

UDC 294.3

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.71.60.031

## The Concept of Personality in the Teaching of Mādhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika in Tibetan Buddhism

**Sergei P. Nesterkin**

Doctor of Philosophy, Senior Researcher,  
Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies  
of the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
670047, 6, Sakh'yanovoi str., Ulan-Ude, Russian Federation;  
e-mail: sn3716@yandex.ru

The study was supported by a grant from the Russian Science Foundation No. 21-18-00074, <https://rscf.ru/project/21-18-00074/> “The Worlds of Mahayana Buddhism in the Context of World Civilizational Processes”.

### Abstract

This paper examines the distinctiveness of the interpretation of the concept of personality in the Buddhist religious and philosophical tradition, based on the example of the Teaching of Mādhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. The research was carried out using materials from classical Tibetan-language sources adopted by this school. It analyzes the Buddhist criticism of the concepts of personality in Indian religious and philosophical schools. Two main concepts of “non-Buddhists” are considered: (I) understanding the personality as (1) permanent, (2) unitary and (3) independent (Tib. *bdag ni rtag gcig rang dbang can gsum*); and (II) acceptance of personality conditioned by the “view of the disintegrating aggregates” (Skt. *satkāyadrṣṭi*; Tib. *'jig tshogs la lta ba*). It is noted that the types of acceptance of the “I” of a personality are divided into those acquired during life (“I” as permanent, unitary, independent) and innate (“I” as a substantively existing personality). Buddhists expose these views as erroneous and as hindering the attainment of complete liberation, and they put forward their own views. The paper concludes that the negation of personality in Buddhism must be understood in the context of the polemics of Buddhism with non-Buddhist religious and philosophical traditions. The objections of Buddhists are directed not against the principle of personality as such, but against the erroneous, in their opinion, understanding of personality developed in orthodox and unorthodox Indian spiritual traditions. Instead, Buddhist philosophers develop their own views of personality that are consistent with the path of attaining enlightenment.

### For citation

Nesterkin S.P. (2021) The Concept of Personality in the Teaching of Mādhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika in Tibetan Buddhism. *Kontekst i refleksiya: filosofiya o mire i cheloveke* [Context and Reflection: Philosophy of the World and Human Being], 10 (5A), pp. 284-296. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.71.60.031

### Keywords

Buddhist personology, philosophy of Buddhism, Gelug, Buddhism in Russia, personality, Prāsaṅgika.

## Introduction

The growth of interest in personological issues in recent years is largely due to the intensification of the processes of interreligious and cross-cultural interaction in modern society. This intensification has led to the erosion of traditional practices of personal identity and established mechanisms of the socialization of personality. These processes occur significantly in regions with a dominant tradition of Buddhism (in Russia – Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva), where traditional values and institutions are increasingly under pressure from the growing processes of globalization.

In the modern global world, the concepts of individual freedom and personal autonomy are firmly associated with Western religious and philosophical traditions and the practices rooted in these traditions. In Western philosophical and ideological discourse, the approach of non-Western civilizations to the issue of personality is often presented as being not very significant. Depending on the worldview of the researchers, this “fact” becomes the subject of value interpretation and is often viewed as a defect that determines the “otherness” of non-Western civilizations and their foreignness to the mainstream of civilization.

Personological issues, without a doubt, are one of the central themes in the philosophical discourse of Buddhism, and they are the main point of divergence between non-Buddhist Indian religious and philosophical schools and Buddhism [Kapstein, 2001; Pupysheva, 2015; Dessein, 1999; Duerlinger, 2003]. At the same time, attempts to properly understand of the principle of the “non-self of persons” (Skt. *pudgala-nairātmya*; Tib. *gang zag gi bdag med*), adopted in Buddhist philosophy, have led to a large number of erroneous interpretations in academic studies on Buddhism. A literal reading created Buddhism's reputation as a teaching that seeks to level the personality, up to its complete depersonalization (see, for example: [Ignatiev, 1991; Shokhin, 1997]).

Buddhists themselves resolutely reject the interpretation of the doctrine of the non-self of persons as a tenet of depersonalization up to a complete dissolution into some inert, immobile and impersonal *nirvāṇa*.

This work attempts to investigate the distinctness of the interpretation of the concepts of personality in the Buddhist religious and philosophical tradition. Because of the vastness of this topic, the study was limited to examining how personality is interpreted in the Gelug tradition, which has become widespread in Tuva. The research was carried out based on materials from classical Tibetan-language sources used in this school.

The question of a personality as a subject of liberation is of fundamental importance for the soteriology of Buddhism. It is determined based on the “middle view”, which excludes both the acceptance of an unchanging (eternal) personality and its complete absence.

In order to be free from the suffering of samsara, the personality must change. This excludes the acceptance of its basis as permanent, unchanging, eternal and substantial.

On the other hand, if we believe that there is no personality at all, then there will be no subject of liberation, there will be no subject who engages in good or bad deeds and reaps their fruits, and there will be no need for religious practice, etc.

This makes clear the significance of the Buddhist philosophers' debate about exactly what is the object of negation in the term “selflessness” (Tib. *bdag med*), what are the incorrect understandings of personality in non-Buddhist schools, and how personality should be understood in order to achieve liberation.

## Criticism of the Concepts of Personality in Indian Religious and Philosophical Schools

The personalological doctrine of Buddhism arose as a result of disputes on views regarding personality that developed in the orthodox religious and philosophical schools of Hinduism. We find a critical analysis of these views already in the Sūtras, where one can often find a full or partial listing of twelve, and sometimes more, terms that mark a personality as a subject of activity.

The concepts of personality developed in these schools are examined by Central Asian Buddhists in “siddhāntas” (Tib. *grub mtha'*) works on the history of philosophy (see, for example, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje<sup>1</sup>).

Buddhists usually use the word ātman (Tib. *bdag* – “I”, “selfhood”) for that which “non-Buddhist” (Skt. *tīrthika*, Tib. *mu stegs can*) schools designate (using various names) as a personality or a subject.

In contrast to the assertion of “non-Buddhist” teachings about the existence of an independent personality, Buddhists put forward the thesis about its absence (i.e., selflessness – Skt. *nairātmya*).

Analyzing the approaches to the analysis of personality (“I”) presented in the works of “non-Buddhists,” Buddhists propose that all of its described features can be reduced to three main ones. The “I” is: (1) permanent (eternal); (2) unitary; and (3) independent (Tib. *bdag ni rtag gcig rang dbang can gsum*). “Non-Buddhists (*tīrthika*) agree on the acceptance of the “I” that has three specific distinguishing features (Tib. *khyad chos*): [it is] a permanent, eternal thing (that is, something real, as opposed to the unreal and illusory); [it is] partless and unitary (Tib. *cha med kyi gcig pu*); and it is endowed with the independence of the one who rules over the skandhas (Tib. *phung po la bdag sgyur ba po'i rang can*)”<sup>2</sup>.

Buddhists believe that this view can be refuted. After all, that which is permanent cannot be a doer, a bearer of karma, feeling and reaping the fruits of his or her actions, for this presupposes the subject's changeability. And that which does not possess permanency, obviously, cannot be accepted as eternal.

They also refute the unitary quality and absence of parts of the subject, basing this on the fact that in everyday life we say: “I think. I walk...,” even though it is the mind that thinks, but the body that walks. Hence the conclusion is drawn that since the “I” is the mind and the “I” is the body, and the mind and the body are not the same; then, accordingly, there are at least two “I”s, or the “I” consists of at least at least two parts.

Further, “I” seems to have dominion over the body and the mind; but when, for example, the body is ill, one says: “I am sick.” The mind, with its various desires, also quite often carries away the “I,” even against the will of the “I.” Therefore, the “I” cannot be accepted as completely autonomous and independent of the body and mind. In addition, Candrakīrti and Gendun Tendar state that the “I” accepted by the Tīrthikas cannot be the object of the phenomenon of the “perception of ‘I’” (Tib. *ngar 'dzin*), because it is actually not perceived to be separate from the skandhas, as something special and different from them<sup>3</sup>. That which is refuted by *praṇāma* – valid (not deceived in its object) cognition,

<sup>1</sup> Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. *Grub mtha'i nram bzhags lhun po'i mdzas rgyan*. Changkya Rölpé Dorjé. Beautiful Adornment of Mount Meru: A Presentation of Indian Tenets. Xyl., 442 ff.

<sup>2</sup> dGe 'dun bstan dar. *dBu ma la 'jug pa spyi don*. (Gedun Tendar. General Meaning of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way') – Xyl., 162 ff. F. 149B.

<sup>3</sup> Zla ba grags pa. *dBu ma la 'jug pa rang 'grel dang bcas pa bzhugs so*. (Candrakīrti. Auto-commentary to the 'Supplement to the Middle Way') – Bibliotheca Buddhica IX. – St.-Petersburg, 1912. P. 243-244; dGe 'dun bstan dar ... 149A-B.

cannot be accepted as validly established (Tib. *tshad grub*)<sup>4</sup> and, accordingly, accepted as true. Therefore, the idea of a permanent, unitary and independent “I” should be characterized as false and refuted.

In addition to this concept of “I”, the “non-Buddhists” have other concepts that are more difficult to understand. In accordance with the classification accepted in scholastic literature, false views of the Self are subdivided into “coarse” (Skt. *sthūla*; Tib. *rags pa*) - easily established, and “subtle” (Skt. *sūkṣma*; Tib. *phra ba*) - found with great difficulty; as well as innate (Skt. *sahaja*; Tib. *lhan skyes*) - “existing in an individual’s continuum of consciousness with no beginning,” and acquired during life (Skt. *parikalpita*; Tib. *kun btags*), as a result of studying incorrect philosophical systems, etc.

According to Buddhist philosophers, in most Buddhist philosophical schools, the recognition of the “I” described above is considered a “coarse” false view, since there are others that are more “subtle” and difficult to understand. Further, views such as this are considered to be acquired during life, since newborn babies and animals are unlikely to reflect on their Self as permanent, unitary, and independent<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the philosophers themselves, who accept the concept of a Self like this, are unlikely to think of themselves in everyday life as permanent, unitary and independent<sup>6</sup>.

Five schools (Tib. *sde*) related to Vaibhāṣika, bearing the general name “Sammattīya” (Tib. *mang pos bkur pa*), such as Vātsīputrīya and others, refute only an “I” that is defined in this way (Könchog, 2005: 16). The adherents of these schools consider the recognition of such a Self to be innate. Prāsaṅgikas think of it as acquired, and call it “very coarse”, to distinguish from other concepts that they call “coarse”<sup>7</sup>.

As for other Buddhist schools, they (except for the Sammatīyas and Prāsaṅgikas), examining the Indian schools' view of the Self, consider as “subtle” and “innate” the recognition of the Self, defined by them as follows: “I am a person, independent and existing substantively (Skt. *pudgalasvatantradavyasat ātman*; Tib. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzes yod kyi bdag*).” Substance (Skt. *dravya*; Tib. *rdzes*) in Buddhist philosophy is usually defined as something that has a function (Tib. *bya ba*), is independently established (Tib. *rang rkya bar grub*) and serves as a “support” for other dharmas (formed by combining substances)<sup>8</sup>.

The introduction of the category of “substantively existing” into the definition of the Self separates this concept of personality from the one considered above. Such a personality will no longer be permanent, for only the impermanent can exist substantively.

The category of being unitary is also not admissible in relation to such an “I,” because unicity is established by reasoning, and the perception of Self also occurs in newborn babies and animals. The lack of parts also is not admissible in this view of Self; as, for example, through clairvoyance (Skt. *abhijñāḥ*), people may see their previous lives, perceiving these incarnations

<sup>4</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. *Grub mtha'i rnam bshad las thal rang gi skabs* (Jamyang Shepa. Explanation of Tenets. Chapter on Svatantrika and Prasaṅgika) – Xyl., 240 ff. F 42.

<sup>5</sup> Zla ba grags pa ... P. 243; Thu'u bkwan. *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long bzhugs so* (Thuken. The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems) – 'Bras spungs blo gsal gling dpe mdzod khang, 1992. P 34.

<sup>6</sup> mKhas grub rje. *Zab mo stong pa nyid gyi de kho na nyid rab tu gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos skal bzang mig 'byed ces bya ba bzhugs so*. (Khedrubje. A Treatise Completely Clarifying the Suchness of the Profound Emptiness, “Opening the Eyes of the Fortunate.”) – Xyl., 247 ff. F. 70A.

<sup>7</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. *Grub mtha'i rnam bshad* ... F. 81B)

<sup>8</sup> Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje ... F. 28B

as well as their current incarnation as a part of the whole of their Self: “All of these [incarnations] – they are I”<sup>9</sup>.

Such an “I”, notes Khedrup Je, perceives himself as master and lord (Tib. *jo bo*) of his body and mind, and this “I” perceives body and mind like slaves and servants (Tib. *khol bo*), obeying him. Thus, like a master, “I” is perceived to be independent (Tib. *rang rkya ba*) from one’s body and mind, distinct from them in its characteristics; and therefore, does not require something additional - body and mind - for cognition of itself. Accepted as such, the Self is “a personality, independent and substantively existing.” It is the object of the phenomenon of “self-perception”<sup>10</sup>.

Understood in this way, the Self can, according to the “non-Buddhists,” independently of anything else, carry out its functions: perform deeds, be the bearer of karma and reap its fruits, reincarnate, and merge with God, Brahman.

Revealing the invalidity of the idea of this Self, according to Buddhist philosophers, is much more difficult than the unacceptability of the first view described. Therefore, its recognition is called “subtle” and, since the perception of such a Self does not require the establishment of its features by reasoning, etc., innate (except for the Prāsaṅgikas, who consider it “coarse” and acquired during life).

The Prāsaṅgikas state that people who have never been involved with philosophy and have not contemplated their Self, its signs and so on, think and say: “I am sick. I am smart... My hand. My mind...”. Here “I” appears, on the one hand, as corresponding (Tib. *mthun*) and similar in features to the skandhas (“I am old. I am beautiful”); and, on the other hand, it is perceived as their master (“My body. My mind.”). Based on this, one can draw the conclusion that here we are dealing with an innate recognition of the Self as an independent and substantively existing personality - an innate form of “a view of the disintegrating aggregates” (Skt. *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*; Tib. *'jig tshogs la lta ba*), “accepted ‘I’” (“I walk. I think.”) and “accepted mine” (“My body. My mind.”)<sup>11</sup>. Gendun Tendar explains the name of this view in the following way: “Since [in fact] it has as its object the disintegrable and aggregated skandhas, then [it is called] “the view of the disintegrating aggregates”<sup>12</sup>.

The types of self-recognition of personality are divided into those acquired during life (the Self as permanent, unitary, independent) and innate (the Self as a substantively existing personality). The innate “view of the disintegrating aggregates” is considered by the followers of most Buddhist philosophical schools to be the type of ignorance that is the first of the twelve links of dependent arising, which is the main component that holds together the mechanism of samsaric functioning.

To dispose with the innate “I,” it is necessary, on the basis of rigorous proof, to show the invalidity of its object – the Self as an independent individual, a substantively existing ruler of the body and mind. According to Candrakīrti, if such an “I” existed, then it would have to differ in its characteristics from the skandhas. However, people say: “I was born at such a time. Now I am old. I am walking. I am strong. I think. I am smart...”. In these statements, the “I” appears as indistinguishable from the skandhas. “Therefore, there is no ‘I’ other than skandhas”<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, such an “I” cannot be the object of an innate “view of the disintegrating aggregates and accepting ‘I’” because there are people (and animals) who have no idea about such a Self but accept

<sup>9</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa'i mtha' dpyod (Jamyang Shepa. Decisive Analysis of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way') – Xyl., 442 ff. F. 416B-417A)

<sup>10</sup> mKhas grub rje ... F. 110A.

<sup>11</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Grub mtha'i nram bshad ... F. 816.

<sup>12</sup> dGe 'dun bstan dar ... F. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Zla ba grags pa ... F. 242.

“I” and “mine”<sup>14</sup>. It follows from this that the specified recognition of the Self is, according to the assessment of the Prāsaṅgikas, acquired during life and not innate.

However, this does not mean that there is no similar innate view, such as, for example, an innate recognition of the Self as an independent and substantively existing personality –that is, an innate form of “view of the disintegrating aggregates and accepting ‘I’” (according to the above reasoning of the Prāsaṅgikas)<sup>15</sup>.

However, this view, according to the Prāsaṅgikas, is “coarse,” for a more “subtle” one is also revealed. This “subtle” recognition of the Self is established by them within the framework of the general theory of *anātman* (absence of the Self) in connection with the analysis of the problem of the Self of dharma. Without going into consideration of this theory here, which would take up too much space, we note that the “subtle” *anātman* of the dharmas and the “subtle” *anātman* of the individual are considered by the Prāsaṅgikas to be the absence of the truly existent (Tib. *bden grub med pa*), which is equally found in both dharma and the individual. Things have the appearance of true existence (Tib. *bden snang*) but are empty of true existence (Tib. *bden stong*). This is what the Prāsaṅgikas consider to be the “subtle” *anātman* of the dharmas. The “subtle” *anātman* of the individual does not differ from it in any way. After all, more primary and “subtle,” Khedrup Je points out, is the individual's perception of himself as existing “of his own accord,” regardless of other phenomena<sup>16</sup>. Thus, Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen states: “The innate recognition of the ‘I’ is the perception of the mind as a sort of vibration (Tib. *dam sbring sbring*) in the center of the heart with the thought ‘I’”<sup>17</sup>.

According to Buddhists, the recognition of the Self according to the interpretation of “non-Buddhist” religious systems creates an incorrect mindset for the disciple. This leads to the accumulation of karma, which, at best, leads to birth in the higher realms and does not lead to liberation from samsara. The texts that develop the concept of *anātman* focus on proving the erroneousness of such views of the Self. At the same time, they put forward their own concepts of personality as a subject of liberation.

### The Interpretation of Personality in Buddhist Schools

An analysis of the sources has allowed us to establish six main interpretations of personality:

1) The Sammatīyas believe that if a personality that is distinct and independent of the skandhas and psycho-physical aggregates is refuted, then the group of five skandhas should be accepted as a personality.

Tibetan Prāsaṅgikas refute this interpretation, relying mainly on the ideas of Candrakīrti. If personality is the skandhas, then because there were other skandhas in past births, we would have to admit that in these past births they were other individuals, and not the self. But this contradicts the words of the Buddha that are often found in the Sūtras: “Then, in those times, I was that being.” One would also have to reject the law of karma, since the fruits of actions performed by one personality would be “experienced” by another.

In addition, the skandhas arise and are destroyed every moment, constantly changing. This means that the personality will also be different at every moment, devoid of an invariant core, which also leads

<sup>14</sup> Zla ba grags pa ... F. 242-243.

<sup>15</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa ... F. 81.

<sup>16</sup> mKhas grub rje ... F. 113B.

<sup>17</sup> bLo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. Byang chub lam gyi rim pa'i dmar khrid. (Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen. Essential Instructions for the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment.) – Xyl., 68 ff. F. 59A.

to the negation of the law of karma<sup>18</sup>. The foregoing leads the Prāsaṅgikas to the conclusion that the personality is not the group of five skandhas.

Some Vaibhāṣikas consider “only the aggregate” (Tib. *tshogs tsam*) of the skandhas as a personality. Just as a forest is not a separate tree but rather an aggregate of trees, so the personality is not five separate skandhas but their aggregate, a compound. However, the aggregate does not exist as something distinct from its parts. This brings us back to the already refuted idea of personality as the group of five skandhas.

2) Vātsīputrīyas consider “consciousness alone” (Tib. *sems gcig bu*) to be personality, but this idea is also refuted on the grounds that consciousness is characterized by instantaneousness and changeability; and this, as already mentioned, ultimately leads to the negation of the law of karma.

Thus, since the ideas of personality as distinct from the skandhas or identical to the skandhas or one of them (“consciousness only”) are refuted, then such a personality should be accepted as either absent or existing conditionally. If the first is true, then one will have to reject the idea of personality in general, as well as the law of karma, the path of liberation, etc. Moreover, it will be necessary to admit that there is no need to eat, drink, and engage in various activities, because there is no one who does these things or who needs any of this. In this case, Buddhist philosophers conclude, since the concept of the individual who exists substantively is refuted, then one should consider this individual to exist conditionally. So, for example, no one will deny that the human body exists. However, it exists only in connection with and in relation to its parts and is not found outside and apart from them.

3) The Kashmiri (Tib. *kha che ba*) Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas, “following authoritative texts,” accept the continuum (Skt. *santāna*; Tib. *rgyud*) of skandhas as a personality. Here we mean that the continuum of the moments of the existence of skandhas serves as the “basis for accepting” the conditionally existing individual, “the basis for naming” the term “individual.” Although the skandhas are constantly changing, and during reincarnation some skandhas are replaced by others, the flow of moments of their existence is not interrupted and remains the same. The Prāsaṅgikas refute the acceptability of the dharma of “birth” not only in an absolute sense, but also in terms of relative truth. Since the term continuum is given to the form of existence of dharmas characterized by the fact that the previous moments of dharma give rise to subsequent ones that are distinct from each other, then the Prāsaṅgikas refute the possibility of continuum even in the relative plane. If the idea of continuum is inadmissible, then all the more so should one refute anything existing in connection and in relation to it.

4) Followers of Sautrāntika and Vijñānavāda, “following the evidence,” as well as followers of Yogācāra-Mādhyamaka-Svatantrika and most of the supporters of the ideas of Bhāviveka (the founder of Svatantrika), consider “mental consciousness,” or “consciousness (conceivable) by the mind” – *manovijñāna* (Tib. *yiḍ kyi rnam shes*) to be an individual, because, in their opinion, it is the *vijñāna* that receives the birth into [new] existence.

Prāsaṅgikas also regard this idea as unacceptable. After all, when one enters the trance state of *samāhita* or its special type - the *samāpatti* of cessation (Tib. *'gog snyoms*) - the psychic elements and consciousness are completely absent. Consequently, while staying in such states, there will be no *manovijñāna* and, accordingly, kleśas and karma.

5) Followers of Vijñānavāda, “following the authoritative texts,” and some followers of Mādhyamaka-Svatantrika consider *ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) to be an individual.

<sup>18</sup> mKhas grub rje ... F. 105A-B.

Prāsaṅgikas refute the possibility of the existence of *ālaya-vijñāna* even in a relative sense, believing that this term in the Sūtras is conventionally called *śūnyatā* - devoid of inherent essence, etc.<sup>19</sup>. In addition, since *ālaya-vijñāna* belongs to a category of consciousness, and consciousness, together with mental elements, is absent in the trance state of *samāhita*, the problem arises again: where are the kleśas, karma, and so on at this time? Supporters of *manovijñāna* and *ālaya-vijñāna* argue that during this period only “coarse” consciousness is absent, but on the other hand there is “subtle” consciousness in the form of wisdom that directly knows the absolute<sup>20</sup>. This wisdom is characterized as undefiled (Tib. *zag med*). Therefore, there should be no defilements – kleśas and karma arising from them. If we consider, as, for example, the Svatantrikas do, that during *samāhita*, the kleśas and so on are absent in consciousness due to the incompleteness of the aggregate of causes and conditions necessary for their appearance, and upon leaving trance state they arise again, then this idea seems unacceptable, for in the absence of kleśas and other defilements, this individual will not differ in any way from the Buddha<sup>21</sup>.

6. In their approach to the assessment of the individual, the Prāsaṅgikas proceed from the following: if a personality, on the one hand, is not the skandhas or distinct from them; and, on the other hand, cannot be considered devoid of them, then personality is “merely a name,” and its conditional existence is accepted in connection with and in relation to the skandhas (Tib. *phung po la brten nas gdags pa*).

Tugan notes that all Buddhist schools accept a personality as conditionally existing in connection with and in relation to the skandhas - the group of five skandhas, “only consciousness,” the continuum of skandhas, the *manovijñāna*, or *ālaya-vijñāna*. However, at the same time, philosophers who expound such tenets tend to identify a personality with that in relation to which the personality is accepted. That is, they think that a personality is a *manovijñāna* or *ālaya-vijñāna*, etc. Therefore, the Prāsaṅgikas conclude that the idea of the conditional existence of a personality was not understood by the followers of those schools with acceptable completeness and clarity<sup>22</sup>. As a result of this, the Prāsaṅgikas clarify that the skandhas are the “basis of acceptance” of the personality—that, in connection with which and in relation to which it is accepted, and the personality is dharma, accepted in connection with and in relation to it. They designate such dharma with the term “merely I” (Tib. *nga tsam*). The word “merely” (Tib. *tsam*), notes Jamyang Shepa, is added in order to distinguish it from “I” (Tib. *bdag*), which is supposed to be as absent as the horns of a rabbit<sup>23</sup>. Such a personality does exist, but not due to its own essence, attributes and being. Supporters of other schools consider the personality, understood in this way, to be simply absent, and they consider the Prāsaṅgikas themselves to “have fallen into the extreme of cessation”<sup>24</sup>.

The Prāsaṅgikas believe that all Buddhist schools in fact accept the “I” (as the bearer of karma and so on) existing conditionally in terms of relative truth, but usually they consider “acceptance in connection with and in relation to the skandhas” as a purely Prāsaṅgika definition of personality.

<sup>19</sup> mKhas grub rje ... F. 200A.

<sup>20</sup> Ngag dbang nyi ma. Nang pa'i grub mtha' smra ba bzhi'i 'dod tshul (Ngagwang Nyima. Modes of Assertion of the Views of Four Buddhist Tenets). – Xyl., 404 ff. sGo mang, 1971. F. 548-550.

<sup>21</sup> mKhas grub rje ... F. 154B.

<sup>22</sup> Thu'u bkwan ... F. 35.

<sup>23</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa ... F. 308B.

<sup>24</sup> Thu'u bkwan. F. 39, 41. The extreme of “cessation” (Tib. *chad*) is usually considered in contrast to the extreme of permanence. The “middle view” put forth by the Buddha is characterized as the only true one and the only one “devoid of falling into extremes.” “Cessation” is usually understood as the negation of the afterlife existence of the individual, and “permanence” is understood as the acceptance of the immortality of the soul, etc.



Indeed, in connection with and in relation to the skandhas, Buddhapālita notes, that which has no essence is accepted. The skandhas themselves also have no essence, for they arise from their causes and conditions, which, in a similar way, are devoid of essence, appearing from their own causes and conditions.<sup>25</sup> In fact, all things that can be examined have dependencies in one form or another, so they should be devoid of inherent essence, and therefore accepted as existing conditionally - in connection and in relation to their parts, causes, etc.

By its very nature, the idea of “accepting in connection and in relation” is that things are not described as existent or non-existent. If personality existed, then it would exist apart from the skandhas. But such a personality is simply inconceivable and imperceivable. “That which is accepted in connection and in relation” is not non-existent, since, for example, rabbit’s horns do not exist, but this cannot be said about a forest accepted in connection to and in relation to trees. From the point of view of absolute truth, personality and other things do not exist, for they are devoid of essence, etc. But in the plane of relative truth, they exist, since they are established by valid cognition “in connection and in relation.”

In connection with the consideration of the problem of defining things in terms of “existent – non-existent,” Prāsaṅgikas make a distinction between the concepts of “existent” and “existent due to inherent existence,” as well as “non-existent” and “non-existent due to inherent existence.” For example, rabbit horns are non-existent at all. A mirage lake is non-existent in terms of inherent existence as a lake but exists as a mirage. An ordinary lake exists as a lake but does not exist due to inherent existence. The absolute simply exists, but in the conventional sense is considered to exist due to inherent existence<sup>26</sup>. From what has been said it follows that in this context the concepts of “existing”, “existing conditionally” and “existing in connection and in relation” are equivalent. From this point of view, a personality is defined as existent as a personality, but not due to inherent existence.

At the same time, the existence of a personality turns out to be the middle between true existence and complete non-existence. Such existence, according to Jamyang Shepa, is most accurately described by the formula “(like) a mere name existing conventionally” (Tib. *ming rkyang btags yod*). When in the twilight a checkered rope rolled up in a ring is perceived as a snake, then this “snake” is perceived as absent “of its own accord” (in place of the rope). Therefore, such a “snake” can be characterized as a “mere name,” and its existence can be considered as purely nominal – “considered to be only accepted because of its being given a name” (Tib. *ming gi tha snyad pas btags tsam bzhas*). Since there is no snake in place of the rope, but the subject has a perception of a snake, it is obvious that such a perception should be categorized as conceptual (Tib. *'dzin rtog*) and qualified as engendered by the idea of the snake. Therefore, the existence of this “snake” is admissible to consider as “only imputed because of conceptual acceptance” (Tib. *rtog pas btags tsam bzhas*). Prāsaṅgikas consider all things to be absent “of their own accord”, therefore they accept them as “merely names” and so on. However, ordinary

---

<sup>25</sup> In other schools, Khedrup Je notes, the “basis of acceptance” of the individual is considered to exist substantively. This is possible because, according to the Vātsīputrīyas, for example, that which is called dharma - the vessel - exists conditionally, and its “basis of acceptance” - atoms - exists substantively (mKhas grub rje: 104B, 119B). This is also necessary, because existing conditionally presupposes existing substantively - that in connection with which it is accepted. Prāsaṅgikas refute this, because they do not detect anything that exists substantively and independently (Zla ba grags pa: 224-226).

<sup>26</sup> dGe 'dun bstan dar. F. 57, 60. From the perspective of the “middle view,” the absolute is characterized as being neither absent nor truly existent, and in terms of the principle of non-duality, it is defined as both being and not being truly existent. To put it otherwise, it is seen as inherently existing but not existing due to inherent existence.

things, notes Khedrup Je, have a fundamental difference from the “snake”: their existence is not refuted by empirical valid cognition (Skt. *pramāṇa*)<sup>27</sup>, and in the case of the “snake” one can come closer, illuminate the object and ascertain that it is only a rope. That which is not refuted by valid cognition is called truly established. A truly established thing is assumed to exist and be capable of performing a function. But at the same time, empirical valid cognition establishes the correspondence of the appearance of a thing not to the thing itself (for it does not exist of its own accord), but to a certain “basis of manifestation” (Tib. *snang gzhi*) of a thing. Therefore, the existence of things is defined as conditional and existing only in the relative plane (Tib. *kun rdzob tu, tha snyod du*). This approach is interpreted as the middle one - avoiding the extremes of existence and non-existence<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, a personality is a conditionally existing dharma, posited by a “mere name” and so on. As existing, it belongs to the category of elements – “connectors” - not associated with consciousness (Skt. *viprayukta-saṃskāra*) (Könchog, 2005: 44), because it is established by empirically valid cognition that is capable of performing certain functions and does not in itself possess signs of the material or mental. It can exist in a situation of absence of consciousness and mental elements (in the “*samāhita*” trance). As existing conditionally, it is qualified as being accepted in connection with and in relation to the skandhas, which determines its main features.

## Conclusions

The negation of personality in Buddhism must be understood in the context of the polemics of Buddhism with non-Buddhist religious and philosophical traditions. The objections of Buddhists are directed not against the principle of personality as such, but against the erroneous, in their opinion, understanding of personality developed in orthodox and unorthodox Indian spiritual traditions. Instead, Buddhist philosophers develop their own views of personality that are consistent with the path of attaining enlightenment.

Not accepting the views on the personality of “non-Buddhists”, Buddhist schools have developed their own concepts of personality. They are presented in detail in a vast corpus of philosophical literature and are an important part of the Buddhist soteriological project.

## References

1. Dessein B. (ed.) The Notion of “Self” in Buddhism. *Communication & Cognition*, 32, 1/2, p. 171.

---

<sup>27</sup> Prāsaṅgikas distinguish two types of cognition: 1) existing when conducting rigorous examination in terms of absolute truth, or ultimate (Tib. *mtshar thug pa*), which aims to discover what exists truly, and 2) empirically valid cognition (Tib. *tha snyad pa'i tshad ma*), existing when conducting rigorous examination on the plane of relative truth. So, for example, with empirically valid cognition it is established that good deeds can karmically give rise to the pleasant, and negative ones to the unpleasant. Ultimate investigation reveals the absence of the true “birth” of dharma (Je Tsongkhapa. *Drang dang nges pa'i don rnam par 'byed pa*. (Analytic Commentary on the Essence of Eloquence) – Xyl., 114 ff. F. 42B). Authentic cognition (Tib. *tshad mas grub*, literally “established by valid cognition”, “existing because of [proven] valid cognition”) is that which is not refuted by these two types of cognition. Thus, for example, the dependent arising of things is truly established, because, on the one hand, it is not refuted by empirical examination that establishes the causal arising of things, and on the other hand, it is not refuted by ultimate examination (conceptual and direct), which reveals the absence of the truth of the presence of things. The above is essentially compatible with their dependent arising and even serves as a necessary condition for this (since the existing is truly independent of the other and does not arise causally). For more details see: (Donets, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. *dBu ma la 'jug pa ...* F. 200A; mKhas grub rje. F. 92A.

2. Donets A.M. (2006) *Uchenie o vernom poznanii v filosofii madkh'yamiki-prasangiki* [The doctrine of correct knowledge in the philosophy of Madhyamika-Prasangika]. Ulan-Ude, 2006. 251 s.
3. Duerlinger J. (2003) *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons. Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self"*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
4. Ignat'ev I.P. (1991) *Kak stat' buddoi* [How to become a Buddha]. Leningrad: Lenizdat Publ.
5. Kapstein M.T. (2001) *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publ.
6. Könchog Jigme Wampo (2005) *Dragotsennoe ozherel'e: Kratkoe izlozhenie buddiiskikh i nebuddiiskikh kontseptsii buddiiskikh i nebuddiiskikh filosofskikh shkol* [The Precious Necklace: A Brief Summary of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Concepts of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Schools of Philosophy]. Ulan-Ude: Rinpoche-bagsha Publ.
7. Pupyshcheva N.V. (2015) Sistema tsennostei v buddizme: istochniki tsennostei i urovni razvitiya lichnosti [The system of values in Buddhism: sources of values and levels of personality development]. *Vestnik Buryatskogo nauchnogo tsentra Sibirskogo otdeleniya Rossiiskoi akademii nauk* [Bulletin of the Buryat Scientific Center of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences], 3 (19), pp. 187-199.
8. Shokhin V.K. (1997) Mnimye vliyaniya (O sovremennykh popytках otyskat' buddiiskie «korni» v khristianstve) [Imaginary influences (On modern attempts to find Buddhist roots in Christianity)]. *Al'fa i Omega* [Alpha and Omega], 3(14), pp. 274-307.
9. *bLo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. Byang chub lam gyi rim pa'i dmar khrid.* (Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen. Essential Instructions for the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment). Xyl., 68 ff.
10. *dGe 'dun bstan dar. dBu ma la 'jug pa spyi don.* (Gedun Tendar. General Meaning of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Xyl., 162 ff.
11. *'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Grub mtha'i rnam bshad las thal rang gi skabs* (Jamyang Shepa. Explanation of Tenets. Chapter on Svatantrika and Prasaṅgika). Xyl., 240 ff.
12. *'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa'i mtha' dpyod* (Jamyang Shepa. Decisive Analysis of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Xyl., 442 ff.
13. *Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. Grub mtha'i rnam bzhags lhun po'i mdzas rgyan.* (Changkya Rölpé Dorjé. Beautiful Adornment of Mount Meru: A Presentation of Indian Tenets). Xyl., 442 ff.
14. *mKhas grub rje. Zab mo stong pa nyid gyi de kho na nyid rab tu gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos skal bzang mig 'byed ces bya ba bzhugs so.* (Khedrubje. A Treatise Completely Clarifying the Suchness of the Profound Emptiness, "Opening the Eyes of the Fortunate"). Xyl., 247 ff.
15. *Ngag dbang nyi ma. Nang pa'i grub mtha' smra ba bzhi'i 'dod tshul* (Ngagwang Nyima. Modes of Assertion of the Views of Four Buddhist Tenets). Xyl., 404 ff. sGo mang, 1971.
16. *Thu'u bkwan. Grub mtha' shel gyi me long bzhugs so* (Thuken. The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems) 'Bras spungs blo gsal gling dpe mdzod khang, 1992.
17. Je Tsongkhapa. *Drang dang nges pa'i don rnam par 'byed pa.* (Analytic Commentary on the Essence of Eloquence). Xyl., 114 ff.
18. *Zla ba grags pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa rang 'grel dang bcas pa bzhugs so.* (Candrakīrti. Auto-commentary to the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Bibliotheca Buddhica IX. St. Petersburg, 1912.

## Концепция личности в учении школы мадхьямака-прасангика тибетского буддизма

**Нестеркин Сергей Петрович**

Доктор философских наук, ведущий научный сотрудник,  
отдел философии, культурологии и религиоведения,  
Институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетологии  
Сибирского отделения Российской академии наук,  
670042, Российская Федерация, Улан-Удэ, ул. Сахьяновой, 6;  
e-mail: sn3716@yandex.ru

### Аннотация

В работе исследуется своеобразие интерпретации понятия личность в буддистской религиозно-философской традиции на примере учении школы мадхьямака-прасангика

Sergei P. Nesterkin

традиции Гелук тибетского буддизма. Исследование проведено на материале классических тибетоязычных источников, принятых в этой школе. В исследовании дается анализ буддийской критики концепций личности индийских религиозно-философских школ. Рассматриваются две основные концепции «иноверцев»: (I) понимание личности как (1) постоянной, (2) единой и (3) самостоятельной (bdag ni rtag gcig rang dbang can gsum); (II) Признание личности, обусловленное "взглядом на совокупность разрушимого" (satkāyadrsti; 'jig tshogs la lta ba). Отмечается, что виды признания Я личности делят на приобретенные при жизни (Я как постоянное, одно, самостоятельное) и врожденные (Я как субстанционально существующая личность). Буддисты подвергают эти воззрения как ошибочные и препятствующие достижению полного освобождения и выдвигают собственные. В работе делается вывод, что отрицание самостности личности в буддизме надо понимать в контексте полемики буддизма с небуддийскими религиозно-философскими традициями. Возражения буддистов направлены не против личностного принципа как такового, но против ошибочного, по их мнению, понимания личности как субъекта освобождения, развиваемого в ортодоксальных и неортодоксальных индийских духовных традициях.

#### Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Нестеркин С.П. Концепция личности в учении школы мадхьямака-прасангика тибетского буддизма // Контекст и рефлексия: философия о мире и человеке. 2021. Том 10. № 5А. С. 284-296. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.71.60.031

#### Ключевые слова

Буддийская персонология, философия буддизма, Гелук, буддизм в России, личность, прасангика.

### Библиография

1. Донец А.М. Учение о верном познании в философии мадхьямики-прасангики. Улан-Удэ, 2006. 251 с.
2. Игнатъев И.П. Как стать буддой. Л.: Лениздат, 1991. 107 с.
3. Кенчог Чжигме Ванпо. Драгоценное ожерелье: Краткое изложение буддийских и небуддийских концепций буддийских и небуддийских философских школ. Улан-Удэ: Ринпоче-багша, 2005. 70 с.
4. Пупышева Н.В. Система ценностей в буддизме: источники ценностей и уровни развития личности // Вестник Бурятского научного центра Сибирского отделения Российской академии наук. 2015. № 3 (19). С. 187-199.
5. Шохин В.К. Мнимые влияния (О современных попытках отыскать буддийские «корни» в христианстве) // Альфа и Омега. 1997. № 3(14). С. 274-307.
6. Dessein B. (ed.) The Notion of "Self" in Buddhism // Communication & Cognition. 1999. Vol. 32. № 1/2. 171 p.
7. Duerlinger J. Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons. Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self". London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 308 p.
8. Kapstein M.T. Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publ., 2001. 28 p.
9. bLo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. Byang chub lam gyi rim pa'i dmar khrid. (Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltzen. Essential Instructions for the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment). Xyl., 68 ff.
10. dGe 'dun bstan dar. dBu ma la 'jug pa spyi don. (Gedun Tendar. General Meaning of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Xyl., 162 ff.
11. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Grub mtha'i nram bshad las thal rang gi skabs (Jamyang Shepa. Explanation of Tenets. Chapter on Svatantrika and Prasaṅgika). Xyl., 240 ff.
12. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa'i mtha' dpyod (Jamyang Shepa. Decisive Analysis of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Xyl., 442 ff.
13. Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. Grub mtha'i nram bzhags lhun po'i mdzas rgyan. (Changkya Rölpe Dorjé. Beautiful Adornment of Mount Meru: A Presentation of Indian Tenets). Xyl., 442 ff.
14. mKhas grub rje. Zab mo stong pa nyid gyi de kho na nyid rab tu gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos skal bzang mig 'byed ces bya ba bzugs so. (Khedrubje. A Treatise Completely Clarifying the Suchness of the Profound Emptiness, "Opening the Eyes of the Fortunate"). Xyl., 247 ff.

15. Ngag dbang nyi ma. Nang pa'i grub mtha' smra ba bzhi'i 'dod tshul (Ngagwang Nyima. Modes of Assertion of the Views of Four Buddhist Tenets). Xyl., 404 ff. sGo mang, 1971.
16. Thu'u bkwan. Grub mtha' shel gyi me long bzhugs so (Thuken. The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems) 'Bras spungs blo gsal gling dpe mdzod khang, 1992.
17. Je Tsongkhapa. Drang dang nges pa'i don rnam par 'byed pa. (Je Tsongkhapa. Analytic Commentary on the Essence of Eloquence). Xyl., 114 ff.
18. Zla ba grags pa. dBu ma la 'jug pa rang 'grel dang bcas pa bzhugs so. (Candrakīrti. Auto-commentary to the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'). Bibliotheca Buddhika IX. St. Petersburg, 1912.