ageing, sickness and death are founded on misperception of the nature of persons and other phenomena."

Through systematic training in ethics, concentration and wisdom, sentient beings can penetrate this fog of ignorance and realise (directly and not just intellectually) that persons and phenomena are not self-arisen, do not have a permanent unchanging essence but in fact have their origin in dependence upon other things, upon identifiable causes and upon imputation through conventions. Sentient beings would then realise the "emptiness" of persons and phenomena and in so realising, break the first link in the chain of *saṃsāra*. Tsongkhapa explicitly refers to these basic teachings in the LRCM **[Vol 1:34]**:

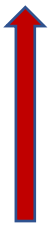
> "You should understand well how cyclic existence – the aggregates of suffering – is formed through the power of its origin karma and the afflictions – and in particular, how the wheel of existence turns in the context of the twelve factors. Understanding this…. destroys the unbearable gloom of confusion (ignorance) the root of all problems….and it is what motivates you toward the path to liberation."

Understanding the Tibetan Interpretation of this Classical Buddhist World View

When Tsongkhapa was writing and teaching, well over a thousand years had passed since the Buddha's time. Although the great monastic universities in India had been destroyed by invading Muslim armies, thankfully, many of the classic Indian Sanskrit Buddhist texts had been translated into Tibetan and preserved in the great monasteries (at least until the genocidal and destructive Chinese invasion in the 20th century). How were the Tibetans going to make sense of all this material? They created lists, charts and structures.

The Tibetans managed the flood of classical Indian Buddhist literature by organising the different philosophical views into "doxographies" (categories of the views of past masters). The classification of classical Indian Buddhist philosophical views into our familiar (i) *Vaibhāṣika* (Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma), (ii) *Sautrāntika* (Sautrāntika Abhidharma), (iii) *Cittamātra / Yogacāra* and two Madhyamaka schools (iv-a) *Svātantrika-Madhyamaka* and (iv-b) *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* was never an explicit "thing" in India, but was a later device used by the Tibetans to sort out what they considered to be a multitude of views.

Later Tibetan monastic textbooks (*yig cha*) about Buddhist tenets such as Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen's (1469 - 1546) *Presentation of Tenets* or Göchok Jikmay Wangbo's (1781 – 1852) *Precious Garland of Tenets*, arrange the views of the different tenet systems according to the above doxography. Read from bottom to top, the reasoning of the schools is said to become more refined and sophisticated until one reaches the highest tenet system with the most refined views, the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka.



Madhyamaka:
Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (Middle Way Consequence School)
Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (Middle Way Autonomy School)
Cittamātra / Yogacāra (Mind Only)
Sautrāntika (Sautrāntika Abhidharma)
Vaibhāṣika (Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma)

When it came to the *larger context* of the Buddha's teachings, the Tibetans accepted the idea of the "Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel". For this, they looked to Chapter Seven of the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* ("Sutra Unravelling the Thought") which is a source text for the Cittamātra / Yogacāra school. The Sūtra presents a characterisation of the Buddha's teachings in "Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel". Very basically…..

1. First Turning

- The Foundational Path / Lesser Vehicle (Hinayāna).
- After his enlightenment, Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path at Deer Park in Sarnath.
- The intended audience were śrāvakas (hearers) and pratkeyabuddhas (solitary realisers) seeking individual liberation. Foundations of Vaibhāṣika tenet systems.
- Scriptural source is the *Dharmachakrapravartana Sūtra*.

2. Second Turning

- The Mahāyāna / Great Vehicle.
- Buddha taught the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (Perfection of Wisdom Sutras) on Vultures Peak near Rajagṛha.
- The intended audience were bodhisattvas seeking enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Foundations of Madhyamaka (Middle Way) tenet systems.
- Scriptural sources are the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*.

3. Third Turning

- Also belonging to the Mahāyāna / Great Vehicle.
- Taught the Yogācāra ("Mind Only") tenet system in Vaiśāli (in modern day Bihar).
- Intended audience were bodhisattvas.
- Scriptural source is the *Saṃdhinirmocana S*ūtra.

Yogācāra followers regard these sūtras of the third turning as definitive explanations of the Buddha's teachings and the teachings in the sūtras of the first and second turnings as provisional. Madhyamaka followers hold the opposite view (2nd turning definitive, 1st and 3rd turnings provisional).

With this basic overview of the classic Buddhist world view, let's see how Tsongkhapa structures the various part and chapters of the LRCM.

Practitioners of the Three Scopes / Motivations

With this classical Buddhist world view in mind, Tsongkhapa then asks each one of us a simple question: "what is your motivation for engaging the Dharma, for engaging in spiritual practice"? He then structures the LRCM according to the answers that different practitioners with one (or more) of three different motivations give.

Practitioner of the Initial Scope

A practitioner who answers: "I want to maximise happiness and minimise suffering in this life, and I want a happy rebirth in the next", is regarded as a practitioner of the initial scope - in the LRCM described as a "Person of Small Capacity" and whose attitude is described in **[Vol 1, Ch 16]**. Tsongkhapa urges them to consider the preciousness of their current human rebirth **[Vol 1, Ch 7],** that in the scheme of things, a human rebirth is an optimal state from which to seek enlightenment. A human rebirth is precious because it is so contingent and fragile – death is certainly on its way, can happen at any time and worldly possessions and honours will not assist at the time of death **[Vol 1, Ch 9].** It should not be wasted on the mere pursuit of worldly, mundane matters since at the time of death the only thing of assistance will be one's Dharma practice. Likewise, even after death, there is no guarantee that a person will actually take rebirth in a fortunate realm. In fact, given the difficulty in assembling its causes, and sentient beings' countervailing tendency to non-virtuous behaviour, a fortunate rebirth is unlikely **[Vol 1, Ch 10]**.

For such a person who has this initial motivation for engaging in spiritual practice, Tsongkhapa advises them to take Refuge in the Three Jewels **[Vol 1, Chs 11 & 12]** and to recall the way karma is generated and functions **[Vol 1, Chs 13 & 14]**. When the mechanics of karma are properly understood, the practitioner is thus advised to avoid non-virtuous behaviour and engage in ethical behaviour **[Vol 1, Ch 15]** since ethical conduct is the cause for "good" karma that ripens as happiness in the present life, or the next and potentially ripens as a fortunate rebirth in the next.

Practitioner of the Middle Scope

A practitioner who answers: "I want to maximise happiness and avoid suffering in this life, but I also do not want to take rebirth again within *saṃsāra*. In fact, I want out of it altogether, I want liberation", is regarded as a practitioner of the middle scope – referred to in the LRCM as a "Person of Medium Capacity". Such a person's attitude to spiritual practice is described in **[Vol 1, Ch 22]**. Tsongkhapa also urges them to train in the stages of the path in common with the practitioner of the initial scope (Person of Small Capacity), but then to strongly reinforce their wish to achieve liberation from *saṃsāra* by reflecting deeply on the nature of suffering in the different realms **[Vol 1, Chs 18 & 19]**. With a feeling of disgust at the suffering within *saṃsāra*, (or as Shakespeare would say: "the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to") the practitioner is then instructed on the very *causes* of *saṃsāra* **[Vol 1, Ch 20]** and the dynamics of *saṃsāra* as taught in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination / Arising **[Vol 1, Ch 21]**.

Armed with this knowledge and realisation, the practitioner is ready to follow instructions enabling them to become free from cyclic existence. These instructions concern the three higher trainings which function as causes through which cyclic existence is halted **[Vol 1, Ch 23]**. The three higher trainings consist in the systematic cultivation of (i) ethics (ii) concentration and (iii) wisdom **[Vol 1, Ch 24]**. At this stage, the practitioner of medium capacity is motivated to engage in spiritual practice in order to seek liberation for themselves only.

Practitioner of the Great Scope

A practitioner who answers: "I want to maximise happiness and avoid suffering in this life, and I also do not want to take rebirth again within *saṃsāra*. However, I realise that all other sentient beings are also suffering miserably within *saṃsāra*. Why should I focus only on my own welfare? I wish to attain the state of enlightenment beyond mere liberation so that from that state, I can un-mistakenly assist them in achieving liberation as well", is regarded as a practitioner of the great scope, referred to in the LRCM as a "Person of Great Capacity" and whose attitude is described in **[Vol 2, Ch 1]**. This sublime attitude involves the generation of *bodhicitta* - referred to in the LRCM as "the Spirit of Enlightenment" and is described as the "entrance to the Mahāyāna" **[Vol 2, Ch 2]**. Such a practitioner also engages in the stages of the path in common with the practitioners of the small and medium capacities or scopes before engaging in practices intended to develop and reinforce the spirit of enlightenment (bodhicitta).

These practices involve the celebrated mind-transformation or *lojong* (*blo sbyong*) practices of "the Seven Cause-Effect Personal Instructions" **[Vol 2, Ch 3]**, the practice of "Equalising and Exchanging Self for Others" **[Vol 2, Ch 4]** and instructions for engaging in the ritual for adopting the spirit of enlightenment (taking the bodhisattva vows) **[Vol 2, Ch 5]** and the maintenance of the spirit of enlightenment **[Vol 2, Ch 6].**

Having taken bodhisattva vows and committed oneself to the development of bodhicitta, the practitioner trains in the Six Perfections explained generally in **[Vol 2, Ch 7]** and accompanying precepts in **[Vol 2, Ch 8].** The Six Perfections include the practice of the Perfection of Generosity **[Vol 2, Ch 9]**, including instructions on *how* to give **[Vol 2, Ch 10]** Ethical Discipline **[Vol 2, Ch 11]**, Patience **[Vol 2, Ch 12]**, Joyous Perseverance **[Vol 2, Ch 13]** and meditative stabilisation and wisdom **[Vol 2, Ch 14].** Volume 2 concludes with instructions on helping disciples mature their mind streams **[Vol 2, Ch 15].**

In reality, Volume 2 of the LRCM extensively covers the first four of the Six Perfections (*pāramitās*). The final two, Meditative Stabilisation (called "Meditative Serenity in the LRCM) (*śamatha*) and Insight (*vipaśyanā*) are separately treated in Volume 3 of the LRCM. That Volume is composed of two Parts, the first concerning the development of Meditative Serenity **[Vol 3, Chs 1-6]** and the second, longer Part concerning Insight **[Vol 3, Chs 7-25].** Volume 3 concludes with instructions reinforcing the need to unite *both* Insight and Serenity as part of the Path (mindful of the debate at Samye in the 8th Century) **[Vol 3, Ch 26]** and then a summary concerning how to train in the Vajrayana / Tantric path **[Vol 3, Ch 27].**

In this way, Tsongkhapa wrote his LRCM so that practitioners of whatever scope or motivation will be inspired to take advantage of their precious human rebirth, realise that the allure of the present *saṃsāric* world is deceptive, understand the law of cause and effect (karma), appreciate the great value of spiritual practice, seek a genuine teacher with unmistaken qualities, develop the wish to be free from *saṃsāra* not just for themselves, but in order to achieve the state of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, develop and strengthen this spirit of enlightenment (bodhicitta), systematically cultivate the Six Perfections, particularly developing immovable meditative serenity, united with insight into the very nature of reality, which is that all things are "empty" of inherent existence but are dependently originated, eliminate the relevant afflictive and cognitive obscurations and ultimately attain the complete bliss of enlightenment.

How to they do this?

Five Mahayana Paths (Attainments of Mind)

From Tsongkhapa's *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* (Middle Way Consequence) perspective, a practitioner progresses through 5 "Paths" as they progress to enlightenment. *Very basically*, these "paths" (which are states of mind characterised by the elimination of certain obscurations and development of certain wisdom consciousnesses) are as follows:

Mahayana Path of Accumulation

A person enters the Mahayana Path of Accumulation when they develop calm abiding *śamatha* (*zhi gnas*) and, on that basis, develop uncontrived *Bodhichitta*; characterised by two aspirations (i) the aspiration to assume responsibility to relieve all sentient beings from suffering and place them in the highest state of happiness and (ii) the aspiration to achieve enlightenment in order to do so.

Prior to this stage, when cultivating *śamatha*, the practitioner found it difficult to balance the stabilising meditation (*'jog sgom*) associated with calm abiding with the more analytical meditation (*dpyad sgom*) needed to develop special insight into emptiness. Having entered the Path of Preparation, the practitioner now cultivates analytical meditation on the basis of the deep calm and concentrative focus of calm abiding. The idea here is that the practitioner is cultivating a *union* of calm abiding and special insight focussed on emptiness.

Mahayana Path of Preparation

When the practitioner achieves a meditative stabilisation (*samādhi*) (*ting nge 'dzin*) which is a union of calm abiding and special insight (*vipaśyanā*) (*lhag mthong*) focussed on emptiness the person enters the Mahayana Path of Preparation. This is not a directed and unmediated *perceptual* realisation of emptiness, but a deep, penetrating *conceptual* understanding of emptiness. On this Path, the person is preparing to make the next breakthrough – the *direct, unmediated perceptual realisation* of emptiness.

Mahayana Path of Seeing

Through repeated *conceptual* analysis of emptiness using logic and reasoning, accumulating merit and purifying negativities, the practitioner deepens their *conceptual* understanding of emptiness. Eventually the "penny drops" and the conceptual understanding is replaced by a direct and unmediated *perceptual* understanding of emptiness (think of reading a manual about how to drive a car versus actually driving the car). They "see" emptiness directly and thus have entered the Mahayana Path of Seeing.

Mahayana Path of Meditation

The instant after the first directly perceptual realisation of emptiness, the person enters the Mahayana Path of Meditation. On this path, the person alternates between periods of meditative absorption (also called "meditative equipoise on emptiness") and subsequent attainment of merit through engaging in bodhisattva deeds.

In the *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* system, the Path of Meditation is traditionally divided into Ten Bodhisattva Levels *(bhūmis*). The origin of this 10-fold scheme is the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* and it forms the core framework for Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* ("Supplement to the Middle Way"). Over the first 7 bodhisattva levels, the practitioner progressively removes different "grades" of afflictive obscurations: (*kleshavarana*) (*nyon sgrib*) -these are the actual manifest afflictions – anger, jealousy, attachment etc underpinned by ignorance. Once the most subtle of the subtle afflictive obscurations have been removed on the final part of Ground 7, the practitioner becomes an Arhat and is no longer compelled to take rebirth in cyclic existence.

However, from the *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* perspective, the practitioner has not yet attained enlightenment. This is because the practitioner has not yet eradicated the cognitive obscurations (*jneyavarava*) (*shes sgrib*). Cognitive obscurations are the *appearances* of inherent existence that arise due to the *latencies* of the afflictive obscurations. The cognitive obscurations are progressively abandoned over Grounds 8-10.

Mahayana Path of No More Learning

Upon abandoning the final level of cognitive obscurations, you attain the Path of No More Learning. School is out and you are enlightened! Congratulations! Now, you have the capacity and ability to unmistakably assist all sentient beings to enlightenment – thus fulfilling your vow, taken eons ago, to develop bodhicitta…..

END.