

STUDIES IN INDIAN AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM

# APPROACHING THE GREAT PERFECTION



SIMULTANEOUS  
AND GRADUAL  
METHODS *of*  
DZOGCHEN PRACTICE  
*in the*  
LONGCHEN NYINGTIG

SAM VAN SCHAİK

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APPROACHING THE GREAT PERFECTION

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*Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches  
to Dzogchen Practice in Jigme Lingpa's*

Longchen Nyingtig

Sam van Schaik



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*To my parents  
Paul and Barbara van Schaik*



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## Preface

THE TEN GREAT PERFECTION TEXTS that appear in this book are the work of Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. Although he died over two hundred years ago, in the long view of the Tibetan tradition he is a recent figure. In all four of the main schools his work remains of central importance for those who practice the Great Perfection. His *Longchen Nyingtig* cycle has been handed down through generations of practitioners as a complete path to enlightenment, and many lineages for the authorized transmission (*lung*) of these texts are still in existence today. While the *Longchen Nyingtig* is full of treasure texts, speaking with the impersonal and authoritative voice of scripture, it also contains texts written as ordinary, yet still inspired, treatises on the Great Perfection. The individual voice of Jigme Lingpa is strongly present in these compositions. The reader cannot help but be struck by the urgency in his writing, and by his concern to communicate the true spirit of the Great Perfection to his audience. Although Jigme Lingpa did compose more scholarly treatises than these, he is best known as a representative of the yogic side of the Nyingma school, as one who wrote out of his own experience of meditation rather than intellectual knowledge. His writings have a colloquial style, with the quality of a personal instruction given from teacher to student, and I hope that my translations will carry some of this feeling of immediacy.

When texts such as these are subjected to scholarly scrutiny, something—some would say the principal thing—is missed, and for this reason most readers might prefer to begin with the translations in part III, before turning to the discussion of them in part II. In my analysis of the texts I have tried to demonstrate how Jigme Lingpa constructs a coherent thesis using passages that seem to contradict each other when taken individually. These contradictions occur between two apparently opposed tendencies within Jigme Lingpa's writing. The first tendency emphasises the immanence of the

enlightened mind in all sentient beings, and proposes that the realization of this immanence is itself the method by which all aspects of enlightenment are attained simultaneously. The second emphasizes the distinction between the ordinary state of sentient beings, samsara, and its enlightened correlate, nirvana, and proposes that enlightenment is to be attained gradually through various practices. Modern scholarship has usually approached these two tendencies as entrenched positions on one side or the other of polemical debates between different schools. However, both tendencies are present to some extent within each of the schools in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The great exponents of every school have found it necessary to mediate between these two extremes, and this is what we see Jigme Lingpa doing in his *Longchen Nyingtig* texts. I have tried to show how the difficult contradictions inherent in Jigme Lingpa's incorporation of the Great Perfection into the Mahayana Buddhist path compelled him to employ a series of interpretive responses.

As ever, I am humbled by the great range and depth of the Tibetan literary tradition. I am not one of those few whose encyclopedic knowledge begins to encompass the whole of the literature, but here I have attempted to trace the subtle lines of literary influence on Jigme Lingpa. Traditional and recent scholarly accounts of Jigme Lingpa's literary sources have focused on the influence of the monolithic figure of Longchenpa, the fourteenth-century Nyingma scholar. The importance of Longchenpa to Jigme Lingpa is indisputable, yet other less famous figures emerge from the *Longchen Nyingtig* texts, including the seventeenth-century writers Tsele Natsog Rangdröl and Lhatsün Namkhai Jigme. Neither of these two produced a large body of work, but both wrote pithy treatises for meditators in a contemporary and colloquial style that has a clear relationship to Jigme Lingpa's writings. This relationship shows us Jigme Lingpa in a different light. He appears not just as a reformer who breathed new life into the doctrines of a figure from the classical period of Nyingma scholarship four hundred years earlier, but also as a teacher interested in the work of those in the recent past who presented the essentials of the Great Perfection in an accessible form. I have also shown Jigme Lingpa as actively engaged with the different versions of the Buddhist teachings maintained by the other schools, particularly the Gelug school which dominated his homeland of Central Tibet. While open to the doctrines of the other schools, especially the Kagyü, he strongly opposed those who made false equivalences between the doctrines of different schools, and fiercely defended what he saw as the special characteristics of the Nyingma teachings.

In short, I have tried to show that by presenting a particular way to practice the Buddhist path Jigme Lingpa was not merely reviving the work done by Longchenpa. He drew together developments in the Tibetan tradition over the four centuries after Longchenpa and presented all this in a style unmistakably his own. The popularity of the *Longchen Nyingtig* testifies to Jigme Lingpa's success in this project, and central to this success is his reconciliation of the contradictions between the simultaneous and the gradual approaches to enlightenment.

### *Conventions*

Sanskrit words have been used for some Buddhist terms familiar to most readers, such as *bodhisattva* and *nirvana*, and these appear without diacritical marks. Sanskrit has also been preferred for certain technical terms with a strong connection to the Indic context, such as *ālaya-vijñāna*. Tibetan words, apart from the very familiar exception *lama*, have been translated, with the Wylie transcription of the Tibetan appearing in brackets where appropriate. In longer passages the *shad* is transcribed with a vertical slash (/) and the *gter shad* with a forward slash (/).

Tibetan proper nouns, including names of places, people, and schools, are written in phonetics. A glossary in Appendix III provides the Wylie transcription for all such words that appear in the main text. Titles of texts are given in phonetics in the main text, except in cases where the title is particularly descriptive, such as the *Seventeen Tantras* or the *Story of the Intelligent Bee*. The full titles in Wylie transcription are to be found in the bibliography, or if they are not included there, in the footnotes.

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## List of Abbreviations

### Longchen Nyingtig *Texts*

- DTK *rDzogs chen gnas lugs rdo rje tshig rkang (Vajra Verses on the Natural State)*
- GP *Man ngag rdzogs pa chen po'i rgyud phyi ma (The Subsequent Tantra of Great Perfection Instruction)*
- KZL *Kun mkhyen zhal lung (The Words of the Omniscient One)*
- KGN *Kun tu bzang po dgongs nyams (Experiencing the Enlightened Mind of Samantabhadra)*
- ML *gZhi lam 'bras bu'i smon lam (An Aspirational Prayer for the Ground, Path, and Result)*
- NCT *rDzogs pa chen po gnas lugs cer mthong (Seeing Nakedly the Natural State of the Great Perfection)*
- NSB *rDzogs pa chen po'i gnad gsum shan byed (Distinguishing the Three Essential Points of the Great Perfection)*
- PK *rGyab brten padma dkar po (The White Lotus)*
- SN *Gol shor tshar gcod seng ge'i ngar ro (The Lion's Roar That Destroys the Deviations of Renunciants Meditating on the Seminal Heart)*
- YL *Khrig yig ye shes bla ma (The Wisdom Guru: Practice Instructions)*
- YLG *rDzogs pa chen po kun tu bzang po ye shes klong gi rgyud (The Great Perfection Tantra of the Expanse of Samantabhadra's Wisdom)*

*Editions of Collected Works of Jigme Lingpa*

AC *Klong chen snying thig* (Adzom Chögar edition)

SBd *Jigs gling gsung 'bum* (Derge edition)

SBl *Jigs gling gsung 'bum* (Lhasa edition)

PART I  
INTRODUCTION





# 1 Approaches to Enlightenment

## *The Great Perfection*

This is the heritage left by the buddhas of the past, the object of accomplishment for buddhas yet to come, and the only pure path walked by the buddhas of the present day. Since the intellectual tenets of the other eight vehicles fail to reach it, it comes at the pinnacle of them all.

**T**HIS IS THE WAY in which Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa (1730–98) describes the methods of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*). The Great Perfection is a Buddhist approach to salvation, in a form only known to have existed in Tibet. From its earliest appearance in the eighth century C.E. it has survived to the present day. In the intervening centuries its literature grew into a vast range of texts, describing various different systems of the Great Perfection.

At the time when the first known texts of the Great Perfection appeared in the eighth century, Tibet had reached the zenith of its power as an empire, embracing much of Central Asia and parts of China. The Tibetan Empire came into being a century earlier through the military successes of the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo (609–49). Songtsen Gampo is also traditionally said to have been the first king to sponsor Buddhism in Tibet. At that time, Buddhism had to compete with indigenous religious practices and local deity cults which made its introduction as a state religion less than straightforward. Nevertheless, as the Tibetan Empire went from strength to strength over the two following centuries, Buddhism rose to become the major religious power within Tibetan borders.

The ascendance of Buddhism in Tibet was assured by the work of Songtsen Gampo's great-grandson, King Trisong Detsen (756–97). This king, while continuing the military successes of his forebears, attempted to turn Tibet into a truly Buddhist country, on the model of India and China. Thus

he invited the renowned Indian Buddhist scholar Śāntaraḥṣita to establish the first Tibetan monastery, with ordained Tibetan monks. He also invited exponents of the Buddhist tantras including the semi-legendary figure Padmasambhava, who taught tantric practice and perhaps the Great Perfection as well.

During the reign of Trisong Detsen great numbers of Buddhist scriptures were translated into Tibetan. A great range of Buddhist literature was translated from both Sanskrit and Chinese, including the most recent developments in the Mahāyāna. Monasteries were established based on the monastic rule of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school. At the same time the practices of the tantras, known as the Vajrayāna, were introduced and practiced by both monastics and laypeople. The lay tantric practitioner (*sngags pa*, Skt. *māntrin*) became a common figure in Tibet, and would remain so throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

### *The early Great Perfection*

The earliest Great Perfection texts are from the manuscript cache found in the Central Asian monastic complex of Dunhuang. During the ascendancy of the Tibetan Empire, Dunhuang was under Tibetan control, although both Tibetan and Chinese lived there as monks and passed through as lay devotees. The Dunhuang texts contain some of the fundamental features of the Great Perfection that remain in most of its various later forms. These essential features owe much to earlier Buddhist literature, in particular the doctrine of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) set out in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras and the understanding of the nature of the mind set out in certain other sutras, such as the *Laṅkāvatāra*. The following passage from one of the Dunhuang texts is a typical example:

It does not matter whether all of the phenomena of mind and mental appearances, or affliction and enlightenment, are understood or not. At this very moment, without accomplishing it through a path or fabricating it with antidotes, one should remain in the spontaneous presence of the body, speech, and mind of primordial buddhahood.<sup>1</sup>

As this passage illustrates, Great Perfection meditation instruction points the meditator toward the direct experience of the true nature of reality, which is immediately present. This method is held to be superior to all oth-

ers, which are said to involve some level of intellectual fabrication. This criticism applies to most of the practices encountered in Buddhism, from intellectual analysis to the use of specific meditation topics as antidotes to undesirable mental states. The exaltation of the Great Perfection above all other schools of Buddhist practice remains a theme throughout Great Perfection literature and can be seen in the eighteenth-century passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The identification of the Great Perfection as a distinct vehicle (*thebs*, Skt. *yāna*) of Buddhist tantric practice is present in these early texts. It is known as the vehicle of supreme yoga (Skt. *atiyoga*), overtopping all of the lower levels of tantric yoga.<sup>2</sup>

From this position as the ultimate system of Buddhist practice, the Great Perfection was used as an interpretive structure for the practices of the tantras, which were placed below it in the hierarchy of Buddhist systems. The rejection of any kind of path (*lam*), any conceptually fabricated form of practice, in these early texts—as seen in the passage above—often seems to put the Great Perfection in opposition to the various and complex paths of practice that were derived from the tantras. However it in fact existed as a way of approaching these practices, much as the doctrine of emptiness is used in the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the works of commentators such as Nāgārjuna, as a way of approaching the practice of the Mahāyāna. In both cases, although there is criticism of conceptually constructed practices, there is also a great deal of discussion of how to engage in those practices. Thus it is clear that the criticism is not to be taken as an injunction against engaging in the practices at all; rather the practices are contextualized within the higher perspective of nonconceptuality and nonduality.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Great Perfection was not really a departure from Buddhist tradition. As well as the similarity to features of the Prajñāpāramitā sutras, there are other obvious influences from the Māhāyāna sutras on the early Great Perfection. The true nature of reality alluded to above is also known as the *basis of all* (*kun gzhi*, Skt. *ālaya*), a term that appears often in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and became fundamental to the Yogācāra school in India.<sup>4</sup> In the early Great Perfection this *basis of all* is synonymous with the awakened mind (*byang chub kyi sems*, Skt. *bodhicitta*), which, as well as being immediately present, is the basis of all that manifests. This use of the term *awakened mind* is also derived from Yogācāra texts and their scriptural sources, such as the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*.<sup>5</sup>

The early Great Perfection was also characterized by certain distinctive features, in particular a vocabulary that was later elaborated and developed into a technical terminology. Examples of this vocabulary in the early texts

are *gnosis* (*rig pa*, Skt. *vidyā*), for the everpresent nondual and nonconceptual awareness, and *spontaneous presence* (*lhun gyis grup pa*), indicating—as in the passage quoted above—the immediate and unfabricated presence of “the body, speech, and mind of primordial buddhahood.” Equally important is the term *primordial* (*ye nas*), indicating that the awakened state has always been present, uncreated.<sup>6</sup>

The categorization of the Great Perfection as a distinct yoga goes back as far as the earliest known Great Perfection texts.<sup>7</sup> The Great Perfection is classed as *atiyoga*, the highest of the three supreme forms of yoga. Below it are the practices derived from the tantras, classed as the two lower forms of inner yoga, *anuyoga*, and *mahāyoga*, although in fact the vast majority of tantric practice fell under the mahāyoga rubric. An eleventh-century Tibetan commentary on the different methods of Buddhist practice distinguished mahāyoga and atiyoga as distinct methods, but earlier texts indicate a less orderly state of affairs in which the characteristic approach of the Great Perfection was presented both in isolation from mahāyoga practice and as the means of engaging in it.<sup>8</sup>

### *The end of the empire and the new schools*

In the 840s a new Tibetan king, Langdarma, was on the throne. Tibetan histories relate that he broke with the custom of supporting Buddhism (which had continued through the reigns of Trisong Detsen’s successors) and supervised the wholesale dismantling of the monastic structure that had been established and encouraged over the previous century. This is said to have been the cause of his assassination by a monk in 842, which ended the royal line and began the disintegration of the Tibetan Empire into small individual states. In the following century and a half there was little or no monastic presence in Tibet, but it seems that the lay tantric practitioners flourished and maintained the transmission of the tantras and their associated practices, including the Great Perfection.

By the eleventh century, certain local rulers in the state of Ngari in Western Tibet wished to see monastic Buddhism reestablished in their land and to curb what they saw as the excesses of the lay tantric practitioners.<sup>9</sup> Their support resulted in the training of Tibetan translators in India, and the beginning of a new wave of translation activity. At their invitation, the Indian monk Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054) came to Tibet and instigated a new wave of translation of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries. His disciple Dromtön (1002–64) established a new Tibetan monastic form

of Buddhism known as Kadam. Atiśa's legacy to Tibet was a form of Buddhism based on a graduated path that included tantric practice but put much more emphasis on general Mahāyāna teachings, especially the practice of compassion.

In the following years other schools developed. The Sakya based their tantric doctrines on the newly translated tantric cycle of Hevajra, the practice of which was structured by a doctrine called the *Union of Samsara and Nirvana*, a meditation-oriented interpretation of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. The Sakya also became a monastic school with a highly scholastic element. Another new school, the Kagyü, also appeared in the eleventh century, with a lesser tendency to monasticism than the Kadam and Sakya. The fundamental texts of the Kagyü were a set of tantric practices derived from an Indian lineage of yogins, and a doctrine that was held to be the ultimate understanding of tantra, called *Mahāmudrā*, "the great seal." Mahāmudrā has many similarities to the early Great Perfection, and the two teachings may have shared a common source. The last of the main Tibetan schools to appear was the Gelug, which was founded by the Tibetan monk Tsongkhapa (1367–1419), based on his wish to continue the monastic tradition of the Kadam, which had been supplanted by the more recent schools. Tsongkhapa, like Atiśa, placed more emphasis on the nontantric practices of the Mahāyāna and on a strictly graduated path of practice. His most important innovation was a new reading of the Madhyamaka doctrine, which he used as an interpretive structure for all tantric practice.

Despite the proliferation of new schools in Tibet, there were many who continued to adhere to the lineages based on the first wave of transmission of Buddhism into Tibet. These were the spiritual descendents of those lay tantric practitioners who had survived the collapse of monastic Buddhism in the ninth century, and in their lineages of transmission they carried with them the Great Perfection scriptures. These practitioners came to be known as *Nyingmapa* (the old ones), and although there was never a coherent Nyingma school as such, it became useful to refer to the lineages and scriptures that derived from the first period of transmission of Buddhism into Tibet with the term *Nyingma*.

Moreover, at just the same time as the new schools began to appear in Tibet, the Nyingma canon began to grow, with the addition of fresh material known as *treasure (gter ma)*. Treasures are scriptures said to have been concealed in Tibet by Padmasambhava in the eighth century that are brought to light by a *treasure revealer (gter ston)*. The new treasures vastly increased the scriptural material available to Nyingmapas and opened the

way to the development of the Great Perfection from its simple early form into a far more complex body of doctrines.

### *The development of the Great Perfection*

The proliferation of Great Perfection texts from the eleventh century called for a structure, a method of categorization to make sense of the different systems that were developing. The method that took hold was a distinction into three classes: the Mind Series (*sems sde*), the Space Series (*klong sde*), and the Instruction Series (*man ngag sde*).<sup>10</sup> Under the Mind Series rubric were placed those early Great Perfection texts dating back to the eighth century or beyond, and more recent material in the same mold. The Space Series enjoyed only limited popularity, and little is known of it today. The Instruction Series, on the other hand, gradually increased in popularity from its appearance in the eleventh century and in time supplanted entirely the Mind Series and the Space Series, becoming by the eighteenth century the only form of the Great Perfection still practiced.

The first known occurrence of this distinction into three series is in an early Instruction Series text, and the threefold distinction is perhaps most accurately seen as a way of distinguishing what made the Instruction Series different from earlier forms of the Great Perfection.<sup>11</sup> The three series were defined as different approaches to the true nature of mind, with the Instruction Series embodying the most direct approach. The characterization is as follows: In the Mind Series, one's own mind is established as the basis of all appearances, and then this mind is recognized as an empty and luminous awareness, mind itself (*sems nyid*). In the Space Series, one approaches mind itself by recognizing it as empty. Finally, in the Instruction Series, mind itself is approached directly by the meditator, without any need to establish its character as the basis of all appearance, or to recognize its emptiness.

The Instruction Series built a far more complex system upon the foundations of the earlier Great Perfection literature, in part through the addition of material from earlier sutra and tantra sources, and in part through distinctive doctrines and practices of its own. The particular features of the Instruction Series are discussed in chapters 4 to 7 below. Here it is only important to mention that, by this stage, the Great Perfection had developed beyond its role as an interpretative approach to tantra (although it did not lose that role) and had developed a complex series of meditation techniques of its own.

The popularity of the Instruction Series owes much to a corpus of literature known as the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*). Although the term suggests an essentialized and condensed teaching, in fact the most elaborate discussions of the Great Perfection occur in Seminal Heart texts. Some doxographies identify the Seminal Heart with the Instruction Series, some place it at the pinnacle of various subdivisions of the Instruction Series, and some place it outside of all the three series, as the very essence of them all.<sup>12</sup>

The earliest known Seminal Heart texts are the collection of tantras known as the *Seventeen Tantras* and a collection of miscellaneous texts attributed to six Indian figures, named *Bima Nyingtig* after one of those figures, Vimalamitra. Both collections were circulating in Tibet from around the mid-eleventh century onward.<sup>13</sup> The Indian masters, who also figure in other Great Perfection lineages, are Garab Dorje, Mañjuśrīmitra, Śrīsīṃha, Jñānasūtra, Vimalamitra, and Padmasambhava. The last two were both active in Tibet, but the historical existence of the previous four is much less certain.<sup>14</sup> The *Bima Nyingtig* is said to have been concealed in the eighth or ninth century and rediscovered in the eleventh, yet it is not strictly classified as a treasure text, for reasons discussed in chapter 3.<sup>15</sup>

Between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries, the Seminal Heart, just one among a number of systems of the Great Perfection, was not particularly preeminent, and by the end of this period may even have been in decline.<sup>16</sup> This was to change due to the work of two people, the treasure revealer Pema Ledreltsal (1291–1315?) and the scholar Longchen Rabjampa (1308–63). In the early fourteenth century Pema Ledreltsal produced the first fully fledged treasure collection in the Seminal Heart corpus, the *Khandro Nyingtig*. This collection did not achieve immediate popularity and may have been short-lived had it not been taken up by Longchenpa.

Longchenpa was probably the greatest exponent of the Great Perfection in its long history and was certainly responsible for the revitalization of the Seminal Heart tradition. He brought together the *Bima Nyingtig* and the *Khandro Nyingtig* with two new collections authored by himself, the *Lama Yangtig* (based on the *Bima Nyingtig*) and the *Khandro Yangtig* (based on the *Khandro Nyingtig*), and a third new collection, the *Zabmo Yangtig*. Before long all of these collections were handed down through the lineages of textual transmission as one great cycle, the *Nyingtig Yabzhi*. The endurance of this cycle ensured that the great variety of meditation practices and doctrines contained in the Seminal Heart rubric would not be lost.

This was not the end of Longchenpa's development of the Seminal Heart. In two lengthy prose works, the *Tegchö Dzö* and the somewhat shorter

*Tsigdön Dzö*, Longchenpa set down, in a coherent and systematic form, the miscellaneous and heterogenous doctrines and practices contained in the Seminal Heart collections. In lengthy discourses he attempted to place these materials in the context in which he felt they belonged, that is, as the supreme method of Buddhist practice, not only for the Nyingma, but for all of the Tibetan schools. He attempted to secure this place for the Seminal Heart by relating it to the Indian heritage (especially the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra) and to the interpretations of the tantras found in the new schools, thus giving the Great Perfection an acceptable place in the Tibetan Buddhist milieu of the fourteenth century. The *Tegchö Dzö* and *Tsigdön Dzö* were only two of the seven large treatises that became known as Longchenpa's *Seven Treasuries* (*mdzod bdun*).<sup>17</sup>

In the centuries following Longchenpa, earlier kinds of Great Perfection practice died out as the Instruction Series became more prevalent. However, no scholar of equal ability appeared, and in general, the new Great Perfection texts were treasures that were, by their nature, miscellanies. By the eighteenth century, the Seminal Heart was beginning to look like a number of competing and increasingly divergent systems of practice—the same state of affairs that had been brought about in the Great Perfection in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by activities of treasure revealers.

This process was stopped and in time reversed by the works of the eighteenth-century treasure revealer, Jigme Lingpa (1730–98). His treasure cycle, the *Longchen Nyintig*, is a self-contained collection of texts including every aspect of the meditative practices current among Nyingmapas in his time. The form of Great Perfection practice contained here was firmly based on the Seminal Heart system set out by Longchenpa. (One meaning of the name *Longchen Nyintig* that acknowledges this debt is “the seminal heart of Longchenpa.”)<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in a treatise called *Yönten Dzö*, Jigme Lingpa made a new attempt at Longchenpa's project of establishing the Seminal Heart as the supreme manifestation of the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

In the nineteenth century, after Jigme Lingpa's death, the *Longchen Nyintig* became the most popular of the treasure cycles, becoming as close to normative as any set of practices within the heterogenous Nyingma milieu. Jigme Lingpa gave much of the credit for the production of the *Longchen Nyintig* to visions of Longchenpa, and in the Great Perfection texts of both this collection and the *Yönten Dzö* constantly deferred to the work of Longchenpa. The success of Jigme Lingpa's works firmly established the Seminal Heart, in the systematized form developed by Longchenpa, as the supreme form of Buddhist discourse for most Nyingma lineages.

### *Simultaneous and Gradual*

He could see, without wishing it, that old, that obvious distinction between the two classes of men; on the one hand the steady goers of superhuman strength who, plodding and persevering, repeat the whole of the alphabet in order, twenty-six letters in all, from start to finish; on the other the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash—the way of genius. He had not genius; he laid no claim to that: but he had, or might have had, the power to repeat every letter of the alphabet from A to Z accurately in order.<sup>19</sup>

Many religious, mystical, and philosophical traditions have recognized the existence of two approaches to their ultimate goals. The first is a step-by-step cultivation, the second an immediate realization. The first approach is often associated with learning, meritorious works, and the practice of morality, while the second is often held to transcend such religious and philosophical activities, in fact to transcend all ordinary activities. In essence, the first approach, which I will call *gradualist*, is pluralistic in that it involves a plurality of methods, and a gradual unfolding of understanding over time. The second approach, which I will call *simultaneist*, is singular in that it includes no method except direct insight, and no progress over time, only the single moment of realization. It is simultaneous in that all of the elements accumulated by the gradual method are present in the singular event of realization.

The tension between these two approaches is felt through much of the history of Buddhist thought. In early Buddhist scriptures, there are many discussions of gradual cultivation, but also accounts of disciples attaining realization on hearing short sermons by the Buddha.<sup>20</sup> In the more technical discussions in the Pāli canon, a distinction is made between liberation of the mind (Pāl. *ceto-vimutti*), which involves gradual ascent through the levels of absorption (Pāl. *jhāna*) in śamatha meditation, and liberation through prajñā (Pāl. *pañña-vimutti*), which some held to afford a direct access to enlightenment without the need to pass through the levels of absorption.<sup>21</sup>

The existence of both approaches is evident in the Mahāyāna sutras as well. In the Prajñāpāramitā sutras the doctrine of emptiness undermined the substantiality of all philosophical reasoning and religious practice. In other sutras, such as the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, the teaching that all sentient beings

are possessed of an inherent buddhahood held the implication that there could be access to an immediate realization of buddhahood. Yet it was also in these Mahāyāna texts that the ideal of the gradual cultivation of the bodhisattva's path was expounded, a cultivation that was generally said to occur through several eons.

In China the simultaneist tendencies of some of the sutras were developed into a doctrine of simultaneous enlightenment by followers of the Chan schools. Most Chan schools advocated a sudden, uncultivated realization of the true nature of mind. In general, the Chan doctrine stated that through nonmentation, the true nature of mind, which is present but not manifest in all beings, becomes manifest. This nonmentation is the avoidance of all conceptual thought. Through the singular method of nonmentation, the singular result, enlightenment, is accomplished. Thus this is a simultaneist approach.

Within the Chan schools, this issue of simultaneism and gradualism received a great deal of attention, and a useful distinction was made between two aspects of the dichotomy. The first aspect is the *method*. The gradual method is the undertaking of a hierarchical series of practices, which in turn remove more and more subtle obstacles to enlightenment. The simultaneous method is a singular practice, such as nonmentation, which has no internal divisions. The second aspect is *realization*. In the model of gradual realization, the qualities of enlightenment become apparent in a cumulative manner in the practitioner of the path. This is the model of the five paths and ten stages that appears in many Mahāyāna sutras. Simultaneous realization is the instantaneous presence of all the qualities of enlightenment at the moment of enlightenment. This distinction means that there are at least four alternative positions in the question of simultaneism versus gradualism:

- (i) A simultaneous method with simultaneous realization
- (ii) A simultaneous method with gradual realization
- (iii) A gradual method with simultaneous realization
- (iv) A gradual method with gradual realization

All of these approaches were taught by Chan schools.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the first one—simultaneous method and realization—came to be the orthodox Chan position. However, another popular approach, which became the standard for Korean Chan, was the third: a gradual method with simultaneous realization. In this model, the trainee Chan adept undergoes a simultaneous realization of the true nature of mind at the very beginning of his career, and then cultivates the spiritual qualities of buddhahood

through standard, gradual, Mahāyāna practices. At the end, another simultaneous realization brings about the final accomplishment of buddhahood.<sup>23</sup>

### *Distinctions in the capabilities of sentient beings*

Many of the traditions that recognized the differences between simultaneous and gradual approaches also recognized that this might correspond to a difference in the capability of those who engage in the practice. The simultaneous method might require the practitioner to be above average, perhaps even to be exceptional. Distinctions between levels of ability in trainees are commonplace in Buddhist literature and were usually characterized as levels in a practitioner's faculties (Skt. *indriya*), with the top level described as having sharp faculties (Skt. *tīkṣṇendriya*). This distinction is especially useful for traditions in which both simultaneist and gradualist approaches are advocated in the scriptures. Advocates of either approach can argue that the simultaneist approach is only for those of the sharpest faculties. While the advocate of the simultaneist doctrine may feel that this includes a substantial number of adepts, the advocate of the gradual approach may argue that only one in a million adepts is actually of this high standard.

There are several passages in the Pāli canon setting out hierarchies of ability in followers of the Buddha; one occurs in the discussion of the two methods of liberation mentioned above. Richard Gombrich writes:

At MN I, 437, Ānanda asks the Buddha why some monks are *ceto-vimutti* and some *pañña-vimuttino*. The Buddha does not reply, as in effect he did to the three monks at AN I, 118–20, that there is no answer to this question. On the contrary, he says, with extreme brevity, that it is due to a disparity in their faculties.<sup>24</sup>

In this context the distinction is between the levels to which a monk has developed the five faculties of faith, energy, awareness, concentration, and insight.<sup>25</sup> Discussions of the concept of disparity in faculties also appear in the Mahāyāna sutras. A reference to three levels of ability occurs in the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*:

But while I teach with such an intention that there is a single way (Skt. *yāna*), this does not mean that there do not exist the (various) realms of living beings, depending on their natures, being of dull faculties, of medium faculties, and of acute faculties.<sup>26</sup>

Such statements become common in the commentaries to the tantras. There is, for example, a much-quoted verse by Tripiṭakamāla that defines the mantra path as being suited for those of the sharpest faculties:

Though the meaning is the same, mantra treatises  
 Are superior because of being for the non-obscured,  
 Having many methods, no difficulties, and  
 Having been made for those of sharp faculties.<sup>27</sup>

These verses are quoted by Atiśa in his *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the influential work in which he sets out a graduated path, and the hierarchy of the three types is used as a fundamental structure. Later, Tibetan scholars of all schools, including Tsongkhapa and Longchenpa, also used the three types of ability to structure a gradual path.

The distinction of different levels of ability was also common in Chinese Buddhism, particularly in Chan. It was used in polemics directed by the Southern Chan toward the Northern Chan, whose gradualist doctrine was characterized as being for those of dull faculties. It was also used to justify a gradualist approach in the Northern Chan by Shenxui, who wrote that the Buddha's most profound teachings are not suitable for sentient beings in general because their faculties are dull.<sup>28</sup> It was also used by later Chan teachers of the simultaneist approach to explain why the Buddhist canon included so many lengthy, scholastic texts: they were produced for those of dull faculties.<sup>29</sup>

### *Simultaneous and gradual in Tibet*

These two approaches seem to have coexisted in the early stages of Tibet's assimilation of Buddhism. In the later tradition, the gradual approach became an orthodoxy, given authority by the result of a debate sponsored by King Trisong Detsen.<sup>30</sup> This debate may never actually have taken place, or there may have been several debates, but the story that became accepted in the Tibetan tradition was that a great debate was called in the late eighth century to determine whether Tibet would accept Indian or Chinese Buddhism as normative.<sup>31</sup>

The Indian Buddhist scholar Kamalaśīla opposed the Chinese teacher Hashang Mahāyāna. The question at issue was whether the cessation of dualistic conceptualization alone was sufficient cause for enlightenment (Hashang's position), or whether a gradual engagement in the practice of the

six perfections of the Mahāyāna was required (Kamalaśīla's position). Thus Hashang represented the simultaneous approach (*cig char 'jug pa*), Kamalaśīla the gradual approach (*rim gyis 'jug pa*).<sup>32</sup> According to the Tibetan versions of the story, Hashang was defeated, and his method rejected.

For Tibetan scholars of later generations, the doctrine of a simultaneous realization caused by the mere cessation of conceptualization, attributed to Hashang, became a standard object of rebuttal. This was to be problematic for those who followed doctrines that had something in common with the Chan of Hashang. Certain bodies of teaching in Tibet, including the Great Perfection, were accused of espousing immediate realization and disparaging models of a gradual method and gradual realization, essentially continuing the banned tradition of Hashang. This perception was not unfounded; as we have seen, the texts of the Great Perfection frequently assert the immediate presence of the true nature of mind.

The Great Perfection was subject to criticism at least as early as the eleventh century, when the Nyingma scholar Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo was writing in its defense.<sup>33</sup> Sakya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) treatise *Domsum Rabje* is an early polemic that influenced many of those that followed. Sakya Paṇḍita criticized the teaching of a doctrine of simultaneous realization called the *white panacea* (*dkar po cig thub*) in the Mahāmudrā doctrine of the Kagyü school and, in passing, leveled the same criticism at the Great Perfection.<sup>34</sup> More extensive attacks followed. The following passage by the great Gelug scholar Khedrubje (1385–1438), translated by David Seyfort Rugg, is a good example:

Many who hold themselves to be meditators of the Snow-mountains talk, in exalted cryptic terms, of theory free from all affirmation, of meditative realization free from all mentation, of practice free from all denial and assertion and of a result free from all wishes and qualms. And they imagine that understanding is born in the conscious stream when—because in a state where there is no mentation about anything at all there arises something like non-identification of anything at all—one thinks that there exists nothing that is either identical or different. By so doing one has proclaimed great nihilism where there is nothing to be affirmed according to a doctrinal system of one's own, as well as the thesis of the Hwashang in which nothing can be the object of mentation.<sup>35</sup>

The intersectorian polemics are the most visible aspect of this conflict, but studying them is perhaps not the best means of investigating the characteristics of particular positions within the Tibetan traditions. As David Jackson has argued in a discussion of the simultaneous versus gradual debate, the use of polemical material to elucidate doctrinal positions within a particular tradition is limited and distorting.<sup>36</sup> Although polemical material is attractive because it points to problematic areas, the presentations of doctrine from both sides are bound to be affected by the arguments that they support. We might also argue, as Seyfort Ruegg has done, that the study of polemics encourages further partiality. A better approach might be the measured study of the various conflicts and the responses to them within particular traditions.<sup>37</sup>

All of the Tibetan traditions had to deal with the rich scriptural inheritance of the late Indian Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, in which both simultaneous and gradualist positions were to be found. As all schools accepted some, if not all, of the Vajrayāna tantras as authentic, they had to deal with simultaneous tendencies in their scriptures. For those who also inherited the systems of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā, the problem was particularly evident, especially under the pressure of attacks from respected scholars like Sakya Paṅḍita. Exponents of these traditions had to come to a solution that would prevent them from being labeled with the Chinese heresy, yet preserve the essence of their own teachings.

Furthermore, if exponents of the Great Perfection did not wish to teach a wholly simultaneous approach—if they wanted to teach a gradualist method or realization, or both—it would be necessary to find a way in which the two approaches could acceptably coexist. The later Great Perfection was without doubt incorporated into a gradual method that included many of the practices of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. In Jigme Lingpa's eighteenth-century treasure cycle, the *Longchen Nyingtig*, Great Perfection texts sit alongside texts derived from other traditions of Buddhist practice. Most large treasure cycles are considered to contain all the materials necessary for the Buddhist path, and this is also the case with the *Longchen Nyingtig*. What we are presented with appears to be a de facto gradualist path that, however, incorporates practices with a strongly simultaneous approach. Because of this, and because of the unequalled popularity achieved by the *Longchen Nyingtig*, it is an ideal case study for the relationship between simultaneous and gradualist tendencies in the later Great Perfection.

### *The Great Perfection of the Longchen Nyintig*

The *Longchen Nyintig* contains eleven texts that are directly concerned with the Seminal Heart, comprising over three hundred pages. They vary greatly in style, including short and pithy instructions on the essential points of the Seminal Heart, evocative verses on the nature of mind as it is known through the Seminal Heart, and longer, discursive commentaries on aspects of the doctrine and practice of the Seminal Heart. All of these *Longchen Nyintig* texts are presented in translation in part IV, except for the *Yeshe Lama*, which is too long to include but from which I draw frequently in the course of analyzing the texts (see also Appendix I). Of the ten translations, seven have never been translated.<sup>38</sup> These translations are a rich resource for the examination of the presence of simultaneist and gradualist approaches within a single tradition. Points of tension can be identified between different texts and even within a single text. Hermeneutical strategies that smooth over the conflicts between simultaneism and gradualism are to be seen here. Sometimes these are explicitly presented in the texts as solutions, while elsewhere they are not marked out as such and have to be drawn out from where they are embedded in the discourse. In either case, these strategies are an example of how the tradition of the Great Perfection embodies contradictions and how it struggles toward the resolution of those contradictions.

Treasure texts, as I mentioned earlier, are believed to have been concealed by Padmasambhava in the eighth century, to be discovered later by a treasure revealer. Such texts have the authority of scripture. However, a treasure collection is not entirely composed of revelatory material. Texts written as ordinary compositions by the treasure revealer were included alongside the treasure texts, often as direct commentaries upon them. Five of the eleven Great Perfection texts from the *Longchen Nyintig* are such ordinary compositions, which Jigme Lingpa attributes to his own hand.

Thus in a single treasure collection one can identify more than the single authorial voice. There are the scriptural voices of the treasure texts, often the first person voice of the primordial buddha Samantabhadra. Alternatively, the scriptural voice may be unspecified, a simple voice of authority.<sup>39</sup> There is also a category of text that, though not considered to have been concealed in the eighth century, nevertheless has a semi-scriptural authority. This kind of text is believed to have come to the writer as a direct realization and is thus called a *pure vision (dag snang)*. Though without any claim to previous existence, the pure vision texts maintain an air of timelessness, not

addressing themselves to contemporary issues as a more mundane composition might.

The nonscriptural texts are usually easily identified by the colophon, in which the treasure revealer records his having written the text.<sup>40</sup> These texts are presented as the expression of the treasure revealer's own authorial voice. Usually the writer will not use his treasure revealer name to sign a non-treasure text.<sup>41</sup> The texts that are neither treasure nor pure vision I will call *authorial*, since they are distinguished from the treasure texts by being presented as the work of the treasure revealer in his role as an author, not as a treasure revealer. Authorial texts are often commentaries on the treasure texts in the same collection, but can merely be works with some thematic connection to the treasure collection. The latter is the case with the authorial texts under consideration here, which share the same themes as the treasure texts, but rarely invoke them or comment directly upon them.

In view of the complexity of the concept of authorship in a treasure collection, invoking the treasure revealer as author when citing every text from the collection would only obscure these distinctions. Therefore, though in the course of my analysis I have referred to the authorial texts as Jigme Lingpa's own statements, I have not invoked this concept of authorship when citing the treasure and pure vision texts. In view of the literary theory of recent decades, one might well question even this use of the concept of the author. Indeed, prior to any modern analysis, the Tibetan Buddhist concept of authorship was informed by the Buddhist concept of nonself (*anātman*), as Janet Gyatso has shown in her study of Jigme Lingpa's autobiographical writing, which displays an unstable and ultimately unresolved tension between the presentation of the authorial self and the fundamental doctrine of nonself.<sup>42</sup>

Despite such reservations, the concept of authorship is useful in the limited sense of distinguishing those texts that an author claims as his own compositions from those in which the matter of composition is more complex. I use the concept in this way for the *Longchen Nyintig* texts that are neither treasure nor pure vision, in order to distinguish the voice that Jigme Lingpa specifies as his own from the voices of the treasure texts, for which he makes no claim of authorship. This is not to suggest that there is a unitary intention behind all of the authorial texts, but that to avoid the concept of the author entirely is to overlook the question of whether the voices of visionary origin in a treasure collection are saying different things than the authorial voice of the treasure revealer.

### *Simultaneous and gradual in the Longchen Nyintig*

The translations presented here bring together for the first time a range of treasure, pure vision, and authorial literature from a single author and treasure revealer, creating the opportunity for an exploration of the ways in which these types of text differ in their doctrinal content and in their style. One significant difference emerges when the texts are examined in the light of the distinction between simultaneous and gradual. The treasure and pure vision texts tend toward the simultaneous approach, while gradualist elements and attempts to reconcile gradualism with simultaneism are to be found more often in the authorial texts.

These texts as a whole throw light on the nature of the general tensions between simultaneist and gradualist approaches in the Seminal Heart that are evident from the very earliest Seminal Heart texts. The interpretative strategies employed in the *Longchen Nyintig* to reconcile these tensions can also be traced back to precedents in the Seminal Heart tradition and elsewhere. Jigme Lingpa, drawing on a wealth of previous material, uses the technique of distinguishing between different levels of ability in practitioners of the Buddhist path in order to justify the coexistence of simultaneism and gradualism in the *Longchen Nyintig*. As we saw above, this distinction may be used in various ways. It may simply justify the coexistence of two different but valid kinds of practice by stating that one is for simultaneist types and one for gradualist types. Alternatively, the distinction may be used to argue for the superiority of a simultaneist form of practice, superior because it is only for those of the highest ability. In both of these cases the proportion of practitioners who are of the highest ability is not particularly important.

On the other hand the distinction in ability may also be used to justify the teaching of a gradualist path, in which case the proportion of those of the highest ability becomes very important. Those who use the distinction to justify the gradualist path agree with those who use it to justify the simultaneist path in asserting that the latter is only for those of the highest ability. They differ in the question of how many practitioners may be said to be of that category. For those defending the gradualist approach, there are very few, perhaps in this degenerate age none at all, who are suitable for the simultaneist approach. This is the position that Jigme Lingpa tends toward in his authorial texts in the *Longchen Nyintig*. As I will show in the following chapters, he attempts to teach a gradualist path without contradicting the voice of the treasure texts, which speak in the language of simultaneism.