

CANDRAKIRTI AND THE BUDDHIST MIND SCIENCES:
A TRADITION-NEUTRAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

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The intelligent person should accept whatever he sees as well explained from whatever source, by thinking of it as if it were his own. Such truth does not abide exclusively with anyone, since it is equally objective for all, and since it is free from attachment and aversion, as sunlight, for instance, works impersonally for everyone with sight.

--- *Catuhshatakātika*, 12, ad.k.300.

This pearl from the seventh century Madhyamika genius Candrakirti reflects the cumulative wisdom of centuries of classical Indian debate over how to sustain a tradition-neutral system for cultivating enlightened knowledge and compassionate agency. Although his consensus-based therapeutic philosophy and pedagogy drew far less notice than the more tradition-specific systems of Bhavaviveka, Dharmakirti, Kumarila and Shankara, I believe that it gave voice to a progressive anti-tradition of critical openness and practical inclusiveness that was and is quintessentially Indian. The later Tibetan interpreters of Buddhism clearly thought as much when out of the many cultural treasures they inherited from Buddhist India they chose Candrakirti's therapeutic philosophy to serve as the jewel in the crown of their monastic university curriculum. Given the Tibetans' post-Samye policy of fidelity to the pedagogic traditions of Nalanda, one could argue that their eventual standardization of Candrakirti studies indicates a post-7th century consensus-shift toward his tradition-neutral methodology. In any case, Candrakirti's distinctive philosophy offers what I believe is a key alternative to tradition-specific strategies for advancing awareness of India's past, present and future contributions to world civilization. For now, I will characterize this approach by paraphrasing a comment

Bob Thurman has made vis a vis Buddhism: Indian civilization will achieve the broadest possible recognition and impact by not being Indian. Put in this way, I am aware that such an approach would seem to run counter to the aims of this conference, not to mention to the culture-specific methodological bias of post-modern scholarship. In the context of the inner sciences in particular, I am aware that the very idea of a tradition-neutral approach must inevitably raise the red flags of scientism and objectivism, especially given the recent scientific reduction and appropriation of Indian yoga and meditation techniques in the name of the Western health sciences. Consequently, I must preface my thoughts on how we can help advance Western understanding of the Indic inner sciences with some methodological remarks.

First of all, I am not advocating a tradition-neutral approach as the one true methodology for all purposes, but only as a useful alternative to complement tradition-specific intellectual and historical research in certain areas like the inner sciences. How our history books and textbooks will depict Indian civilization depends on a process of cross-cultural exchange taking place all around us as we speak, at every level and in every domain of every society on the planet. In the end, the matter will be decided as much by what people in all walks of life think and do as by what groups of specialists like us say. Civilizations like languages are not lifeless artifacts whose roots can be simply indexed and filed for reference, but living, breathing ways of being human, with all the peculiar strengths and weakness of the individuals and societies which embody them. In this sense, I submit that perhaps the most powerful argument for the proper recognition and integration of India's contribution is based on the obvious benefits Indian civilization has and can offer as one response to the complex challenges of civilized life.

A tradition-neutral strategy would attempt to make these benefits obvious to members of non-Indic civilizations like the West in much the same way that the virtues of a text are conveyed by translation. Of course, I hardly need to mention in this company that this is where we run up against the most difficult methodological obstacles. To reference the Indic sources of the route I take through those obstacles, I turn now to Candrakirti and the context of his methodological contribution.

Among other things, Candrakirti was heir to a five century-long debate over the authority of tradition and expertise, a debate that occupied the greatest Buddhist and Vedist minds of the classical era. Prompted by the Mahayana Buddhist move to rationalize and democratize Vedic priestly traditions like linguistics and yoga, the debate was central to an extended and open public exchange that refined the golden age of classical India. Thanks to this exchange, Puranic Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism took shape as mainstream traditions which co-evolved to culturally unify the ethnolinguistic and social diversity of the subcontinent and its satellites. In its central debate, the dominant apologetic paradigms of Dignaga and Vatsyayana shared a covertly tradition-neutral strategy: rationalizing the authority of their respective textual-practical traditions by appealing to the obvious healing benefits of Buddhist psychology and Ayurvedic medicine. Eventually this strategy would break down where the authority of the validating standards in the debate, the constructed language of formal logic and the experiential procedure of yogic practice, were called into question. Given the radical epistemologic critiques articulated by Nagarjuna and Gaudapada, Indian thinkers of all schools were forced increasingly to question the foundations presumed to ground the supposedly neutral standards of classical thought and practice, let's call them: the mind-

independent objectivity of language; and the matter-independent self-evidence of consciousness. Elsewhere I have compared this crisis to the crisis of modern scientific theory and method reflected in the post-modern debate over the physical and social science paradigms of objectivism and deconstructionism.¹ As I see it, the Indian version of this crisis prompted both Buddhist and Vedist thinkers to turn toward non-dualism in search of an overtly tradition-neutral means of validating an intertraditional consensus practice. Bhavaviveka and Dharmapala, Gaudapada and Bhartrhari respectively reflect the objectivist and constructivist trends in the convergent tradition of Indian non-dualism, setting the stage for the radical non-dualisms of Candrakirti and Shankara. As in the dialectic of analytic and hermeneutic philosophies in the post-modern West, the movement of Indian non-dualism increasingly seemed to avoid grand synthetic traditions in favor of a sort of commonsense transcendentalism based on a systematic critique of reification, whether cast as a therapeutic or as a hermeneutic philosophy of language. To extend the cross-cultural mapping, one could add to frequent comparisons linking Candrakirti to Wittgenstein a tentative link between Shankara and Ricoeur. Like Wittgenstein, Candrakirti critiqued all foundationalist and essentialist moves to ground language either objectively on public objects or subjectively on private self-evidence, insisting that it can only work when we suspend critical analysis and accept unexamined the social conventions of everyday life.² In this sense, Indian non-dualism reflects the eventual triumph of the linguistic philosophy of the three sages, universalized by the conventionalism and de-reificationism of the Buddhist linguistic tradition that passed

¹ Loizzo J, *Candrakirti and the Moon Flower of Nalanda: Objectivity and Self Correction in India's Central Therapeutic Philosophy of Language* (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 2001)

² Loizzo J, *The Reason Sixty Commentary (Yuktisastika) of Candrakirti: Translation with Comparative Philosophical Introduction* (Columbia University AIBS Series, forthcoming 2002)

through Nagarjuna to Candra the Grammarian, and thence via Bartrhari to Shankara and via Buddhapalita to Candrakirti. The translation strategy I prefer, as part of a Candrakirit-style tradition-neutral approach to Indic studies, is based on his radical conventionalist view of language. Adapting a term from the early Chinese Buddhist translation effort, in which novel Buddhist concepts were matched with their closest indigenous analogues, I call this translation strategy *context-matching*.

Context-matching works by juxtaposing one system of terms and practices taken from a given context in a source culture against another family of terms and practices found in the most similar usage contexts in the target culture. For instance, terms and practices from the Buddhist mind sciences might be matched with analogues in Western psychotherapy or psychiatry, while the language and ethos of the Bodhisattvayana might be more felicitously juxtaposed with analogues from the Christian humanist or existentialist tradition. Given Candrakirti-Wittgenstein comparisons, this strategy squares with the Wittgensteinian dictum that the common behavior of humankind is the system of reference by means of which we translate an unknown language. It helps to remember here that this dictum presupposes his non-dualistic contextualism of language as actual usage in social context, *To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life*. Apart from this cross-cultural comparison, the fact that Candrakirti felt free to substitute the conventions of Nyaya logic and epistemology for their Buddhist analogues, for instance, suggests that he saw them as interchangeable systems despite their divergent sources. Still more important for our purposes, the fact that he felt free to use Nayayika terms while clearly rejecting their traditional foundationalist-essentialist connotations suggests that he saw any and all conventions of language as fair game for translating Buddhist

insights and methods into tradition-neutral terms suited to India's pluralistic mainstream. Hardly novel for the Buddhist tradition, Candrakirti and his interpreters saw this approach as true to Nagarjuna's conventionalist pedagogy as well as the Buddha's own use of Pali peppered with technical terms from the Vedic tradition. As an extension of the radical conventionalisms of Candrakirti and Wittgenstein, context-matching is meant to avoid the excesses of both objectivist (neo-Kantian) and constructivist (deconstructionist) translation programs. In fact, more than simply avoiding them, it would permit a complete context-mapping of objectivist and constructivist systems of theory and practice along a continuum of cognitive-practical styles arrayed to match the continuous curriculum developed in the gradualist pedagogic traditions that eventually coalesced around Buddhist and Vedist non-dualism. A lightning survey of Buddhist pedagogy after Candrakirti may help explain what I mean.

Once the de-reifying philosophical therapy Candrakirti refined had effectively purged the divergent systems of Buddhist Realism and Idealism of their competing foundationalist and essentialist truth-claims, subsequent generations could more readily align these systems along a pedagogic gradualism meant to lead the reifying mind from naive realism through critical realism and constructivism, eventually culminating in radical non-dualism. Refined by Candrakirti's Centrist successors at Nalanda, from Shantideva and Jnanapada to Kamalashila and Atisha, this gradualism was transplanted into the Tibetan university, with its curricular progression from Sarvastivada Realism, Sautrantika Logic and Epistemology and Vijñānavāda Idealism through the hybrid non-dualism of Sautrantika and Vijñānavāda-Madhyamika up to the radical non-dualism of Candrakirti's Prasāngika-Madhyamika. This incredible academic achievement, all but

inconceivable to the post-modern Western academy, was eventually replicated in the still more difficult esoteric domain of the Indian Tantras. The pellucid syncretic curriculum of the Kalacakra tradition arrayed all liberative knowledge and expertise along a continuum from the natural sciences and human sciences up to its alternative science of cultural evolution. Given this elegant and comprehensive gradualist tradition, a context-mapping tradition neutral approach to Indic studies would free us from the merely reactive stance of defending the value of Indian civilization to the more proactive stance of targeting problem areas in Western civilization for the translation of novel Indic contributions whose value would be blatantly obvious to all those who feel the problem. The virtues of a proactive approach may be especially appreciated by this audience of scholar-teachers, in that helping mainstream Westerners recognize the contribution of Indian civilization may be likened to trying to teach a cell-phone armed and cable-addicted gang of ADD teens the intangible value of Upanasadic non-dualism. On a more serious note, without this being an accepted approach to Indic studies, more or less successful examples of this process already exist in the domain of the inner sciences. John Kabat-Zinn's work teaching Buddhist vipassana practice in the pain clinic at UMass Medical Center has brought mindfulness meditation into the lives of thousands of Americans who otherwise might have seen little value in Indic civilization.³ Mark Epstein has done something similar for many mainstream users of Western psychotherapy, not to mention their therapists.⁴ If Ken Zysk's take on the roots of Indian medicine is true, the role the Buddhist monastic tradition appears to have played in helping to systematize Indian medicine may have been conducive to the acceptance and spread of Buddhism in India,

³ Kabat-Zinn J, *Full Catastrophe Living* (Bantam, 1990)

⁴ M Epstein, *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* (Knopf, 1996).

despite its being a non-Vedist, non-indigenous tradition. Interestingly, an Indian Buddhist doctor's treatment of Srong-btsan sGam-po's queen was decisive in the Tibetan King's recognition of the value of Indian Buddhist civilization. This helps explain His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice that importing Tibetan medicine may benefit the West not only directly but also indirectly by alerting us to the value of Buddhist civilization. (A piece of advice that is one of the prime reasons for our being here at Menla.) This is only one of the ways in which the Tibetan Buddhist tradition lends the weight of history to the tradition-neutral approach I am presenting. Another is that, as guardians of the most developed tradition of Buddhist gradualism, Tibetan scholar-practitioners preserve the full spectrum of the Buddhist map of Indic knowledge and expertise. This is relevant even to scholar-practitioners of Vedic, Puranic and Tantric Hinduism since the Buddhist public educational system produced the most universalized and systematized version of Indian civilization and this version can act as a sort of interface linking the Vedist traditions they co-evolved with to the secular knowledge and practice systems of the modern West.

Given my own interdisciplinary research and clinical experience along these lines, of course, I have gradually been sensitized to the many conceptual and practical pitfalls such a tradition-neutral approach entails. Given the historical and methodological background I have surveyed, in what follows I will try to show how these pitfalls can be avoided using an interdisciplinary method based on context-matching, making a proactive, tradition-neutral approach to Indic studies a viable alternative.

Among the many pitfalls to be avoided in a tradition-neutral approach, the first and most serious is the false generalization syndrome that comes of imprecise context-

matching. Broadly comparing the Buddhist inner sciences (*adhyatmavidya*) to the Western cognitive or mind sciences is a common source of confusion, whether based on incomplete knowledge of the Buddhist tradition or on superficial familiarity with the Western mind sciences. Very often comparisons are drawn between modern empirical method in the physical sciences and the reliance on reason and evidence prescribed in the abhidharma tradition. Generalizations based on this matching quickly break down in discussing the ethical or meditative aspects of Buddhist theory and practice, especially when the theory and practice paradigm in question comes from Mahayana traditions, be they exoteric or esoteric. Even narrow comparisons of early Buddhist physical medicine or psychology with the Western health or mind sciences overlooks the fact that the prime analytic language in the Indian sciences is linguistics not mathematics, while their prime practical paradigm is yogic self-regulation not mechanics. This means that Buddhist medicine is a first-person or inside-out n=2 qualitative science of mind/body self-healing for which there is no real equivalent in modern Western medicine.⁵ Likewise, Buddhist psychology is an inside-out, n=2 system for the intersubjective replication of linguistically communicated insights, under experiential conditions that include lifelong education in and daily practice of techniques of ethical self-restraint and meditative self-regulation.

There are several reasons why most clinicians who take a tradition-neutral approach to the Indic mind sciences are working toward a context-matching of Buddhist theory and practice with Western psychotherapy. Unlike brain science or experimental psychology, psychotherapy is one of few Western settings in which individuals are taught

⁵ Loizzo J, Blackhall L: Traditional Alternatives as Complementary Sciences: The Case of Indo-Tibetan Medicine. *Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine* 4:311-319, 1998.

through a first-person, intersubjective exchange to cultivate greater self-knowledge and self-control. Of course, the context of psychotherapy differs from that of the Indic mind sciences in many ways, some of which are cultural while others stem from its origins as a medical treatment for specific pathologies. We owe the modern Western tradition of psychotherapy to two accidents of history. First, when Freud completed his neuroscience fellowship under Brucke, there were no neuroscience positions available in the Austrian or German university systems. Second, in Freud's day neuroscience had not progressed far enough for him to apply it to clinical practice using accepted scientific theories and methods. Consequently, in developing his new science he was forced to rely on qualitative analytic traditions from linguistics, aesthetics, philosophy and introspectionist psychology; to accept n=2 intersubjective validation instead of standard statistical validation procedures; and to concoct an optimal learning environment by instruction and daily practice in techniques that enhance relaxation, attention and memory, honesty, confidence and self-discipline.

Even granted the context-matching between Buddhist psychology and Western psychotherapy, however, more pitfalls abound. All too often a possible context-match is taken as a final translation, rather than a tentative point of departure. Sweeping comparisons and pat distinctions can both belie the baffling complexity of the task. On neither side of the proposed match do we find a monolithic entity. Which system of therapeutic language and practice do we compare with which system of meditative theory and practice? There are 225 licensed types of psychotherapy in the U.S. alone. Psychoanalysis itself has been the subject of dozens of interpretations and revisions, none of which has been able to reconcile or integrate its rival paradigms. The challenge is

orders of magnitude greater on the Indic side, where prehistoric yogic and meditative systems arose from obscure origins; differentiated into a whole spectrum of rival traditions and schools; evolved over several historical eras; and infiltrated almost every civilization in Asia. In any case, how can comparisons with Western psychotherapies ever lead to clear recognition of the distinctive contribution of culturally and historically divergent Indic mind sciences? Psychotherapy is a medical treatment, not a spiritual discipline. It presupposes a mechanistic reduction of mind and life in stark contrast with the Indian tradition of integral transcendentalism.

In my view, Mark Epstein and others have made the most promising start by comparing classical Freudian analysis with Theravada Buddhist theory and practice. Both traditions are critical of theistic conceptions of self and world and attempt to teach individuals greater self-knowledge and self-control by sharing the insight that the mind and its energies are conditioned by instinct and habit in ways that can be exposed and unlearned. In addition, Freud's fundamental method of maintaining equipoised attention has obvious similarities to mindfulness practice, both descriptively and in terms of their neurophysiology. Finally, his attempt to extend the new science beyond its humble medical origins into a complete multidisciplinary science of mind revealed its intimate ties to the higher ethical intent and civilizing aims addressed in *Civilization and its Discontents*. From an Indic perspective, the attempt to find a match with the context of psychoanalysis is less strained in the case of the Buddhist mind sciences, since they assume a naturalistic, evolutionary psychology, are based on the therapeutic framework of the noble truths, and prescribe a therapeutic reeducation (to use Freud's term) aimed

at the cultivation of insight through scientific self-analysis, ethical self-discipline and conscious mind-body self-regulation.

Given this match of classical analysis with basic Buddhist mind science as an index, a quick survey of a tradition-neutral research and translation program indicates the enormity of the contributions to be reasonably expected from the Indic mind sciences. Such a program would help us proactively target for solution a series of intractable problems that have come to threaten the very existence of the psychoanalytic mind sciences. In particular, it would address four problems which have recently been used as grounds for questioning the scientific status and practical value of analytic psychotherapy. 1) There seems to be no way to reconcile the rival theories and practices of different analytic schools. 2) There seems to be no way to link analytic theory and practice to current developments in neuroscience. 3) Analytic therapies are too costly and labor intensive to be of practical value. 4) Analytic education and training is a culture-bound practice, a relic of no lasting value to scientific civilization. Although stated in terms of the analytic tradition, I believe these four problems are of immediate relevance to Western understanding of the Indic mind sciences and their contribution, since they are essentially the grounds on which Western scientists dismiss the scientific status and practical value of Indian yogic and meditative traditions. The remainder of my comments will be addressed to tradition-neutral solutions to these four problems.

1) Among the most complete and systematic maps of inner scientific theory and practice ever developed, the pedagogic gradualism of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist *lam-rim* (*pathakrama*) tradition allows for a step by step context-matching between Buddhist and Western analytic systems that makes child's play of what is impossible for the

contemporary analyst. Leaving aside ideas and skills that might be taught in the medical context, the gradualist map divides its pedagogic continuum into three sections, in which the corresponding systems of theory and practice respectively address: personal self-analysis and self-control; social self-analysis and social emotional self-regulation; cultural self-analysis and creative-passionate self-mastery. Correlated with Hinayana, Mahayana and Tantrayana traditions, the links to Vedic ritualism, Puranic devotionism and the Hindu Tantras are obvious. Less familiar although almost as blatant are the ties to individually focused classical analysis, interpersonally focused object-relations analysis and creatively-energetically focused Jungian and Riechian analysis. Beyond analytic therapies, the matching could be extended to map the range of behavioral therapies using similar variables of learning focus and technique. While these ties suggest only a very general human cross-mapping of life learning contexts, not an identity of theory or practice, they do serve to suggest how the sophisticated mind science gradualisms of Candrakirti, Shankara and their heirs could shed invaluable light on how Western psychotherapies may be integrated and reconciled.

2) The problem in linking analytic systems to current neuroscience stems from the fact that psychotherapy is a qualitative, inside-out science of the human nervous system while modern brain science is a quantitative, outside-in science. The Indic mind sciences can serve as a missing link between the two approaches, in that their aims and methods generally match with those of psychotherapy, while their descriptive schemas and mechanistic models are precise enough to be juxtaposed with neuroscientific research. First of all, the Indic mind sciences help resolve an apparent conflict between analytic therapies and current learning-based behavioral neuroscience. Instincts and habits

deemed to be immutable contents of the unconscious in analysis are viewed as potentially accessible and transformable in the Indic sciences given the proper yogic and meditative techniques. The general concept of meditative and yogic practice as a continuum of learning that yields knowledge and control of deeper and deeper mind-body structures and processes in fact corresponds to contemporary learning models of brain systems as plastic or malleable at every level. At the same time, the need for more advanced systems of psychotherapy to employ more potent mind-altering tools such as positive social emotions or sexual imagery and experience, makes perfect sense when these are mapped alongside the more advanced techniques of non-dual analysis, devotional contemplation and Tantric practices. In fact, yogic models of how such techniques remove obstacles and prompt learning help reconcile analytic views of technique as a means to overcome stress-reactive resistances and facilitate learning with current neuroscience models of how the brain de-stresses and learns. Remarkably, the three depths of learning recognized in the Indic mind sciences can be correlated, using current research on various meditation techniques, with the three-stage matching of Buddhist and Western systems mapped above as well as with three-stage models of how the brain learns.⁶

3) From an Indic point of view, the time and labor intensive nature of analytic therapy can be readily explained and remedied by understanding that self-knowledge and self-control require an interdisciplinary educational system in which one-on-one teaching is the exception. An artifact of the medicalization of self-knowledge in psychotherapy, its prohibitive cost can be easily reduced by complementing individual meetings with classroom instruction and daily homework practice. This Indic contribution has already

⁶ Loizzo J, *Psychotherapy and Meditation: Stress, Allostasis and Enriched Learning*, in P Muskin ed., *Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Psychiatry* (American Psychiatric Association Press, 2000).

received some Western recognition thanks to the work of Epstein, Kabat-Zinn, Marsha Linehan⁷ and others, who have argued and shown that meditation instruction and group classes can speed the process of therapeutic learning, making otherwise intractable physical and personal problems more manageable than with conventional Western methods. To this end, I have tried to reproduce in my clinical work the complex balance of classroom and individual instruction, insight, meditative and lifestyle learning refined over the centuries in the Indo-Tibetan academic tradition.

4) Finally, as for the general scientific value of analytic education and training, the Indic mind science tradition offers strong support to the argument made by Bachelard, Ricoeur and others that the first-person, qualitative discipline of self-knowledge and self-control psychoanalysis offers represents perhaps the single most invaluable system of scientific self-correction in the West. Such arguments strike a deep chord in the Indic scientific tradition, where yogic self-analysis and self-regulation is viewed as the most crucial factor in the cultivation of enlightened social knowledge and compassionate social agency. The fact that we are in the position of having to counter the West's might-makes-right delusion of cultural superiority is in fact the proof of the effectiveness of this self-corrective discipline in insuring that the Indian science and technology remained under the enlightened guidance of its philosophical and ethical traditions. Here, the Indic traditions can offer the West a living pedagogic model of how to yoke all aspects of civilization to a sustainable vision of human life on this planet, based on a core discipline of cultivating enlightened human agency. This contribution would no doubt hold the greatest promise for a global renaissance of the most enlightened traditions of human civilization, married into a clearer more vital hybrid than any before.

⁷ Linehan's influential Dialectical Behavior Therapy is explicitly based on Zen insights and methods.

In conclusion I should say that I have found current attempts at matching the contexts of analytic therapies with those of Buddhist meditative therapeutics extremely helpful in my work teaching Westerners how to integrate Indic insights and practices into their personal healing, growth and life. After several generations of research on Indic meditative practices and their uses in medicine and psychotherapy, there is a large body of tradition-neutral scientific research to which we can point to help Westerners understand in more or less familiar terms how these practices work. With this as an opener, I have found doctors and patients are increasingly open to learning about Indic systems of self-healing and self-analysis in more tradition-specific terms. Having taught Indic medicine and Buddhist psychology in both academic and clinical settings, I can say that the nearly immediate practical benefits of a yoga or meditation practice provide a very powerful tradition-neutral way of introducing Westerners to Indic traditions as guardians of an invaluable and disarming alternative to the challenges of sustainable civilized living.