

## **Buddha-Nature and the Indivisibility of the Two Truths**

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### ***Introduction***

Conflicting depictions of truth, and how ultimate reality should be represented—through negation or affirmation—is a contested issue in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In particular, this issue concerns the relationship between the affirmations of a true presence of divine wisdom on the one hand, and the negating discourse of emptiness on the other. The competing interpretations of the relationship and meaning(s) of an ultimate presence and absence is fueled by the polysemy of Buddhist scriptures and the scholastic enterprise to systematize them into a comprehensive whole. At the center of this tension is “Buddha-nature”—the innate divine presence within beings in the world. This paper explores Buddha-nature in the works of Mi-pham (*’ju mi pham rgya mtsho*, 1846-1912), an influential figure in the “ecumenical movement” (*ris med*) that began in the late nineteenth century in Eastern Tibet.

Buddha-nature is the central unifying theme woven throughout Mi-pham’s interpretations of Buddhist doctrines. He presents Buddha-nature as the common ground of samsara and nirvana, and the unifying principle of transcendence and immanence. Mi-pham creatively formulates Buddha-nature into a synthetic interpretation that incorporates elements of the “deconstructive” discourses of negative dialectics and the systematic “foundationalism” of Buddhist epistemology—the two predominant discourses of the burgeoning monastic institutions in the late nineteenth-century. I discuss Mi-pham’s unique depiction of Buddha-nature within his formulations of truth that draw from a synthesis of negative dialectics and foundational truth—a synthesis at the heart of Tibetan scholasticism.

### ***The Unified Ground of the Two Truths***

Buddha-nature is an innate presence within the world. It is the fundamental element through which beings participate in the divine. Mi-pham presents Buddha-nature as the single essential point of all Buddhist doctrines:<sup>1</sup>

The single essential point of all the doctrines of sūtras and tantras is only this all-pervasive Buddha-nature...when speaking, the Sugata teacher sometimes elucidated the essence (*ngo bo*) of the Buddha-nature by means of teaching emptiness, and at other times elucidated the nature (*rang bzhin*) of the Buddha-nature through the aspect of teaching the [Buddha’s] qualities of the powers and so forth as a primordial endowment. These two need to be unified without contradiction; however, due to the influence of not having found conviction in the extremely profound of profound essential points—the indivisibility of the two truths—some people view the Buddha-nature as a permanent phenomenon that is not essentially empty, while others, holding onto a mere void, remain in the denigrating position of a view of annihilation that cannot posit the primordial endowment of the inseparable qualities of wisdom.

Mi-pham states that it is important to integrate as non-contradictory the Buddha's teachings of emptiness, which elucidate the essence of Buddha-nature, with the teachings of the primordial endowment of qualities, which elucidate the nature of Buddha-nature. He reveals that the essential point to the resolution of the issue of Buddha-nature and emptiness is the indivisibility of the two truths. In order to more fully understand Buddha-nature in Mi-pham's works, we will now turn to his discussion of the two truths.

A central doctrine in Buddhism is the two truths: (1) the ultimate (*don dam*) and (2) the relative (*kun rdzob*), or conventional (*tha snyad*), truth. An important part of Mi-pham's interpretation is his unique model that renders the two truths in two distinct ways:<sup>ii</sup>

In the great scriptures there are two ways in which the two truths are posited: (1) the term "ultimate" designates reality as non-arising and the term "relative" designates the conventional mode of appearance, and (2) in terms of conventional apprehension, the term "ultimate" designates both the subject and object of authentic experience and the term "relative" designates both the subject and object of inauthentic experience.

He describes one two-truth model as a dichotomy of non-arising emptiness (ultimate) and appearance (relative). In the other two-truth model, he depicts authentic experience as the ultimate and inauthentic experience as relative.

The ultimate truth is not privileged in the two truths as appearance/emptiness because the two truths here are not actually distinct. In the characterization of the two truths as emptiness/appearance, neither of the two truths is superior to the other:<sup>iii</sup>

The unreal appearances are called "relative" and the emptiness that is the lack of intrinsic nature is called "ultimate." Without being regarded with a qualitative difference, both of these are equally applied [to all phenomena] from form to omniscience. If you know this, there is certainly nothing more important to know within the sphere of what can be known.

In the appearance/emptiness dichotomy of two truths, the two truths are in actuality an inseparable unity. Mi-pham states: "If there is no appearance, then there is also no emptiness of that [appearance]. Mutually, both appearance and emptiness are such that one is impossible without the other; if there is one, there is the other."<sup>iv</sup> In this way, emptiness and appearance are co-extensive. He further states:<sup>v</sup>

"Appearing" and "relative" are the same in meaning because appearance should be understood as appearing yet not truly established as it appears. One should understand that the phrase "not truly existent" also does not have to indicate erroneous appearances, because "not truly existent" designates what is empty. If it [appearance] were established the way it appeared and were true as it appeared, then the designation "relative"<sup>vi</sup> would not be appropriate. In that way it would not be empty and the

manner of the impossibility of a non-empty entity being an object of knowledge is authentically established by reason; therefore, it is impossible within this sphere of what can be known for a phenomenon to be exclusively one part that is detached from both appearance and emptiness.

In his appearance/emptiness model, only what appears (or is perceived) is empty; there is no substrate of emptiness that is beyond perceptible reality.<sup>vii</sup>

There is no ultimate apart from the relative,  
There is no relative at all other than the ultimate.  
Whatever appears is necessarily empty,  
Whatever is empty necessarily appears  
Because appearance that is not empty is impossible  
And emptiness as well is not established without appearance.

He depicts the quality of emptiness as an essential property of all things.

In his other two-truth scheme, Mi-pham represents the two truths not as appearance/emptiness, but as a dichotomy of authentic and inauthentic experience. In this scheme, the two truths are not the same, but are a hierarchy—the ultimate truth is undistorted truth while the relative truth is distorted and false. Thus, there is a context where the ultimate truth is privileged above the relative truth and is not just the empty quality of appearance.

In the two truths as authentic/inauthentic experience, emptiness is not the only ultimate because appearances can be both ultimate and relative. Mi-pham accommodates the presence of Buddha-nature in this second two truth-scheme; thereby, he does not reduce the ultimate truth to a mere absence. Also, descriptions of ultimate truth are not limited to only negations. Buddha-nature can be affirmed as ultimate truth because Buddha-nature is ultimate—as an authentic and undistorted experience of reality—in this two-truth model of authentic/inauthentic experience. In this way, this model provides a context for asserting the ultimate truth as a non-distorted participation in reality (and *not just a negation* of distortion).

While Buddha-nature is affirmed as the ultimate truth in his authentic/inauthentic experience model of the two truths, he also preserves the appearance/emptiness two-truth scheme and a context for the critique of the ontological status of all reality, including the presence of Buddha-nature. Mi-pham does not curtail the universality of emptiness, he states: “The latter ultimate [authentic experience] also is empty of essence.”<sup>viii</sup> In this way, he synthesizes both models of the two truths.

The two models of two truths support his interpretation of the compatibility of emptiness and Buddha-nature. In his two-truth model of appearance/emptiness, only emptiness is ultimate and any appearance is necessarily the relative truth. However, emptiness also appears. As such, there is another meaning of emptiness other than solely appearances’ lack of true existence; it is the unity of appearance and emptiness. This unity is expressed by Buddha-nature and is described as the reality actualized in authentic experience.

Instead of an “either/or” interpretation of the presence of Buddha-nature and emptiness, Mi-pham adopts a “both/and” position by means of these two models of two truths. We can see a “dialectical”<sup>ix</sup> tension between his two models of truth: the ultimate within the two truths distinguished as authentic/inauthentic experience is a presence, whereas the ultimate within the two truths distinguished as appearance and emptiness is an absence. It is the resonance found *in and between both* models—the unity of the two truths—through which he represents Buddha-nature.

### ***Establishing Buddha-Nature: Foundational Truth***

We will now look at the reasons Mi-pham puts forward to affirm the existence of Buddha-nature. In his *Lion’s Roar: Exposition of Buddha-Nature*, he bases a discussion of Buddha-nature around a stanza from the *Uttaratantra*, in which he explains three verses as reasons for the existence of Buddha-nature in all beings. The verse from *Uttaratantra* 1.27 reads as follows:<sup>x</sup>

Because the body of the perfect Buddha is radiant,  
Because suchness is indivisible,  
Because of possessing heritage;  
Therefore, all beings always possess the essential nature of Buddha.

We will look at Mi-pham’s exegesis of this stanza in some detail, then we will explore in more depth his delineation of Buddha-nature:<sup>xi</sup>

The meaning of the first verse is as follows: since the Truth Body, the consummate body of a complete and perfect Buddha, as such with the qualities equal to [the extent of] space, later is made clear, radiant, or manifest from a former continuum of a thoroughly bounded ordinary being; therefore, the statement “presently the Buddha-nature exists in the continuums of all sentient beings” is established.

He explains the first verse of the stanza as a reason that proves the cause, Buddha-nature, from the effect, the Buddha. He argues that if a future effect is established—that is, the Truth Body of the Buddha which is the unconditioned and unchanging ultimate truth—then the cause also presently must be the nature of the Truth Body present in all beings in the manner of suchness.<sup>xii</sup>

If the wisdom of the consummate Truth Body is established by scriptures of definitive meaning sūtras and reasoning analyzing the consummate [reality] to be the nature of the immutable ultimate truth, completely pervading nirvāna and saṃsāra, an equality, and unconditioned; then the cause, which is able to actualize that at one time, is presently the nature of the wisdom Truth Body abiding in the manner of suchness without decrease or increase. Although it may or may not be actualized in the mode of appearance free or not free from adventitious defilements, there is not even the slightest qualitative or temporal difference in the mode of being because it is the intrinsic nature of the immutable unconditioned. In the *Uttaratantra* [1.51]:

As it was before so it is later—

The immutable suchness.  
And [1.63],  
The luminous clarity that is the nature of mind  
Is immutable like space.  
It is undisturbed by adventitious defilements  
Such as attachments that arise from the imagination of the  
unreal.

He argues that since there cannot be the slightest qualitative or temporal difference in the nature of the immutable unconditioned, then the nature cannot be different at the time of the effect (Buddha) and at the time of the cause (beings in the world). In the way things appear, however, this reality may or may not be actualized due to the presence of adventitious defilements that obscure reality.<sup>xiii</sup> Mi-pham compares the mind that does not realize the nature of reality to consciousness in a dream.<sup>xiv</sup>

Although the suchness that is the luminous and clear wisdom pervades everything without distinction, when this adventitious delusion arises in one's mind, the basis of designation of samsāra is only this deluded mind together with its object; due to this delusion, one's suchness is not known as it is. For example, when sleeping, due to the power of solely the mental-consciousness, unrestricted appearances arise such as the body, objects, and eye-consciousness, etc. At that time, although the subject and object are observed and apprehended separately, the mental-consciousness itself is not able to know its own mode of being, in which the perceived [object] and the perceiving [subject] are not established as different; even though it is not known, there is nothing other than that mode of being. Likewise, all phenomena abide as emptiness; even so, merely being as such does not entail that everyone realizes this because there is the possibility of delusion—appearances that do not accord with the mode of being.

He argues that just because the luminous and clear wisdom pervades everyone does not mean that everyone must realize this, just as all phenomena being empty does not entail that phenomena are realized as such by everyone. He calls the argument in the first verse a “reasoning of dependency,”<sup>xv</sup> proving the cause from the effect.<sup>xvi</sup>

The evidence of a clear manifestation of the Truth Body at the time of the fruition establishes that the heritage, primordially endowed with qualities, exists at the time of the cause because there is no temporal causality in the mode of being; however, in dependence upon the mode of appearance, it is necessarily posited as cause and effect. Therefore, proving the cause from the effect is called “reasoning of dependency.”

He states that a clear manifestation of the Truth Body is posited as the effect of a cause in the mode of appearance—in the way things appear. However, this is not the case within the way things are in the mode of being. In reality, the heritage of Buddha-nature, primordially endowed with qualities, is not the prior cause of a later effect. Mi-pham continues his explanation of the second verse of the stanza.<sup>xvii</sup>

The meaning of the second [verse], “because suchness is indivisible,” is as follows: since all phenomena of samsāra and nirvāna are of one taste—indivisible within the great primordial luminous clarity of the emptiness that is the abiding reality—Buddhas and sentient beings also are ultimately indivisible due to the equality of existence and peace. Therefore, although appearing as emanated sentient beings due to adventitious delusion, it is established by the reasoning of the nature of things that there is not the slightest deviation from the ultimate suchness of abiding reality; hence, the possession of the essential nature of Buddha is certain.

He says that sentient beings appear as “emanated” due to delusion that is adventitious, but in reality there is no deviation from the suchness of reality. Due to the indivisibility of samsāra and nirvāna within the abiding reality, Buddha and sentient beings are ultimately indivisible. He calls this verse “reasoning of the nature of things,” or more literally, “reasoning of suchness.” Effectively, he is giving the reason for Buddha-nature as: “because that is just the way things are,” perhaps like a response to a question why fire is hot—*because it is*. We will consider Mi-pham’s use of reasoning below after we address his explanation of the third verse:<sup>xviii</sup>

The meaning of the third [verse], “because of possessing heritage,” is as follows: all sentient beings have the heritage that is the potential to be a Buddha because it is established that (1) defilements are adventitious and suitable to be relinquished and (2) the Truth Body primordially endowed with qualities exists in everything without distinction. In this way, the possession of the heritage that is the potential to be a Buddha entails that these embodied beings are possessors of Buddha-nature because (1) there is a context of them being a Buddha and (2) since the Buddha’s Truth Body is also established as essentially unconditioned, there is no temporal or qualitative distinction [between the Truth Body and Buddha-nature] from the aspect of the essence. This third reason, knowing the production of the effect from the cause, is reasoning of efficacy.

Here, due to the mere presence of the cause, the emergence of an effect is not merely inferred because, due to the essential fact that it is impossible that the heritage of Buddha-nature would ever diminish in the event of becoming a Buddha, (1) the heritage of Buddha-nature which is suchness itself is unchanging, (2) at the time of the effect there is no qualitative difference in the essence, and (3) no matter how long the duration of the adventitious defilements is, they are suitable to be separate.

Mi-pham argues here that all beings have the potential to be a Buddha because (1) defilements are adventitious; they are accidental and contingent—not inherent within the nature of beings—and (2) the Truth Body of Buddha pervades everything without distinction. The possession of heritage that is the potential to be a Buddha is called “reasoning of functionality”; it is a reason that infers the effect from the cause.

Moreover, Mi-pham argues that this reason is not merely an inference of the *emergence* of an effect because the effect, in essence, is immanent due to there

being no qualitative difference in the essence of a sentient being and a Buddha. Since suchness is unchanging, a continuity—or common ground—of sentient beings and Buddhas is necessitated. Thus, in essence, beings presently participate in the changeless and timeless nature of the Buddha. In this light, heritage can be seen as somewhat like a divine spark in beings. To conclude, he summarizes the three reasons for all beings possessing Buddha-nature as follows:<sup>xix</sup>

In this way, (1) the existence of the cause, heritage, is essentially not distinct from the Truth Body at the time of the fruition, and (2) if the Truth Body at the time of the fruition exists, then at the time of sentient beings it [the heritage that is essentially the Truth Body] also necessarily exists without increase or decrease, and (3) although there is the imputation of causality and temporality, in meaning, the expanse of phenomena is one taste within the immutable essence; the three reasons establish that all sentient beings are possessors of Buddha-nature due to the authentic path of reasoning that is engaged by the power of fact.

In this way, he puts forward reasons “by the power of fact” to support Buddha-nature.

It does not take a trained logician, in Buddhist logic or modern logic, to see that the status of these as “reasons” is quite spurious. The first “reason” is based on the assumption of a Buddha, and the last “reason” is based on another foundational assumption—the possession of heritage. At best, in consideration of the second reason, the indivisibility of suchness, one could take a skeptical approach towards the experience of a differentiated world. However, even if one were to find the indivisibility hypothesis a workable description of reality, all beings could be said to share the undivided nature of a Buddha *if* one were to accept the assumption of the existence of a Buddha, which brings us back to the assumptions of a foundational truth. Mi-pham’s use of Buddhist logic to affirm Buddha-nature draws from, and returns to, the foundational premises upon which his discourse rests.<sup>xx</sup>

### ***Epistemology and the Immanent Buddha***

We will continue to explore Mi-pham’s arguments for the existence of Buddha-nature by looking further into his text, the *Lion’s Roar: Exposition of Buddha-Nature*. In this text, Mi-pham evokes the Buddhist epistemological tradition to affirm Buddha-nature. Using the language of the Buddhist traditions of epistemology, Mi-pham innovates a delineation of four perspectives on truth—two that are conventional and two that are ultimate.<sup>xxi</sup> We will first look into the two conventional perspectives.

The two conventional, perspectives, or “valid cognitions” (*tshad ma*) are respectively based on: (1) confined perception, and (2) pure vision. Mi-pham states in his *Sword of Supreme Knowledge*:<sup>xxii</sup>

Since there are appearances that do not accord with [the mode of] being,  
With regards to the conventional also there are two thoroughly  
conventional valid cognitions:

Based upon impure confined perception and  
Based upon pure vision,  
Like a person's eye and a divine eye.

His division of two types of conventional valid cognition is based upon two modes of understanding. The structure of these two conventional valid cognitions is Mi-pham's attempt to provide a context to affirm the immanence of a divine presence in the world, yet without undermining the grounds for an epistemology of pragmatic truths on the level of worldly transactions.

The conventional valid cognition of confined perception concerns ordinary modes of being in the world. The conventional valid cognition of pure vision, on the other hand, functions to affirm the immanent presence of the divine—a reality that is otherwise inconceivable and conflicting with ordinary perception.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The unique object of this latter [conventional valid cognition of pure vision] is (1) that which appears such that it conflicts with the objects of ordinary confined perception and (2) that which is an inconceivable domain such as:

- an appearance of as many [Buddha-]fields as dust motes within the breadth of a single dust mote
- a show of many aeons' activities in one moment of time
- showing a display of emanations without wavering from the immutable expanse of phenomena
- knowledge of all objects of knowledge instantly with a non-conceptual mind.

In this way, the conventional valid cognition of pure vision allows Mi-pham to provide a context of valid cognition to affirm what is inconceivable. He states:<sup>xxiv</sup>

One should be learned in the essential point that the profound meanings—all phenomena are primordially Buddha, etc.—are not established by only confined perception, yet are not utterly without a valid means of establishment either.

His emphasis on valid establishment reveals his agenda to affirm an inconceivable reality that is in accord with a reasoned procedure.

### ***Negative Dialectics and Transcendence***

Mi-pham also makes a two-fold division of perspectives on ultimate truth. Like the two conventional truths, his division of ultimate truth into the *categorized* and *uncategorized* ultimate concerns two distinct modes of understanding. The first is the categorized ultimate, the perspective in a “post-meditation phase” (*rjes thob*) of determinate experience, in which the two valid cognitions (conventional and ultimate) relate to emptiness and appearance separately. The second is the unique “category” of the uncategorized ultimate, wisdom's perspective of reality from a non-conceptual state of meditative equipoise in which the two-truths are indivisible.<sup>xxv</sup> This division allows Mi-pham to distinguish between two types of

ultimate: emptiness as mere non-existence and emptiness as a unity, or Buddha-nature.

The distinction between (1) a conceptual negation and (2) the unified emptiness is a central part of Mi-pham's explanation of ultimate truth. The former refers to a mere absence as a negative representation of the ultimate, the "categorized ultimate." In contrast to this mere non-existence, the "uncategorized ultimate" is beyond all concepts:<sup>xxvi</sup>

Ultimate truth which is categorized, merely a negation as an absence of true establishment, is an object of mind and an object of language. The uncategorized is the unity of appearance and emptiness that does not fall to the side of either appearance or emptiness. It is signified by the words such as "unity of the two truths," "freedom from constructs," "the Middle Way," but these are merely indicators, like the finger pointing to the moon, the meaning is far beyond the domain of language and mind.

The "uncategorized" is indicated by words such as the unity of two truths, but its meaning defies affirmation and negation. He distinguishes a mere aspect of a negation, in which emptiness is separate from appearance, from the indivisible truth of empty appearance, in which emptiness is indivisible with appearance. In this way, he creates a space for the absolute transcendence of an ultimate truth that is inconceivable. Mi-pham describes Buddha-nature as not a mere absence, but as a unified truth:<sup>xxvii</sup>

Buddha-nature is not a mere absence; it is emptiness and luminous clarity. It is the abiding reality of the ground of the primeval beginning of all phenomena, the abiding reality that is the indivisible truth of unity, the mode of being that is the emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects.

He affirms the essence of Buddha-nature as the unity free from conceptual constructs:<sup>xxviii</sup>

The own essence of Buddha-nature is free from all conceptual constructs such as existence and non-existence, permanence and annihilation; it is the equality of the single sphere of indivisible truth.

Through a contextual division of ultimate truth, Mi-pham attempts to preserve the transcendence of the ultimate as *uncategorized*. Since emptiness as the categorized ultimate is known as an object of thought and linguistic utterance, it is merely a conventional truth.<sup>xxix</sup> In the uncategorized ultimate, which he describes as "free from conceptual constructs," he provides a space for the transcendent presence of Buddha-nature.

### ***Conclusion***

Mi-pham describes emptiness and appearance in a way that they do not cancel each other out; rather, they comprise a unified ground of being. He depicts this ground of being as Buddha-nature—the unity of the two truths of emptiness and appearance—which is the ultimate truth of authentic experience. He draws upon

Buddhist logic to affirm the existence of Buddha-nature, and contextualizes his claims to the truth of Buddha-nature within a perspectival epistemological system: he affirms the immanent presence of Buddha-nature within the conventional perspective of pure vision and depicts the transcendence of Buddha-nature as the emptiness of the uncategorized ultimate.

The monistic<sup>xxx</sup> resolution of duality is central to Mi-pham's representation of Buddha-nature. A common theme in his exegesis is a two-fold schema, with an ultimately false dichotomy of two opposed factors and a third element that emerges from their dissolution. Two provisionally opposed factors, such as the two truths, subject and object, appearance and emptiness, etc., are resolved in a foundational synthesis in which each of the two distinctions are ultimately untrue, because they are actually indivisible from the beginning. The process of describing the indivisible reality, however, goes through a virtual "detour" of a dichotomy of truths, and thus such a system is not a simple monism but is better described as a *dialectical monism*.<sup>xxxi</sup> The detour through ultimately unreal dichotomies is a process that involves everything that falls under the rubric of conventional truth—all that can be physically acted upon, verbally spoken of, and mentally thought about. In Mi-pham's depictions of the indivisible reality, these provisional divisions are part of a process of representing the unified truth of Buddha-nature.

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<sup>i</sup> Mi-pham, *stong thun seng ge'i nga ro*, 564.2-565.3.

<sup>ii</sup> Mi-pham, *Shedding Light on Suchness (gzhan byis brtsad pa'i lan mdor bsdu pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed)*, published in *spyod 'jug sher 'grel ke ta ka* (Sichuan: Nationalities Press, 1993), 304.

<sup>iii</sup> Mi-pham, *Speech of Delight: Commentary on the Madhyamakālamkāra (dbu ma rgyan gyi rnam bshad 'jam byangs bla ma dgyed pa'i zhal lung)*, published in *dbu ma rgyan rtsa 'grel* (Sichuan: Nationalities Press, 1990), 57-58.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>vi</sup> The word I translate as "relative" (*kun rdzob*), reflects only one of its meanings, "interdependent"—it also has the meanings "conventional" and "concealing," as expressed by Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā*. Here Mi-pham is stressing the *concealing* connotation. Although the term "relative" does not express the full range of meanings of *kun rdzob*, I use the single term "relative" to maintain consistency in translation. For a discussion of the meaning of *kun rdzob*, see Guy Newland, *The Two Truths* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), 76-80.

<sup>vii</sup> Mi-pham, *Beacon of Certainty (nges shes sgron me)*, (Sichuan: Nationalities Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>viii</sup> Mi-pham, *dbu ma rgyan rtsa 'grel*, 56.

<sup>ix</sup> A unique quality of what I find to be Mi-pham's use of a "dialectic" is that it seems to fall between: (1) a Hegelian dialectic, in which there is a synthesis in a final resolution (closure), and (2) a Ricoeurian or Derridian dialectic, where the two seemingly opposed sides of the dialectic are not resolved and the dialectical tension remains (open-ended). Mi-pham's dialectic is closed in that he affirms a monistic unity as the ontological ground of existence; however, it is open in that he maintains contexts for the deconstruction of reified notions of such a ground. Furthermore, an open-ended quality of his dialectic is present due to the fact that he contextualizes his affirmations and denials of reality within particular

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perspectives of discourse (see below); he does not affirm only one mode of discourse as the sole representation of truth. In this way, we can see a unique dialectic in Mi-pham's system that accommodates a certain level of open-ended dialectical inquiry within the closure of an ultimately indivisible ground. For a discussion of Ricoeur's dialectic, see Paul Ricoeur, "Language and Discourse" and "Explanation and Understanding," published in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 1-23; 71-95. For a defense of the word "dialectic" to describe a central part of Tibetan philosophical praxis, see Kenneth Liberman, *Dialectical Practice in Tibetan Philosophical Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 58-59.

\* Mi-pham, *stong thun seng ge'i nga ro*, 567.4-567.5.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid., 572.3-572.3.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid., 575.6-576.4.

<sup>xiii</sup> We can see this first argument in general as a teleological argument for the immanence of the divine: if a future is acknowledged when beings are united with a perfect and unchanging divinity, then that unchanging divinity must also in some way participate in the present world because any change between pre- and post-union would by definition contradict the unchanging divinity. A current trend in theology called "panentheism" (*lit.* God-in-everything) addresses issues of the relationship between the divine and the world in terms such as "inextricable intertwining." The discourses of panentheism are fruitful to consider in light of Mi-pham's depictions of Buddha-nature. For a concise introduction to some of the central issues in panentheism, see Michael W. Brierley, "Naming a Quiet Revolution: The Panentheistic Turn in Modern Theology," in Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (eds.) *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 1-15.

<sup>xiv</sup> Mi-pham, *stong thun seng ge'i nga ro*, 578.2-578.5.

<sup>xv</sup> Mi-pham explains each of the first three verses of the stanza from the *Uttaratantra* in terms of three of the four types of reasons from the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*. See *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, in Powers, *Wisdom of Buddha*, 284-285. These same three reasons are found in Rong-zom's *Establishing Appearances as Divine*. See Rong-zom, *snang ba lhar bsgrub*, Rong-zom's Collected Works, vol. 1 (Sichuan: Nationalities Press, 1999), 560-561. See also Kapstein, "Mi-pham's Theory of Hermeneutics," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald Lopez (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 155-157.

<sup>xvi</sup> Mi-pham, *stong thun seng ge'i nga ro*, 578.6-579.2.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid., 579.2-579.4.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid., 583.1-583.5.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid., 583.5-584.1.

<sup>xx</sup> A similar foundation of dialectical inquiry is found in Paul Tillich's "mystical apriori" in the context of Christian theology: "In both the empirical and

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metaphysical approaches, as well as in the much more numerous cases of their mixture, it can be observed that the a priori which directs the induction and the deduction is a type of mystical experience...based on an immediate experience of something ultimate in value and being of which one can be initiatively aware...The theological concepts of both idealists and naturalists are rooted in a 'mystical apriori,' an awareness of something that transcends the cleavage between subject and object. And if in the course of a 'scientific' procedure this a priori is discovered, its discovery is only possible because it was present from the very beginning. This is the circle which no religious philosopher can escape. And it is by no means a vicious one. Every understanding of spiritual things (*Geistwissenschaft*) is circular." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 9.

<sup>xxi</sup> For a discussion of the functions of Mi-pham's four valid cognitions, see Matthew Kapstein, "Mi-pham's Theory of Hermeneutics," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald Lopez (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 159. Pöd-pa Tulku's presentation of these four valid cognitions is also discussed in Kennard Lipman, "What is Buddhist Logic?" in *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, Steven Goodman and Ronald Davidson (eds.), (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 27-39.

<sup>xxii</sup> Mi-pham, *Sword of Supreme Knowledge (don nam par nges pa shes rab ral gri mchan bcas)*, Mi-pham's Collected Works, vol. 4 (*pa*), 800.3-800.5.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Mi-pham, *Overview: Essential Nature of Luminous Clarity (spyi don 'od gsal snying po)*, published in *bka' brgyad nam bshad dang spyi don 'od gsal snying po yang dag grub pa'i tshig 'grel bcas bzhugs* (Sichuan: Nationalities Press, 2000), 448.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>xxv</sup> Mi-pham, *dbu ma rgyan rtsa 'grel*, 54; 97-98.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Mi-pham, *dbu ma rgyan rtsa 'grel*, 366.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Mi-pham, *Difficult Points of Scriptures in General (dbu ma sogs gzhung spyi'i dka' gnad skor gyi gsung sgros sna tshogs phyogs gcig tu bsdu pa tin po che'i za ma tog)* Mi-pham's Collected Works, vol. 22, 453.4-453.5.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Mi-pham, *stong thun seng ge'i nga ro*, 598.2-598.3.

<sup>xxix</sup> See Mi-pham, *rab gsal de nyid snang byed*, 205-206; Mi-pham, *dbu ma rgyan rtsa 'grel*, 332.

<sup>xxx</sup> Caveat: I use the term "monism" to describe an important aspect of Mi-pham's view; however, we should bear in mind a distinction between monism and non-dualism. See for instance, Sallie King, *Buddha Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 99-115. Monism is an affirmation of a single reality (closure) and non-dualism is a negation of the entire framework of single/plural (open-ended) without affirming either/or/both/neither. We can thus say that the "non" in non-dualism is an existential negation, or an illocutionary denial. Although Mi-pham's view certainly has such a non-dual character, I use the term "monism" to evoke the important aspect of his emphasis on unity. Mi-pham states: "The meaning of unity is the single sphere of equal taste of all dualistic phenomena." Mi-pham, *Trilogy of Innate Mind (gnyug sems skor gsum) gnyug sems book 3 (gnyug sems zur dpyad skor gyi gsung sgros thor bu nam phyogs gcig tu bsdu pa rdo rje rin po che'i phreng ba)* Mi-pham's Collected Works, vol. 24, 743.4.

<sup>xxxi</sup> This term is used in a different context by Jean Paul Sartre in *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1960); English edition translated

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by Alan Sheridan-Smith in *Critique of Dialectical Reasoning* (London: NLB, 1976), 1. To my knowledge, this term was first used in the context of Buddhism by Robert Magolia in *Derrida on the Mend* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1984).