

Mipam's Middle Way Through Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika

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Abstract In Tibet, the negative dialectics of Madhyamaka are typically identified with Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna, and systematic epistemology is associated with Dharmakīrti. These two figures are also held to be authoritative commentators on a univocal doctrine of Buddhism. Despite Candrakīrti's explicit criticism of Buddhist epistemologists in his *Prasannapadā*, Buddhists in Tibet have integrated the theories of Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti in unique ways. Within this integration, there is a tension between the epistemological system-building on the one hand, and “deconstructive” negative dialectics on the other. The integration of an epistemological system within Madhyamaka is an important part of Mipam's (*'ju mi pham rgya mtsho*, 1846–1912) philosophical edifice, and is an important part of understanding the place of Yogācāra in his tradition. This paper explores the way that Mipam preserves a meaningful Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction while claiming both Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika as legitimate expressions of Madhyamaka. Mipam represents Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka as a discourse that emphasizes what transcends conceptuality. As such, he portrays Prāsaṅgika as a radical discourse of denial. Since the mind cannot conceive the “content” of nonconceptual meditative equipoise, Prāsaṅgika, as the representative discourse of meditative equipoise, negates any formulation of that state. In contrast, he positions Yogācāra as a discourse that situates the nonconceptual within a systematic (conceptual) structure. Rather than a discourse that re-presents the nonconceptual by enacting it (like Prāsaṅgika), the discourse of Yogācāra represents the nonconceptual within an overarching system, a system (unlike Prāsaṅgika) that distinguishes between the conceptual and the nonconceptual.

Keywords Madhyamaka · Yogācāra · Prāsaṅgika · Mipam · Buddhism

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Introduction

The negative dialectics of Madhyamaka are typically identified in Tibet with Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna, and systematic epistemology is associated with Dharmakīrti. Despite Candrakīrti's explicit criticism of Buddhist epistemologists in his *Prasannapadā*, Buddhists in Tibet have integrated the theories of Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti in distinct ways. Within this integration, there is a tension between the epistemological system-building on the one hand, and “deconstructive” negative dialectics on the other. This integration is also a fundamental part of Mipam's (*'ju mi pham rgya mtsho*, 1846–1912) philosophical edifice, and is an important part of understanding the relationship between Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika in his tradition. This paper explores Mipam's representation of Madhyamaka, and the way that he integrates the negative and deconstructive dialectics of Prāsaṅgika with the systematic and constructive discourses of Yogācāra.¹

Yogācāra is an important part of Mipam's systematic presentation of Buddhism. The synthetic approach of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka is instrumental to the way that he incorporates various systems of Buddhist thought in Tibet. Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka also has an important place in his works. Not only is Prāsaṅgika commonly held in Tibet as the culmination of philosophies in the dialectical vehicles (the non-Mantra views), but Mipam also associates Prāsaṅgika with the manner of understanding primordial purity (*ka dag*) in the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), which is the penultimate view in his Nyingma (*rnying ma*) tradition. In this paper, I will show how Mipam portrays Madhyamaka through both the discourses of Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika.

Ultimate Truth and Prāsaṅgika

We will begin by looking at how Mipam positions Prāsaṅgika. The main way he delineates Prāsaṅgika is through a division of two types of ultimate truth: the categorized ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) and the uncategorized ultimate (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*).² The “categorized ultimate” refers to mere absence as a negative representation of the ultimate. In contrast to this *concept* of nonexistence, the “uncategorized ultimate” is nonconceptual. He describes this difference as follows:

¹ This paper is derived from my *Mipam on Buddha-Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), and develops an idea I raised therein. The reader can consult this source for a more detailed examination of this topic.

² I use the terms “categorized” and “uncategorized,” following Thomas Doctor, to reflect the distinctive way that Mipam glosses the etymology of the term *rnam grangs*. Mipam states: “The categorized ultimate is ‘categorized’ because it is counted as one in a pair, the binary counterpart of relative existence, or, because it is included in the category of the ultimate. It is what is categorized as the binary counterpart of the relative when speaking of ‘two truths.’” Mipam (1990b), published in Doctor (2004, p. 62): *rnam grangs pa'i don dam ni/ kun rdzob yod pa'i zla la sbyar ba'i cig shos kyi zlas drangs pa'i phyir ram/ don dam pa'i grangs su stogs pas na rnam grangs tel bden pa gnyis zhes pa'i kun rdzob kyi zlar bgrang rgyu de yin*.

The categorized ultimate, which is merely a negation—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.³

Thus he says that the “uncategorized” is indicated by words such as the unity of the two truths, but it has no linguistic or conceptual referent. Its meaning defies affirmation and negation, and any other conceptual formulation.

Mipam describes the transcendent quality of the ultimate in the discourse emphasized by Prāsaṅgikas, in accord with a perspective in which no position is held, while maintaining an ultimate truth that can be conceptually discerned in the discourse emphasized by Svātantrikas. For Mipam, Svātantrika discourse emphasizes the categorized ultimate, the ultimate truth known within a conceptual framework. While the categorized ultimate is known within the framework of discursive, conceptual analysis, there is no such framework demarcating the uncategorized ultimate. Thus there are no conceptual or linguistic boundaries to demarcate what is uncategorized.

Mipam defines Prāsaṅgika as a discourse that emphasizes this uncategorized ultimate.⁴ As such, he positions Prāsaṅgika as a discourse that accords with the way things are in meditative equipoise, free from duality, in contrast to Svātantrika, which he frames as addressing the way the ultimate is conceptually discerned in postmeditation. Accordingly, for Mipam, Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika respectively emphasize the two contexts of: (1) the way things are seen by wisdom—as the undivided truth, and (2) the way things appear to consciousness—as distinguished into two truths. Prāsaṅgika discourse emphasizes reality as it is experienced in meditative equipoise when the two truths are not separate.

³ Mipam (1990b, p. 366): *don dam rnam grangs pa bden grub med par dgag pa tsam ni blo'i yul yin sgra'i yul yin/ rnam grangs min pa la ni snang stong re re'i phyogs su ma lhungs pa'i snang stong zung 'jug bden gnyis zung 'jug spros bral dbu ma sogs ming btags pa ni mtshon byed tsam ste mdzud mos zla ba bstan pa dang 'dra ba las don du sgra rtog gi yul las shin du 'das pa yin no.*

⁴ A slippery word in Mipam's definition here is *emphasize* (*rtsal du bton*). If Prāsaṅgikas were said to *always* present the uncategorized ultimate in their discourse, they would not be able to have a presentation of conventional reality, or the two truths, which is an extreme view that Mipam does not follow. By using the word “emphasize,” even though he preserves a context for Prāsaṅgikas to present the conventional truth, the word also brings ambiguity to the definition. That is, when Prāsaṅgikas are not emphasizing the uncategorized ultimate, is their discourse still Prāsaṅgika? After all, their discourse is not directly characterized by the definition when they are not presenting the uncategorized ultimate. Also, with this definition we can see that uncritically labeling an author a “Prāsaṅgika,” or generalizing an entire text, such as Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra*, as a “Prāsaṅgika” text is a problem. The definition leaves open significant questions such as: is part of the *Madhyamakāvātāra* Prāsaṅgika (e.g., Chap. VI that addresses the uncategorized ultimate), while other parts not (e.g., Chap. XI that presents the qualities of a Buddha)? Or is the entire text “Prāsaṅgika” because it deals more with, or emphasizes, the uncategorized ultimate? How much discourse must be devoted to the uncategorized ultimate to constitute *emphasis* on it? While recognizing the ambiguity of the word “emphasize” in his definition, we can see the significant place that the uncategorized ultimate has in his characterization of Prāsaṅgika. For the textual reference to Mipam's definition of Prāsaṅgika, see the following note.

In other words, he represents Prāsaṅgika as a discourse that emphasizes what transcends conceptuality—the reality as experienced in meditative equipoise. He depicts Svātantrika, on the other hand, as emphasizing the component of dialectical inquiry, a discourse at play within the conceptual structures of thought. In this depiction of the Prāsaṅgika-Svātantrika distinction, we can see that Mipam juxtaposes consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), the conceptual and the nonconceptual—which reflects the important consciousness-wisdom distinction (or *sems* and *rig pa* distinction) in his Nyingma tradition's Great Perfection.

The key distinction between Mipam's two contexts of (nonconceptual) meditative wisdom and (conceptual) postmeditative consciousness is precisely how he distinguishes key themes related to the Prāsaṅgika-Svātantrika distinction such as: (1) whether or not there are assertions,⁵ (2) whether or not the qualifier “ultimately” is needed to modify what is negated, (3) whether or not commonly appearing objects are accepted,⁶ (4) whether or not autonomous arguments (*rang rgyud kyi sbyor ba, svatantraprayoga*) are appropriate in the ascertainment of the ultimate,⁷ and (5) whether or not apprehension (*'dzin stangs*) is present in the ascertainment of the ultimate.⁸

⁵ Mipam states: “The defining character (*mtshan nyid*) of Svātantrika is explanation that emphasizes the categorized ultimate together with assertions. The defining character of Prāsaṅgika is explanation that emphasizes the uncategorized ultimate free from all assertions. In the context of positing the defining characters for these two, positing a distinction such as whether or not [phenomena] are established by their own character conventionally, and the manners of forming evidence, etc. are merely ancillary divisions subsumed within the defining characters above. Also, due to this [emphasis on the categorized or uncategorized] itself, which was just explained, is also the key point of: whether or not there are assertions, whether or not there is acceptance of establishment by own character conventionally, the manner of forming evidence establishing the lack of intrinsic nature as a consequence or an autonomous argument, and whether or not the qualifier ‘ultimately’ is applied to the object of negation.” Mipam (1990b, p. 99): *rnam grangs pa'i don dam khas len dang bcas pa de rtsal du bton nas 'chad pa rang rgyud pa'i mtshan nyid yin la/ rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam khas len kun bral rtsal du bton nas 'chad pa thal 'gyur ba yin pa shes par bya'ol/ 'di gnyis kyi mtshan nyid 'jog pa'i skabs su tha snyad du rang mtshan gyis grub pa 'dod mi 'dod dang gtan tshigs 'god tshul sogs kyi khyad par phytes te 'jog pa ni yan lag gi dbye ba tsam ste gong gi mtshan nyid 'dir 'du ba yin te/ khas len yod med/ tha snyad du rang mtshan gyis grub pa zhal gyis bzhes mi bzhes/ rang bzhin med sgrub kyi gtan tshigs thal rang du 'god tshul/ dgag bya la don dam gyi khyad par sbyar mi sbyar gyi gnad kyang bshad ma thag pa'i tshul de nyid kyi dbang gis yin no.*

⁶ For instance, Mipam states: “In the perspective of authentic vision—a perspective like the sight of the absence of floating hairs for which nothing at all is found—there are no commonly appearing objects; and due to that essential point, a qualifier [e.g., ‘ultimately’] does not need to be applied to the object of negation.” Mipam (1990a, p. 503): *yang dag pa'i gzigs ngor ci yang ma rnyed pa skra shad med pa'i mthong ba lta bu'i ngor chos can mñun snang med pa dang/ gnad de las dgag bya la khyad par sbyar mi dgos pa.* See also Mipam (1990a, p. 502).

⁷ See Mipam (1990b, p. 99), cited above in footnote 5.

⁸ For instance, Mipam states: “The uncategorized ultimate free from all assertions appears as the object of meditative equipoise of a Sublime One, and the categorized ultimate appears in postmeditation certainty; the former is the domain of wisdom and the latter is the domain of consciousness...In this way, there is a great essential point here that applies to the [difference between] the nominal and genuine ultimates, and postmeditation and meditative equipoise. If this is understood, one can also understand the essential point of whether or not apprehension has deconstructed (*zhig*).” Mipam (1993b, p. 473): *rnam grangs min pa khas len thams cad dang bral ba'i don dam 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhas gi yul du snang zhing/ rnam grangs pa'i don dam rjes kyi nges pa la snang la snga ma ye shes dang phyi ma rnam shes kyi spyod yul yin. . . de ltar don dam btags pa ba dang mtshan nyid pa gnyis po dang mnyam rjes sbyar rgyu 'dir go ba'i gnad chen po yod cing 'di go na lta ba'i 'dzin stangs zhig ma zhig gi gnad kyang go nus.*

Within the realm of consciousness, the domain of thought and language: there are assertions, the qualifier “ultimately” is applied when negating (conventionally existent) phenomena, there are commonly appearing objects, autonomous arguments can be used to ascertain the (categorized) ultimate, and apprehension is present. It is just the opposite in the context of wisdom and the discourse of Prāsaṅgika that accords with it.

Under the rubric of Svātantrika, Mipam depicts a progressive approach to truth, a truth determined by thought and language. He depicts the Svātantrika as based in a perspective of the two truths *conceived separately*. While Svātantrikas separate the two truths, the two truths are not separated in the discourse that defines the Prāsaṅgikas.⁹ The Prāsaṅgikas—while emphasizing the way things are in meditative equipoise—have no claims and use consequences to negate wrong views. The difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, however, is not simply in logical form, but involves emphasis on a distinctive perspective on truth. For this reason, we should recognize the fluidity of the categories of Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika in Mipam's interpretation, as the difference between them is a contextual one. Also, an important point of Mipam's presentation of Prāsaṅgika is that it is not so much a *view* but is a *discourse in accord with a view*. Consequently, one is allowed the flexibility to proclaim a Prāsaṅgika discourse in the morning and a Svātantrika one in the afternoon, without being limited to one at the exclusion of the other.

While Prāsaṅgikas emphasize the discourse of the uncategorized ultimate, ironically, they do so without making a distinction between the categorized and uncategorized ultimate.¹⁰ So oddly enough, we are confronted with the paradox that the defining character of Prāsaṅgika, explanation with an emphasis on the uncategorized ultimate, is based on the distinction of an uncategorized ultimate that the Prāsaṅgikas themselves do not accept in such discourse! This *aporia* is a significant part of Mipam's representation of Prāsaṅgika. I wish to argue that the systematic exposition of Prāsaṅgika as Mipam defines it necessarily entails this *aporia*, this contradiction without rational resolution, because distinctions become necessary when *theorizing about* Prāsaṅgika, (but theorizing about Prāsaṅgika is not Prāsaṅgika discourse!) for such distinctions fall within the discursive contexts of nonmeditative states, whereas there are no distinctions in the wisdom of meditative equipoise nor the discourse that accords with it.

⁹ Mipam states that the unique object of negation for Prāsaṅgikas is *holding onto the two truths as distinct*: “One should know that the Prāsaṅgika's unique object of negation is the aspect of apprehending the two truths as distinct because if the Svātantrikas were free from this object of negation, which is conceiving the two truths as distinct, then other than that view, there would not be the slightest thing to develop for even the Prāsaṅgikas, etc.” Mipam (1990b, p. 97): *de ltar bden gnyis so sor zhen pa'i cha de thal 'gyur ba'i dgag bya thun mong ma yin pa yin te/ gal te rang rgyud pa dag bden gnyis so sor zhen pa'i dgag bya dang bral bar gyur na/ thal 'gyur ba sogs la'ang lta ba de las skyed cung zad kyang 'don rgyud med par shes par bya ste.*

¹⁰ Mipam states as follows in his commentary on the Wisdom Chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*: “One should know that in this context of Prāsaṅgika, since the emphasis is on the great Middle Way, which is a unity and free from constructs, there is no twofold distinction of the categorized and uncategorized ultimates in this tradition.” Mipam (1993a, p. 9): *thal 'gyur ba'i skabs 'dir zung 'jug spros pa dang bral ba'i dbu ma chen po nyid rtsal du 'don pas 'di'i lugs la mam grangs dang rnam grangs min pa'i don dam gnyis su dbye ba med par shes par bya'o.*

Consequently, this unresolved paradox is a necessary feature of Prāsaṅgika as Mipam has positioned it: if Prāsaṅgika represents the deconstruction of systematic thought, then a systematic exposition of Prāsaṅgika will always entail this contradiction. We can also see this as a reason why Yogācāra plays an important role in Mipam's representation of Madhyamaka: for in order to sustain a radically negative dialectic like Prāsaṅgika, the discourse must eventually implode—it must turn on itself; hence, it must defer to something else for its systematic configuration. Furthermore, we can see this as a reason why Mipam, unlike Tsongkhapa for instance, does not attempt to explicate Prāsaṅgika as a complete and consistent system. In fact, Prāsaṅgika is not a system at all—for it does not stand alone as a coherent structure in a conceptual scheme.

Unlike the systematizing function that Yogācāra plays in Mipam's works, Prāsaṅgika functions to *deconstruct* systematic representation; it is a discourse that accords with meditative equipoise in that it performatively *enacts* the nonconceptual—where all distinctions, including the distinction between the conventional and ultimate truth, have collapsed. Yogācāra, on the other hand, frames the nonconceptual; that is, it plays the all-important function for Mipam to situate the nonconceptual state of meditative equipoise within an overarching structure of a system that distinguishes the conceptual from the nonconceptual. By doing so, Yogācāra is more suited to represent a comprehensive account of reality that accounts for both distorted (conceptual) experience and undistorted (nonconceptual) experience.

Thus, we can see how Mipam configures Prāsaṅgika and Yogācāra such that they can relate in a symbiotic way.¹¹ Prāsaṅgika's deconstruction of systematic thought depends on the architecture of systematic thought, or in other words, we might say that the antistructure of Prāsaṅgika presumes the structure of Buddhist thought. In any case, the integral relationship between the negative and destabilizing discourse of Prāsaṅgika and the comprehensive and constructive system of Yogācāra is a significant part of Mipam's formulation of Madhyamaka.

Conventional Truth and Yogācāra

In contrast to Prāsaṅgika's emphasis on the (uncategorized) ultimate, the domain of Yogācāra plays an important role in Mipam's formulation of conventional reality, where phenomena are known and discussed as if they were separate from emptiness. Mipam presents Yogācāra-Madhyamaka as a system that makes a distinction between the conventional mode of appearance (*tha snyad snang tshul*) and the conventional

¹¹ Mipam does not claim that all Prāsaṅgikas must necessarily go along with Yogācāra (Mind-Only), in fact, he explicitly denies this. He states: "In general, it is sufficient for Middle Way proponents to determine that all phenomena that arise in dependent relation are non-arising; it is not required for them to accept a Mind-Only philosophy. . . ." Mipam, *A Feast on the Nectar of the Supreme Vehicle: Commentary on the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (*theḡ pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi dgongs don mam par bshad pa theḡ mchog bdud rtsi'i dga' ston*), Mipam's *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (a), 98.5–98.6: *spyir dbu ma pas rten cing 'brel 'byung gi chos rnam skye ba med par gtan la phab pas chog gi /sems tsam gyi grub mtha' khas ma blangs thabs med pa ma yin*.

mode of reality,¹² through which one can take account for the fact that although things *appear* to be external, they are not because their conventional mode of reality is Mind-Only. It is not only the presentation of conventional truth that distinguishes Yogācāra, for Mipam uses Yogācāra discourse to offer a systematic representation of both conventional and ultimate truth. The systematic quality of Yogācāra contrasts with Prāsaṅgika, which he defines with reference to only the ultimate truth.

While Mipam's defines Prāsaṅgika with reference to the (uncategorized) ultimate, his characterization not only reflects an approach to the ultimate truth, but also implicates a different way that the conventional truth is represented. Bötrül (*bod sprul mdo sngags bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1898–1959), an influential commentator on Mipam's works, elaborates Mipam's Prāsaṅgika distinction not only in terms of ultimate emptiness, but also in terms of relative appearance. He makes a distinction between the way the relative truth is respectively asserted in the three traditions of (1) Mind-Only, (2) Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (Śāntarakṣita), and (3) Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka. He says that appearances are held to be mind in the Mind-Only tradition, and that the mind is conceived as truly established. In Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, however, while the conventional mode of reality (*tha snyad gnas tshul*) is mind, that mind is not held to be ultimately real. Finally, in the Prāsaṅgika, the appearances of relative truth are “merely self-appearance” (*rang snang tsam*).¹³

In contrast to the accounts of conventional reality in the Mind-Only and Yogācāra-Madhyamaka systems, “merely self-appearance” seems to be the concise and comprehensive delineation of conventional truth in the context of what is a *uniquely* Prāsaṅgika account of conventional reality. We are not given an elaborate discussion of conventional truth beyond “self-appearance”—perhaps necessarily so—because when we engage in discourses that theorize about conventional reality, we are no longer in the domain of Prāsaṅgika as it is defined: namely, a domain of discourse that emphasizes the uncategorized ultimate—the “content” of nonconceptual meditative equipoise.

Unlike Yogācāra, a uniquely Prāsaṅgika discourse does not make an appearance-reality distinction between a conventional mode of appearance and a conventional mode of reality. Also unlike Yogācāra, a uniquely Prāsaṅgika discourse does not offer the mind as the ontological ground for appearances *even conventionally*. Thus, there is no reality *behind* conventional appearances to ground reality in the Prāsaṅgika tradition; Prāsaṅgika is ground-less and anti-realist through and through.

Nevertheless, Mipam shows how conventional reality as it is laid out in terms of Yogācāra can be compatible with Prāsaṅgika. He states:

In general in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, the collection of six consciousnesses is accepted, and there is no presentation of reflexive awareness and so forth, as it is clear from their texts. Yet how is it that just because there is no assertion conventionally in that [tradition] that one must necessarily understand that [these] definitely do not exist conventionally? For example, like the fact that

¹² See Mipam (1990a, p. 528).

¹³ Bötrül (1996, pp. 185–186). For an in-depth presentation of Bötrül's interpretation of Mipam's Madhyamaka, see my forthcoming English translation of his *Distinguishing the Views and Philosophies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011).

although there is no point in using conventions such as innate mind and great bliss in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, it is not that these are conventionally unreasonable.¹⁴

There is no point to theorizing about conventional existence in Prāsaṅgika discourse—a discourse in accord with the nonconceptual. Yet in terms of conventional truth, such conventions as reflexive awareness (*rang rig*), innate mind (*gnyug sems*), and great bliss (*bde ba chen po*) are not necessarily incompatible with the Prāsaṅgika tradition either. Similar to his distinction between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, Mipam uses a *perspectival* system to integrate Prāsaṅgika with Yogācāra, as well as tantra. Such a perspectival system can be seen as an extension of Śāntarakṣita's integration of Dharmakīrti and Nāgārjuna. In Mipam's case, however, it extends to become an integration of Candrakīrti and Padmasambhava.

So the question remains: how do we understand Mipam, as a proponent of Prāsaṅgika or Yogācāra? We might think that the fact that he does not develop a uniquely Prāsaṅgika position on conventional reality reflects his commitment to Yogācāra. However, rather than this fact being necessarily due to a preference for Yogācāra over Prāsaṅgika, his representation of Prāsaṅgika apparently necessitates this. As such, he does not develop a systematic theory of conventional reality that is unique to Prāsaṅgika precisely because such theories necessarily involve foundationalist presuppositions. Instead, he positions Prāsaṅgika as antithetical to the foundationalist and discursive presumptions that system-building discourses such as Yogācāra involve.

When we carefully consider this question of whether Mipam is a proponent of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka or Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, we can see how the answer to the question of where he stands might be best answered with a “both/and.” As we see in his Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, his presentations of Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika reflect a distinction based on different perspectival contexts rather than necessarily entailing incompatible ontological commitments. The question of whether he is a proponent of *either* Prāsaṅgika *or* Yogācāra is poorly formulated because neither necessarily precludes the other, and both discourses can be employed to demonstrate the authentic view of Madhyamaka.

Conclusion

Mipam represents Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka as a discourse that emphasizes what transcends conceptuality. As such, he portrays Prāsaṅgika as a radical discourse of denial. Since the mind cannot conceive the “content” of nonconceptual meditative equipoise, Prāsaṅgika, as the representative discourse of meditative equipoise, negates any formulation of that state. In contrast, he positions Yogācāra as a

¹⁴ Mipam (1993b, p. 561): *spyir dbu ma thal 'gyur pa'i lugs la nram shes tshogs drug tu bzhes pa dang/ rang rig gi nram bzhas sogs ma mdzad pa ni rang gzhung na gsal mod/ der tha snyad du zhal bzhes med pa tsam zhig gis tha snyad du med nges su go dgos pa'i nges pa ga la yod de/ dper na thal 'gyur pa'i lugs la gnyug sems dang bde ba chen po sogs kyi tha snyad sbyar don med kyang de dag tha snyad du mi 'thad pa ma yin pa bzhin no.*

discourse that situates the nonconceptual within a systematic (conceptual) structure. Rather than a discourse that re-presents the nonconceptual by enacting it (like Prāsaṅgika), the discourse of Yogācāra represents the nonconceptual within an overarching system, a system (unlike Prāsaṅgika) that distinguishes between the conceptual and the nonconceptual.

Mipam portrays Prāsaṅgika as a deconstructive and radically negative dialectic. Although he unequivocally denies discursive practices as such in the discourse that defines Prāsaṅgika, we must situate the negative dialectics within the context of his larger hermeneutic project. His larger project incorporates Yogācāra and the systematic portrayal of two truths, as well as tantra, which has historically been the main emphasis, and defining character, of his Nyingma tradition.

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¹ This paper is derived from my *Mipam on Buddha-Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), and develops an idea I raised therein. The reader can consult this source for a more detailed examination of this topic.