

7. Ocean of Definitive Meaning: A Teaching for the Mountain Hermit  
Dölpopa Sherap Gyaltzen (1292–1361)

Written in the first half of the fourteenth century, *Ocean of Definitive Meaning* (Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho) is Dölpopa's magnum opus. Ostensibly a hermeneutical text on the issue of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma, the work represents a revolutionary interpretation of two of the key principles of Mahayana Buddhism, namely emptiness and the theory of buddha nature. A central element of Dölpopa's thought is the development of a sophisticated hermeneutics of the Mahayana scriptures according to which the teachings of Maitreya, and especially those of the Yogacara masters Asanga (fourth century) and his brother Vasubandhu (fourth century) emerge as the culmination of Mahayana philosophical thinking. Dölpopa refers to this Yogacara standpoint as the "Great Middle Way," transcending all extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. Dölpopa's writings provided crucial philosophical framework for the the Shentong view of emptiness of the Jonang School. However the influence of Dölpopa's Shentong view extends beyond the Jonang school and is discernable in the writings of such eminent Tibetan masters as Shakya Chokden (1428–1507) of the Sakya school, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje and Pema Karpo (1527–92) of the Kagyü school, the well-known historian Taranatha (1575–1634), the nineteenth-century ecumenist Jamgön Kongtrül, and the Nyingma master Ju Mipham Gyatso (1846–1912).

Translation project funded by Tsadra Foundation.

Project Status: Work began, 2007.