

[T]he two individuals who are the objects of Go rams pa's critique in *Distinguishing the Views...* are, of course, Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) and Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419).

Dol po pa's theory of Madhyamaka came to be known as "the emptiness of what is other" (gzhan stong), so-called because it maintained that the ultimate (don dam), while empty of all things different from itself (rang ma yin pas stong pa = gzhan stong), is not empty of itself (rang stong ma yin). In Dol po pa's view, the ultimate, which he equates with the buddha nature (bde bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po = rigs) and gnosis (ye shes), is a positive reality beyond intellectual comprehension. It is a radiant, permanent, stable unity that is self-sufficient. It can never be understood in terms of the deconstructionist and reductive dialectic of the negationist (chad pa'i) branch of the Madhyamaka tradition epitomized in the rationalist works (rigs tshogs) of Nāgārjuna. Rather, says Dol po pa, it is the positivist tradition found, for example, in Nāgārjuna's "corpus of hymns" or "praises" (bstod tshogs) that is the best source for understanding the ultimate.

Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka theory has come to be known simply as the Prāsaṅgika. Like many of the luminaries of Tibetan scholasticism before him, Tsong kha pa saw the great texts of Indian Buddhism as the foundation for Buddhist theory and practice. As regards the doctrine of emptiness, he cast his lot with Indian Mādhyamika thinkers like Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva, claiming that it was their interpretation of Nāgārjuna, and their interpretation alone, that constituted the correct theory (yang dag pa'i lta ba) of the nature of things.

Tsong kha pa maintained that emptiness, the ultimate truth, was an absolute negation (med dgag)—the negation of inherent existence—and that nothing was exempt from being empty, including emptiness itself. The ultimate truth, he claimed, could be understood conceptually, and while that conceptual understanding needed to be transformed through meditation into a deeper and more transformatively efficacious mode of cognition (the gnosis of the āryan, the direct realization of emptiness; 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag ye shes = stong nyid mngon sum du rtogs pa'i blo), he believed that the object of the conceptual understanding of the ultimate and the object of gnosis were no different. Moreover, he believed that since emptiness is a truth that is not evident, it could only be approached (at least initially) through the path of reasoning, that is, through the Madhyamaka dialectical strategies. The logic of the Madhyamaka, he felt, was not fundamentally inconsistent with the theories of Buddhist logicians like Dharmakīrti.