

# H-Net Reviews

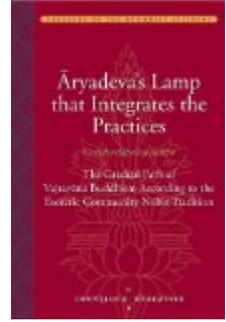
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Christian K. Wedemeyer. *Āryadeva's Lamp That Integrates the Practices (Caryāmelāpakapradīpa): The Gradual Path of Vajrayāna Buddhism according to the Esoteric Community Noble Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. xxx + 826 pp. \$62.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9753734-5-3.

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Published on H-Buddhism (September, 2009)

Commissioned by Daniel A. Arnold



## Āryadeva's Secret Lamp of the Noble Tradition

This volume belongs to a very important and ambitious publication series: the Tengyur Translation Initiative, itself part of the larger Treasury of the Buddhist Sciences series of the America Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University. This series has the primary purpose of publishing English translations, editions, and studies of the texts belonging to the bsTan-'gyur ("Tengyur"), the division of the Tibetan Buddhist canon that comprises exegetical and systematic treatises of the sort generally styled "*śāstra*" in Sanskrit discourse. Along with the bKa'-'gyur ("Kangyur"), which gathers the Buddhist works traditionally represented as preserving the word of the Buddha, this collection has been handed down to us thanks to the amazing and systematic work of preservation undertaken by the Tibetans during the eighth to fourteenth centuries CE, during which time hundreds of Tibetan scholars, assisted by Indian pandits, undertook the translation of the complex Indian Buddhist scriptural tradition into Tibetan. These translations are among the most important sources for studying Indo-Tibetan Buddhist literature, as many of the texts preserved in it (mainly belonging to the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools of Buddhism) are lost in Sanskrit and survive only in their Tibetan translations.

It should be observed, however, that over the last ten years the field of Buddhist studies has very fortunately been greatly enhanced thanks to the discovery and publication of several Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts that had

been considered lost until recently. Many texts that were forgotten on the obscure shelves of various libraries in India, Nepal, Tibet, Central Asia, and Europe have been brought to light, edited and published by several scholars, thus supplementing the collection of Tibetan translations.

The *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* (*CMP*) of Āryadeva, one of the most important scriptures in the history of medieval Buddhism, is one of the texts thus to have become available again in Sanskrit. Before the year 2000 this work was available only in its Tibetan translation, but for this 2007 publication, Christian K. Wedemeyer has been able to collate, besides its Tengyur editions, two different Sanskrit witnesses—one of which was also edited by Jannardan Shastri Pandey, published in 2000 by the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, and the other found in the Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyan collection in Patna. The work Wedemeyer has based on these recently available Sanskrit witnesses represents a great step forward in our understanding of the history of esoteric Buddhist thought.

The *CMP* was considered by later Tibetan exegesis as belonging to the system of the "Noble (Ārya) Tradition of the Esoteric Community" (*gsang 'dus 'phags lugs*), which was transmitted by a group of authors who commented in a distinctive way on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*; in particular, these commentators upheld a gradual approach

to the Buddhist process of the yogic cultivation of enlightenment, in contrast to the other main tradition of *Guhyasamāja* exegesis, which is known as *Jñānapāda* (*ye shes zhabs lugs*) from the name of its principal exponent. Due to its revelatory character, one of the principal problems in the study of medieval Buddhist literature is with the dating of the texts and the identification of the authors. In the case of this text, such difficulties turn on the fact that the Āryadeva who authored the *CMP* is identified by the Tibetan tradition with the third-century Madhyamaka of the same name, who is taken to have been a student of Nāgārjuna and to have written the characteristically Madhyamaka treatise *Catuḥśataka*. By analyzing all the sources that contain quotations from the *CMP* as well as the sources cited therein, Wedemeyer establishes the temporal limits for the formation of this text, arriving at the conclusion that it was written between the second half of the ninth century and the eleventh century.

This American scholar does not, however, simply dismiss the traditional Tibetan chronology by taking it to represent either confusion on the part of the Tibetans or literary fraud, as had been done by such previous modern interpreters as Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Benoytosh Bhattacharya, S. B. Dasgupta, David Seyfort Ruegg, David Snellgrove, and Giuseppe Tucci. Instead, he sees the traditional identification of the two Āryadevas as reflecting a legitimization strategy—a way to confer spiritual authority and charisma on the esoteric Vajrayāna literature, which is thus represented as continuous with a prestigious tradition of Madhyamaka thought. This approach to legitimization is fully attested in Tibet in the *gter-ma* scriptural revelation, but is also familiar from the antecedent Indian Buddhist literature. Such an approach represents a widespread Buddhist strategy for dealing with scriptural innovations, and Wedemeyer provides us with a broad diachronic description of this narrative model, tracing its prototypes back to second-century Indian Buddhist scriptures.

Wedemeyer's thorough analysis opens up a problem in the hermeneutics of the Buddhist tantric tradition. As always in history, the relationship with the past is not only cognitive but also expressive or performative; as in all other civilizations, then, Tibetans have created, interpreted, mythologized, and valorized the past according to a precise agenda. The task of the modern interpreter is to contextualize their historical representation, and to characterize the internal logic of the mechanisms involved in their narratives, rather than facilely taking the traditional representations to reflect a simple contrast between the primitive, superstitious, ahistorical "Oriental" vision and

the objective, analytic, materialistic orientation of Western historiography.

It is thus in terms of the internal logic of a complex legitimization strategy that one should understand the traditional Tibetan identification of the esoteric "Nāgārjuna," "Āryadeva," and "Candrakīrti"—the primary and principal authorities of the tantric "Noble Tradition of Esoteric Community"—with the well-known Madhyamaka philosophers of the same names, who all lived centuries earlier than the dates Wedemeyer establishes for the *CMP*. In his introduction, Wedemeyer outlines the most important writings of the thinkers so named, together with those authored by other famous yogins of this tradition (such as Nāgabodhi and Śākyamitra), providing a broad overview of a whole corpus of relevant literature and contextualizing the role of the *CMP* within the hermeneutical parameters thereof. Wedemeyer then offers a detailed analysis of the content of the *CMP*, describing the subject matter of each chapter and providing accurate insight into its structure.

Following the pattern (typical of Indian śāstric literature) of a dialogue between a student and his mentor, the text is divided into eleven chapters, corresponding to the basic schema of the *Pañcakrama*, integrating the esoteric practices of the *gSang 'dus 'phags lugs* tradition. The first chapter examines the nature of enlightenment and the superiority of the gradual yogic method of the five stages laid out in the *Pañcakrama*. This chapter's analysis thus offers a perspective on the dispute concerning the relative superiority of the "gradualist" and "subitist" approaches—a dispute that represents a crucial issue in this phase of Buddhist thought, both in esoteric and exoteric traditions, as would be reflected in the diffusion of Buddhist thought in Tibet during the eighth and ninth centuries and in the following periods of formation of the different schools.

The next three chapters concern the body, speech, and mind practices of isolation, corresponding to the first two stages (*vajrajāpa* and *cittaviśuddhi*) of the *Pañcakrama*. The fifth chapter deals with the consequences of *karma*, while the sixth and seventh chapters respectively concern the two truths, *saṃvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya*, which correspond to the *svādiṣṭhāna* (self-consecration) and *abhisambodhi* (higher knowledge) of the third and fourth stages of the *Pañcakrama*. The eighth chapter describes the state of "unlocated nirvāṇa," coextensive with the state of union (*yuganaddha*), the final stage of the *Pañcakrama*. The last three chapters focus on the practice (*caryā*) of enlightenment,

also called *vratacārya*, or “practice of spiritual discipline.” This is the erotic practice of union with a woman, and is traditionally taken to represent one of the most efficacious and essential methods of yogic advancement in all the esoteric Buddhist traditions. Āryadeva divides it into three phases (with elaboration, without elaboration, and completely without elaboration), and his analysis represents an interesting synthesis, by late medieval Buddhist yogins, of Indian erotic *kāmasāstra* literature techniques, elements of Hindu Śākta Śaiva culture, and specifically Buddhist philosophical tenets.

Wedemeyer has produced critical editions of the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation of the *CMP*. As mentioned above, the edition of the Sanskrit is based on two different manuscripts. One, presumably the older (consisting of a manuscript written on palm leaves in an old Newari script), is divided in two halves: one preserved in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and the other in the National Archives of Nepal. As Wedemeyer recounts, the two halves fit together perfectly and should be considered as belonging to the same text, which may have been split when the Indian pandit who catalogued the text in its original place in Kathmandu, for unknown reasons, took half of the manuscript with him when he went back to India. Wedemeyer, although perfectly aware of the unity of this codex, nevertheless refers to its two halves as Mss A and B. This

decision might cause some confusion for the reader. The other Sanskrit manuscript, designated C in Wedemeyer’s edition, is preserved as a microfilm in the Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyan Collection in Patna. The microfilm preserves photographs, taken by Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyan and Gedun Choepel at Ngör Monastery in Tibet in 1930, of a manuscript that might date to the fourteenth century. Wedemeyer’s edition of the Tibetan translation is based on the four texts preserved in the major Tengyur redactions: sDe-dge, Cone, sNar-thang, and Peking.

Both the editions and Wedemeyer’s English translation of the text are very accurate and exact. The English translation is based chiefly on the Sanskrit, and the divergences between the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation are indicated in the majority of cases. The choice of English vocabulary, though not always convincing in my opinion—as in the cases of “superficial reality” for *saṃvṛtisatya*, “phantasm” for *māyā*, and “prototype” for *prakṛti*—shows the great effort the author has made in rendering in the most precise manner the meaning of the text, and reflects care in the search for insightful semantic choices.

In conclusion, Wedemeyer’s work is a very valuable contribution not only to the academic study of the Buddhist tantric tradition, but also to the general public’s comprehension of this still poorly understood and little studied phase of Buddhist literature.

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**Citation:** Giacomella Orofino. Review of Wedemeyer, Christian K., *Āryadeva’s Lamp That Integrates the Practices (Caryāmelāpakapradīpa): The Gradual Path of Vajrayāna Buddhism according to the Esoteric Community Noble Tradition*. H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. September, 2009.

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