Atiśa (Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna)—His Philosophy, Practice and its Sources*

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The bsTan ’gyur (translated treatises) of the Tibetan Tripitaka contains a great number of Atiśa’s (982–1054) works. This paper describes his philosophy and practice as well as some problems related to his non-tantric works. Most of his non-tantric works are mainly in the dBu ma section, but the other half of his works are also found in the rgyud ’grel (tantric commentaries) section because Atiśa was a Tantrist, which was typical for his time.

Most of his works are concerned with practice, which surely derives from his sense of time. The Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā (D 3948, P 5344)1) states:

Because nowadays, [all beings suffer from] the [five] degenerations of sentient beings, of times, of distress, of deluded views and of shortened life expectancy. They need not to listen to [all the] doctrines; they should cultivate [only] the essential yoga.

These days, there is no time to listen to such doctrines, which are vast like ships; one should cultivate only the excellent instruction, discarding anything else that disturbs the mind.

Life is short, yet there is much to be learned. Since you do not know even the length of this life’s span, take only the things you are [really] looking for, like the goose (hamsa) that separates milk from water.

deñ (P din) sañ sens can dus dañ ŋon moñs dañ // lta ba tshe’i sñīgs mar gyur pa ste // gźuñ rnams mñan par dgos pa med pas na // sñīñ po don gyi rnal ’byor bsgoms bar bya // diñ (sic) sañ dus su gziñs dañ ’dra ba yi // gźuñ rnams rgya chen mñan pa’i dus med pas // yid ’khrugs (P ’khrug) byed pa thams cad spañs byas la // dam pa’i ñer bstan ’ba’ žig bsgom par
Since the last verse is also stated in his other works, it seems to be an especially important statement to him. In this way, the Bodhipāramādyāpanjikā explains the necessity for the immediate commencement of practice due to shortened life expectancy. Therefore, Atiśa thinks that one should cultivate only the “essential practice” and not be distracted by insignificant matters. Such an understanding led him to emphasize the “essential practice” in particular.

What is the “essential practice” for him? There are many minor works by Atiśa concerning practice in general such as the Garbhāsāṃgraha (D 3949, 4469, P 5345, 5382), the Bodhissatvavacaryāśūtrikṛtāvāda (D 3946, 4472, P 5342, 5348, 5385), the Hṛdayanikṣepa (D 3950, 4470, P 5346, 5383), the Bodhisattvamanyāvalī (D 3951, 4471, P 5347, 5384), the Bodhisattvādikarmikamārgavatārādesānā (D 3952, 4477, P 5349, 5390), the Mahāyānapaṭhasādhanavārṇaṃsāṃgraha (D 3954, 4479, P 5351, 5392), the Mahāyānapaṭhasādhanasāṃgraha (D 3955, 4480, P 5352, 5393), the Caryāsāṃgrahapraṇāḍīpa (D 3960, 4466, P 5357, 5379), etc. The Ratnakaranaṅḍodghāta (D 3930, 4470, P 5325), which is one of his relatively major works, explains his system of practice with respect to the “thought of awakening” (bodhiccita). However, the Bodhipaṭhapraṇāḍīpa (D 3947, 4465, P 5343, 5378) and its commentary, the Bodhipāramādyāpanjikā, show his theory of practice most extensively. Therefore, this paper describes his philosophy and practice as seen in these two works, while occasionally referring to other minor works.

Although many studies on Atiśa’s philosophy and practice have been already published, some unclear and controversial points still remain. One of the sources of controversy is how Atiśa is understood in Tibet. Namely, some of the Tibetan doxographies classify Atiśa as a Prāsaṅgika, following the lineage of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti. However, Atiśa himself does not seem to make distinctions among Bhāviveka, Candrakīrti and other Mādhyamikas or divide Mādhyamika into any subdivisions, as we will see below. The problem, therefore, lies in how we understand such an attitude in his own texts. Furthermore, it is also necessary to analyse his position, strictly differentiating between śīla, dhyāna, prajñā, etc. because the texts he bases his position on apparently differ by subject. Therefore, this paper focuses on clarifying his
sources according to subject and describes his practice and philosophy, setting the Tibetan understanding of Atiśa aside. I will also suggest some leads to solve problems in certain cases.

1. **Atiśa’ description of practice**

The *Bodhimargadipa-paṇjikā* explains practice in the order of *śīla, dhyāna* and *prajñā*. Before explaining *dhyāna*, he explains why he presented *śīla* first:

Enlightenment (*abhisambodhi*) depends on the twofold accumulation (*sambhāra*). The twofold accumulation depends on benefit for others (*parārtha*). Benefit for others depends on supernatural knowledge (*abhiññā*). Furthermore, it (supernatural knowledge) depends on tranquility (*samatha*). Tranquility depends on the vow (*śīla*). Therefore the vow was explained first. For this reason, tranquility arises from the vow. Supernatural knowledge arises from tranquility. [Therefore] I said [in the *Bodhipathapradīpa* as follows]:

> Supernatural knowledge does not arise without accomplishing tranquility. Therefore, [one should] strive to accomplish tranquility over and over again.

\[=BPP 153–156\]  
\[=D 274a6–b1, \ P 316b5–8\]

Naturally, as a follower of the Mahāyāna, Atiśa regards attaining the enlightenment of the Buddha as the goal. However, here he particularly emphasizes the significance of benefiting others, and from this viewpoint shows *śīla* to be a fundamental element of practice. Although wisdom
(prajñā) is not mentioned in the citation, wisdom is of course absolutely necessary because skillful means (upāya) for the benefit of others should be carried out in conjunction with wisdom (prajñā). In this way, Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā explains the prajñā together with upāya after mentioning śīla, abhijñā and śamatha.

1.1 Sources that describe śīla

The Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā begins the explanation of śīla by defining three types of human beings. The best is one who deserves to enter the practice of the Mahāyāna. He states:

The vessel for the Mahāyāna is explained [by the following verse of the Bodhipathapradīpa]:

Superior is the person who is willing above all to remove the entire suffering of others by suffering in his own stream of being.

raṇ rgyud gtogs pa’i sdu gbsñal gyt // gaṇ žig gžan gyi sdu gbsñal kun //
yan dag zad par kun nas ’dod // skyes bu de ni mchog yin no // [=BPP 17–20] žes pas ni theg pa chen po’i snod bstan pa yin no // (D 242a5–6, P 279a1–2)

Ultimately, this statement underscores the necessity of compassion (karunā) for the Mahāyāna Buddhist. It has the same meaning as the expression “perfection of the lineage” (gotrasam.pad) as a cause of producing bodhicitta described in the Ratnakarañḍodghāta. Such a person is able to enter the path of the Bodhisattva, which starts with the first production of bodhicitta and the assumption of the vow.

Atiśa detailed the method of assuming the vow in his Cittotpādasamvaraśīvakrama (P 5364, 5406, D 3967, 4491), which means “sequence of the method for producing the thought and for [the assumption of] the vow.” The title demonstrates the connection between producing the thought and the assumption of the vow itself. Therefore, the Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā also describes the thought of awakening in connection with śīla. In addition, Atiśa left a text called the Gurukriyākrama (D 3977, 4489, P 5374, 5402) for the preceptor of the vow.

The Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā declares that Atiśa himself wrote the
Cittotpādasamvaravidiḥkrama in accordance with both Aṣaṅga and Śāntideva. In the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā, Atiśa refers to the Śīla-parivarata of the Bodhisattvabhūmi by Aṣaṅga and the Bodhicaryavatāra and the Śikṣāsamuccaya by Śāntideva. As we will see later, Atiśa says that he depends on the Śīla-parivarata in the case of the method of receiving the vow from a master and on the Śikṣāsamuccaya in the case of the method of receiving the vow without a master. The reason given for depending on both of them is only that both traditions are “the path of a big wagon” (śī rta chen po’i lam). The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā explains the Bodhisattva’s vow in detail from both Aṣaṅga and Śāntideva’s viewpoint.

The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā explains “taking refuge” and the “seven branch practices” (yan lag bdun) as preparations for the assumption of the vow. The “seven branch practices” are homage (phyag ’tshal ba, vandanā), offering (mchod pa, pūjana), confession of sins (sdiṅ pa bsags pa, pāpadesāna), rejoicing (rjes su yi raṅ ba, anumodanā), entreaty (bkul ba, adhyēṣanā), petition (gsol ba gdab pa, yacana), and dedication of one’s merit (yons su bsio ba, parināmanā). The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā discusses in detail the “seven branch practices” and also presents different opinions. The “seven branch practices” are derived from the Bhadracaryāpranidhānāraja (D 4377, P 5924) and also seems to be related to the Śikṣāsamuccaya and the Bodhicaryavatāra, but further examination is required. “Taking refuge” is explained in detail in his minor work, the Saranagamanadesāna (D 3953, P 5350), which illustrates “taking refuge” from fifteen different points of view. Some of these points are also described in the Ratnakaraṇḍodghāta. Atiśa wrote on the method for confessing sins in the Āpattidesānāvidhi (D 3974, P 5369).

In the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā, the thought of awakening is explained as being twofold: pranidhānacitta and prasthānacitta. In this respect, Atiśa apparently follows Śāntideva. Although he also briefly, presents different views about the thought of awakening he declares that he does not see any difference among the views of Nāgārjuna, Aṣaṅga and Śāntideva with regard to the way of producing the thought of awakening. Atiśa says:

Among Nāgārjuna, Aṣaṅga, and Śāntideva, the way of producing the thought of awakening of resolution (pranidhānacitta) does not differ, but agrees. At present, my masters, Bodhibhadra and Suvarṇadvīpa, also follow these sages. Because I also follow these masters, one should regard my minor work of the se-
quence [of the method for producing the thought and for the assumption of the vow] (the Cittotpādasamvaravādihikrama), which I made at request of my pupils, as following the tradition of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Śāntideva.

de la ’dir re žig slob dpon ’phags pa klu grub dañ / slob dpon ’phags pa thogs med dañ / slob dpon ’phags pa sân ta de ba dag smon pa byañ chub kyi sens bskyed pa’i cho ga’i tshul ’di la tha dad pa med ciñ mthun pa dañ / da ltar bdag gi bla ma rje bsun dpal byañ chub bzañ po dan bla ma rje bsun su ba rèña dvi (P dvi) pa dag kyañ ’phags pa de dag gi rjes su ’brañ ba dañ / bdag kyañ bla ma rje bsun de dag gi rjes su ’brañ ba yin pas bdag la slob ma’i tshogs kyi gsol pa btab nas byas pa’i cho ga’i thabs cuñ žig bdag gi bkod pa ni ’phags pa klu sgrub dañ / ’phags pa thogs med dañ / ’phags pa sân ta de ba dag gi lugs yin no žes khoñ du chud par bya’o // (D 250b1–4, P 288b4–7)

In this case, Atiśa follows both Suvarṇadvīpa and Bodhibhadra explicitly. However, the influence of Suvarṇadvīpa is limited only to this case, as I will discuss below.

According to Atiśa’s account of sīla, the person who is willing to receive the Bodhisattva’s vow must maintain moral discipline (so sor thar pa, prātimoksā). Of course, it is well known that it is not his own theory, but that of the Yogācāra school. It can be regarded as characteristic of late Mādhyamika thought, which is closely connected with Yogācāra practice. The Bodhimārgadipa-panjikā says:

The person who maintains one of the seven types of moral discipline at all times is qualified [to receive] the Bodhisattva’s vow. However, this is not so in other cases.

so sor thar pa ris bdun gyi // rtag tu sdom gžan ldan pa dag // (D om. //) byañ chub sans dpa’i sdom pa yi // skal ba yod kyi gžan du min // [=BPP 79–82] (D 258a5–6, P 297b5–6)

Atiśa explains this point by quoting the Samvaravimsāka-panjikā (D 3924, P 5319) of Bodhibhadra. It is clear that Atiśa depends on the Bodhisattvabhūmi when one considers the relationship between Bodhibhadra and the Bodhisattvabhūmi. Later, Atiśa explains seven prātimokṣas, not eight like the Sarvāstivādins, and explicitly points out the title
of the Yogācārabhūmi and in particular the Śīla-parivarta of the Bodhisattvabhūmi.

According to the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā, the reason one should follow the works of Asaṅga is that he is a Bodhisattva of the third stage as predicted (vyākṛta) in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa. Furthermore, Atiśa applies this type of logic to the case of Nāgārjuna. He describes the prediction of Nāgārjuna in his Ratnakarandodghāta, where he mentions titles of sutras such as the Mahāmegha-sūtra, the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, the Lankāvatāra-sūtra, the Mahābherihāraka-parivarta, and the Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra and quotes passages from the Mahāmegha-sūtra, the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa and the Lankāvatāra-sūtra.7)

The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā explains how the person who maintains moral discipline receives the Bodhisattva’s vow as follows:

In accordance with the method described in the Śīla-parivarta of the Bodhisattvabhūmi.

byaṅ chub sems dpa’i sa dag gi // tshul khrims le’u gsuṅs cho ga yis //

[=BPP 87–88] (D 246a5–6, P 304b6–7)

In this way, he basically depends on the Śīla-parivarta here and briefly presents seven śīlas, which are explained in the Śīla-parivarta, in the commentary to the verse.

However, the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā explains the following “the method of receiving the Bodhisattva’s vow,” “causes of abandoning the vow,” “causes of producing sins,” “causes of not producing sins,” “rehabilitation from sins” and “benefits of the vow,” on the basis of the traditions of both Asaṅga and Śāntideva. Here, Atiśa declares that he wrote the method of receiving the vow, the Cittotpādasamāvadhkrama, conforming to both traditions.

However, because I follow both the traditions [of Asaṅga and Śāntideva], I made the method of receiving [the vow] from the master (guru) on the basis of the Śīla-parivarta and the method of receiving [the vow] without a master on the basis of the Śīkṣāsamuccaya.

'on kyaṅ bdag ni lugs de gñis ka’i rjes su ’braṅ bas na (P ’braṅs pas na) bla ma las blaṅ ba’i (D blaṅs pa’i) cho ga tshul khrims kyi le’u la brten
In addition, the three types of śīla mentioned in the Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā, i.e. sāṃvara-śīla, kuśaladharmanāṃgrāhakaś, and sattvārthānugrāhakaś, apparently depend on the Śīla-parivarta of the Bodhisattvabhūmi as previous studies have already pointed out.8)

1.2 Sources that describe dhyāna

After śīla, the Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā describes dhyāna (here as tranquility) and supernatural knowledge:

All the Buddhas assert generating supernatural knowledge to be a cause of completing the accumulation of merit and wisdom... As a bird is unable to fly without a grown wing, one is not capable of benefiting sentient beings without obtaining supernatural knowledge.

bsod nams ye şes raì bêzin gyi // tshogs ni yoins su rdzogs pa yi // rgyu ni saṇs rgyas thams cad dag / mön şes bskyed pa ñid du bxed // ... ji ltar ’dab gsog ma skyes pa’i // bya ni mkha’ la ’phur (P phur) mi nus // de bêzin mön şes thob bral bas // sems can don byed nus ma yiin // [=BPP 137–144] (D 272b2, 4, P 314b3–4, b5–6)

Atiśa also warns that one should not teach the dharma without first obtaining supernatural knowledge on the basis of the Samādhisambhāraparivarta (D 3924, P 5319) of Bodhichakra. The Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā explains in detail the necessity of supernatural knowledge for benefiting sentient beings and then moves on the subject of dhyāna as a prerequisite for supernatural knowledge. In the section on supernatural knowledge, he uses the Śikṣāsamuccaya and the Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva as his sources. The citations from the Adhyāṣayasamcudana-sūtra are also found in the Śikṣāsamuccaya. We can see the close connection between the description and Śāntideva.

In the section on tranquility, the Samādhisambhāraparivarta by Bodhichakra is quoted many times. Atiśa also bases his thought on that of Bodhichakra in this case. The Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā says:
Even if one who spoils the branches of tranquility diligently meditates for thousands of years, he will not accomplish contemplation (tiṅ ne ’dzin, samādhi).

According to the commentary of the *Bodhimārgadīpa-paṇḍikā*, “the branches of tranquility” are the nine branches of tranquility described in the *Samādhisamābhāramaparivarta* of Bodhibhadra. Only the last branch is briefly explained in the *Bodhimārgadīpa-paṇḍikā*.

In this text, samatha is divided into two types: tranquility with signs (mtshan ma dañ bce pa’i ’zi gnas) and tranquility without signs (mtshan ma med pa’i ’zi gnas). It also conforms to the *Samādhisamābhāramaparivarta*. This division creates a problem which will be discussed later.

At the end of this section, the *Bodhimārgadīpa-paṇḍikā* declares that the Yogins who have acquired the samatha are capable of generating insight (vipaśyanā) and moves to the next section on wisdom (prajñā).

1.3 Sources that describe prajñā

Atiśa explains wisdom together with skillful means (upāya), because according to him, neither wisdom without skillful means nor skillful means without wisdom can exist.

The *Bodhimārgadīpa-paṇḍikā* explains skillful means as follows:

I inserted the words of my master, Bodhibhadra, into the root text, [the *Bodhipathapradipa*], that the Jinas assert that skillful means are all the accumulation of virtues, i.e. the perfection of giving and so on, excluding the perfection of wisdom.

He declares the verse of the *Bodhipathapradipa* to be the words of
Bodhibhadra.

Atiśa describes wisdom as follows:

It is stated that the *prajñā* is the knowledge (*jñāna*) of the emptiness of self-nature which realizes a non-arising of the [five] aggregates (*skandha*), the [eighteen] elements (*dhātu*) and the [twelve] spheres (*āyatana*).

The famous “four great reasonings” are explained as a method for realizing the *prajñā* in the *Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā*, although it is unknown who was the first to summarize it into four reasonings.\(^\text{10}\)

What are the “four great reasonings”? The reasoning of refuting the four alternate extremes of arising, the reasoning of the diamond particle,\(^\text{11}\) the reasoning of the lack of unity and plurality (ekānekaviyoga) and the reasoning of the dependent origination (pratityasamutpāda).

The *Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā* explains these reasonings in detail. However, because this subject has been treated in previous studies,\(^\text{12}\) here I will concentrate on presenting the sources and summarizing related problems in the next section.

First of all, the reasoning of refuting the four alternate extremes of arising is justified by citing the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, IX-146–150 of Śāntideva.

The reasoning of the diamond particle is explained by a verse in the root text, the *Bodhipathapradīpa*:

An entity does not arise from itself, not from another, not from both [of itself and another]. It does not [arise] without cause. Therefore, it lacks self-nature by way of own existence.
The content is very similar to the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, I-1 which is also quoted immediately after the verse in the *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā*. The *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* regards the aim of the reasoning of the diamond particle as refuting the arising of all entities which Buddhists and heretics assert. In this regard, he recommends reading the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* of Nāgārjuna itself, the six commentaries, the two subcommentaries, the *dBu ma rnam par 'thag pa* (*Madhyamakavaidalya*?), the Prasannapadhā of Candrakīrti, the *Tarkajvalā* of Bhāviveka and the *Madhyamakāvātāra* of Candrakīrti. This statement is a matter of controversy because the so-called Śvātāntrika and Prāsaṅgika are not distinguished here.

The reasoning of the lack of unity and plurality is justified by citing the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* of Śāntarakṣita and the *Tattvāvatāra* of Śrīgupta.

Concerning the reasoning of the dependent origination, the *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* states:

In the reasoning of the Śūnyatāsaptati [of Nāgārjuna], the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* [of Nāgārjuna] and other [works], the emptiness of the self-nature of entities is established.13)

The *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* advises the reader to read these very texts.

In the explanation of the four great reasonings, the *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* mentions the Yogācāra and the Mādhyamika, but Atiśa declares that his explanation is based on Mādhyamika thought, which he calls the “great Mādhyamika” (*dbu ma chen po*). He explains the tradition in which he is rooted as follows:

The nectar of the noble Nāgārjuna had satisfied Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhavya (=Bhāviveka) and Śāntideva, down to Bodhibhadra. A little has even been sprinkled on me. Thus having proven the non-arising of all phenomena by the four great reasonings and following the former Ācāryas, one should hold to
the tenet of the great Mādhyamika.

Next, these verses are followed by verses which are quoted at the beginning of this paper and emphasize the shortness of life.

Moreover, the works of Nāgarjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakirti and Bhāviveka, the eight major commentaries to the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā as well as the subcommentaries are mentioned here, although the works of Nāgarjuna are described in more detail in the Ratnakaranaṇḍodgāta.⁴

Now we should examine the purpose of this explanation. The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā describes the four great reasonings not for the purpose of proof per se but of practice. The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā states:

Here, the tenets of our great Mādhyamika are described only as such and not in extensive detail. Because I briefly explained it for those Yogins who desire to experience it, I said [in the Bodhipathapradaṇḍīpa] “I explained for the purpose of contemplation.”

In addition, Atiśa explains the non-arising of the prajñā itself. It is also based on the four great reasonings.

In this way, after explaining reason, the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā describes emptiness through the scriptures by quoting many sutras. At the end of the section, the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā states:

Therefore, having known such scriptures and reason as described in detail, having ascertained the meaning and having re-
moved uncertainty, one should cultivate the non-concept called "vipaśyanā."

de bas na de lta bu'i luṅ dañ rigs pa rgya chen po bstan pa de dag šes par byas śin de'i don la ņes par byas te / the tshom med par byas nas lhag mthoṅ žes bya ba rnam par mi rtog pa de bsgom par bya'o // (D 285a2, P 329b1–2)

Here, we should pay attention to the connection between the four great reasonings and the vipaśyanā. Namely, it states that one cultivates the vipaśyanā, by which one can attain the emptiness of all things, only after removing uncertainty via the scriptures and reasoning such as the “four great reasonings.” The “four great reasonings” work only before the vipaśyanā.

The Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā briefly explains the vipaśyanā, quoting the Samādhisambhāraparivartapramitā section in the Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā is as follows:

After having contemplated emptiness in this way and having gradually obtained “warmth” and so on, one will attain such stages like [the first stage,] the pramuditā. The enlightenment of the Buddha is not far.

de ltar stoṅ ņid bsgom byas nas // rim gyis (P gyi) drod sogs thob byas nas // rab dga’ la sogs thob 'gyur te // saṅs rgyas byaṅ chub yun mi riṅ // [=BPP 237–240] (D 285b1–2, P 330a3)

Although the verse remains only a general description of the Bodhisattva path, we should take notice of the commentary which explains the eight steps of the Abhisamayālāṃkāra. However, we can hardly know the precise position of the eight steps in his practice from such a short description of him.

2. Problems related to Atiśa’s philosophy and practice

Thus far, we have surveyed Atiśa’s philosophy and practice, focusing
on its sources. Obviously, he uses very different sources depending on the subject. This means that we must be meticulous in our examination of his writings. In this section, I will summarize his position on each subject and present related issues, which may serve as a guide for future research.

2.1 Problems regarding the description of śīla

It is very clear that Atiśa’s explanation of śīla is based on Śāntideva and Asaṅga. Atiśa often cites works by Śāntideva like the Bodhicaryāvatāra as well as the Śikṣāsamuccaya in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā and his other works. He apparently regards Śāntideva as very important. On the other hand, the influence of Asaṅga can also be seen in the description of cause and condition of producing the bodhicitta, etc. in the Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭa. Some parts of his practice are obviously derived from Asaṅga, specifically the Yogācārabhūmi.

His attitude seems to be connected in particular with two of his own teachers, namely Suvarṇadvīpa and Bodhibhadra.

Suvarṇadvīpa left works connected with Śāntideva like the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra-saṭṭrimśat-piṇḍārtha (D 3878, P 5280), the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra-piṇḍārtha (D 3879, P 5281) and the Śikṣāsamuccayābhismaya (D 3942, P 5338). Bodhibhadra wrote the Bodhisattvasamvaravimsaka-panjikā (D 4083, P 5584), a commentary to the Bodhisattvasamvaravimsaka (D 4081, P 5582) by Candragomin, which is said to be a summary of the Śīla-parivarta in twenty verses, and the Samādhisambhāraparivarta (D 3924, P 5444).

In particular, the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā mentions the two teachers.

The “masters” [in the verse of the Bodhipathapradīpa] are Bodhibhadra, Suvarṇadvīpa and others.

*de la “bla ma rnams” ni rje btsun dpal byaṅ chub bzaṅ po daṅ / rje btsun su wa rnña dvi (P di) pa la sogs pa’o // (D 242b6, P 279b3)*

However, Atiśa does not quote from the works of Suvarṇadvīpa. Furthermore, later in the section on prajñā, Atiśa classifies Suvarṇadvīpa as a part of the Yogācāra and recommends following Bodhibhadra. Therefore, more research is needed to ascertain the source of Śāntideva’s influence on Atiśa. This will be discussed again later in the connection...
with *prajñā*.

Atiśa’s description of *śīla* apparently depends on the *Yogācarabhūmi*. Nevertheless, some points still remain unclear.

First, the connection with the *Vinayasamgrahaṇī* (’*Dul ba bsdu ba*, D 4040, P 5541) of the *Yogācarabhūmi* needs to be examined. While Atiśa frequently explains the *pratimokṣa* by quoting the *Abhidharma*ka-*śāra*-bhāṣya, the explanation in his own words agrees with the *Vinayasamgrahaṇī*, although Atiśa does not mention its title explicitly in the *Bodhimārgadīpa*-panijikā. Therefore, a study on the *Vinayasamgrahaṇī* itself and the tradition of such an understanding of the *pratimokṣa* is required in order to know Atiśa’s understanding more precisely.

There is also a problem in the number of the monks’ *vinaya*. The *Bodhimārgadīpa*-panijikā counts 253 rules. Twenty-seven of them are things to confess, 213 of them are things to restrain and 13 are sinless. The number “253” might suggest the possibility of a correlation to the Mūlasarvāstivāda school. However, at the present time, we know nothing about the division of the rules into 27, 213 and 13. Therefore, we should still think carefully about this if one is also to seriously make a connection between Atiśa and the *Vinayasamgrahaṇī*.

The explanation of the Bodhisattva’s vow obviously relies on the *Yogācarabhūmi* and Śāntideva. However, the tradition of Śāntideva has yet to be clarified. Although some works of Suvarṇadvīpa related to Śāntideva do exist, the connection between Atiśa’s explanation and Suvarṇadvīpa is completely unknown. Therefore, it still needs to be examined how the tradition of Śāntideva was handed down to Atiśa.

### 2.2 Problems regarding the description of the *dhyanā*

*Dhyanā* is explained as tranquility (*śamatha*) in the *Bodhimārgadīpa*-panijikā. As shown above, the *Bodhimārgadīpa*-panijikā divides tranquility into two types: with and without signs. The citation from the *Samādhisamābhāratarivarta* of Bodhibhadra shows that this is the source for this division.

However, there is a contradiction here to the traditional understanding of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. For example, according to Kamalaśīla, *śamatha* is the one-pointedness of mind (*cittakāgrata*) and means “tranquility” or “calming.” On the contrary, *vipaśyanā* is “discriminating knowledge of the truth” (*bhūtapratyaveksana*) and is therefore considered conceptual.16}
In the explanation of śamatha, the Bodhimārgadipa-panjikā cites the Samādhisambhāraparivarta as follows:

As for tranquility without signs, the same text (Samādhisambhāraparivarta) states: “From the discriminating knowledge itself, which is tranquility without signs, arises insight (vipaśyana) without signs, non-conceptual wisdom (nirvikalpajñāna).”

This sentence indicates that Atiśa considers tranquility without signs as discriminating wisdom and insight without signs as non-conceptual wisdom. However, because the discriminating knowledge is generally said to be related to vipaśyana, objection is expected as a matter of course. Although the Bodhimārgadipa-panjikā does not quote the refutation of the objection, the Samādhisambhāraparivarta rejects it as follows:

[Objection:] The discriminating knowledge does not belong to śamatha. It observes in many forms. [Answer:] If so, śamatha would not be śamatha too because it observes at many moments and many factors.

Thus, Bodhibhadra accepts discriminating knowledge as śamatha. However, the source of this understanding still needs to be determined.

2.3 Problems regarding the description of the prajñā

The Bodhimārgadipa-panjikā describes the four great reasonings in this section. It should be noted that: 1) the four great reasonings are explained as a form of reason besides the scriptures for removing uncertainty before cultivating insight and 2) it is only explained briefly for the purpose of practice. Therefore it is not easy to discuss Atiśa’s position in
detail only by the description of the four great reasonings. In other
words, it is precisely this attitude of Atiśa that shows how much impor-
tance he attached to practice.

One thing we can definitely say from the description of the four
great reasonings is that Atiśa includes the reasoning of the lack of unity
and plurality in the four great reasonings. It means that Atiśa does not
classify the Mādhyamika into such subdivisions like the Svātantrika and
the Prāsaṅgika, a point that should not be disregarded.

The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā explains the Mādhyamika only in con-
trast to the Yogācāra. The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā introduces the Yogācāra
and the Mādhyamika as follows:

The scholars in the world are as follows: Ārya Asaṅga explained
a synonym of the teachings. He stated the meaning of the perfec-
tion of wisdom as representation-only (vijñaptimātra). Nowadays
masters like Suvannadvīpa and Śānti-pa understand it in this
way. Ācārya Nāgārjuna explained the essence of the teachings.
He comprehended the meaning of the perfection of wisdom as
the great middle way (dbu ma chen po) which transcends existence
and non-existence. He taught thus to the other scholarly lineage
as well. Masters like Bodhibhadra and Kusulu-pa recognize in
such a way.

dzam bu’i (P dza mbu’i) gliṅ na mkhas pa dag ni ’di skad du / ’phags pa
thogs med kyis (P kyi) bstan pa’i rnam grañs bṣad pa / des šes rab kyi pha
rol tu phyin pa’i don rnam par rig pa tsam du gsum sīn / da ltarbla ma
su wa rṇa (P rṇa) do’i pa dañ / bla ma sān ti pa yaṅ de ltar dgoṅs so //
slob don klu sgrub kyis ni bstan pa’i sṅiṅ po bṣad de / des šes rab kyi pha
rol tu phyin pa’i don yod pa dañ med pa las ’das pa’i dbu ma chen po’i
don thugs su chud ciṅ / mkhas pa gzan gyi rgyud la yaṅ de ltar gsums so //
de (sic) ltar bla ma byañ chub bzaṅ po dañ / rje btsun ku su lu pa yaṅ de
ltar dgoṅs so // (D 280a4–6, P 323b4–7)

Atiśa himself takes the position of the great middle way, and he ultimate-
lly follows Bodhibhadra. Therefore, the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā states the
following:

Bodhibhadra attained the accomplishment (dīnos grub) by means
of the instruction of Nāgārjuna and acquired the approval of
Ārya Mañjughosa. He obtained supernatural knowledge and perceived the truth, manifesting the intention of all the sutras, tantras and the precepts of vinaya at once. Bodhibhadra is therefore the person to whom [the teachings of Nāgārjuna] were transmitted, one after another. Thus one should follow him.

I did not write the doctrine in detail.

He recommends reading the Madhyamakabhramaghāta, the Tarkajvāla, the Madhyamakāvatāra, and the subcommentary of Avarokitavrata to the Mūlamadhyamaka. From this description, it is difficult to know anything more than that the Mādhyamika is superior to the Yogacāra.

In this way, it is very obvious that Atiśa follows Bodhibhadra and considers the tradition from Nāgārjuna to Bodhibhadra as the Mādhyamika. The tradition is also said to be from Nāgārjuna through Āryadeva, Candrakirti, Bhāviveka and Śāntideva down to Bodhibhadra.

Undoubtedly, Atiśa regards these masters as important. However, the connection between Śāntideva and Bodhibhadra seems odd because, as seen above, Bodhibhadra left no works relating to the teachings of Śāntideva. Suvarṇadvīpa, another master mentioned in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā, wrote works connected with the works of Śāntideva but is considered as a Yogacāra in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā. Because Atiśa does not quote the works of Suvarṇadvīpa, we might say that Atiśa
does not regard Suvarṇadvīpa as very important. However, we can hardly find the reason Atiśa mentions Suvarṇadvīpa in particular as one of masters in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā besides Bodhibhadra. We might find the influence Suvarṇadvīpa had on Atiśa by chance through a study on the works of Suvarṇadvīpa himself. Research on Suvarṇadvīpa, who also wrote a commentary on the Abhisamayālaṃkāra, is therefore required, too.

In his description of śīla and dhyāna, Atiśa is apparently under the influence of Bodhibhadra. Atiśa describes śīla within the framework of the Yogācārabhūmi, quoting Bodhibhadra’s Samvaravimśaka-panjikā. The descriptions of the dhyāna are often justified by the Samādhisāṃbhārāparivarta of Bodhibhadra, although we do not yet know with certainty what sources the Samādhisāṃbhārāparivarta itself is based on.

However, the description of prajñā in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā completely lacks citations from the works of Bodhibhadra despite his emphasis on the tradition from Nāgārjuna down to Bodhibhadra. It is justified by the teachings of former masters like Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka, Śāntideva, etc.

Therefore, there still remain problems to be solved: if the description of the prajñā is connected with Bodhibhadra, how Bodhibhadra is related to the teaching of Śāntideva; how Bodhibhadra understands the teaching of Mādhyamika; etc. He left works mainly related to practice such as the Samādhisāṃbhārāparivarta and the Samvaravimśaka-panjikā and quotes a work of Śāntideva in the context of dhyāna in the Samādhisāṃbhārāparivarta.

Moreover, there are problems with the tradition of Śāntideva in Atiśa’s description of the prajñā. Like his description of the śīla, Atiśa quotes the works of Śāntideva, and explains things such as the reasoning of refuting the four alternate extremes of arising. However, the tradition of this understanding remains to be found.

One more thing that might perplex us is that Atiśa explicitly rejects inference while declaring that he follows Bhāviveka, and also states the reasoning of the lack of unity and plurality (ekānekaviyoga) as one of the four great reasonings. The Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā states:

When one analyzes at the [level of the ultimate] truth, there is nothing like existence and non-existence as the ultimate truth. Therefore, one can accomplish nothing.

Even if someone who is separated from the tradition of the
masters [from Nāgārjuna] have established existence, non-existence, permanence, cessation, and the like through inferential knowledge, they will be exhausted and not reach their goal.

Why did Dharmakīrti, Dharmottara, and so on write so many treatises? The scholars wrote [them] for the purpose of refuting the objections of heretics.\(^{17}\)

Thus, such valid means of knowledge are not necessary for cultivating the ultimate truth. I already wrote this elsewhere [in the Satyadvayāvatāra]. Therefore, it is not necessary to state it here.

For that reason, one should discard such texts of logic mainly concerned with inference and should cultivate the instruction transmitted from Nāgārjuna.

Here, Atiśa explicitly rejects inference and makes an allusion to the Satyadvayāvatāra.

One might be confronted with problems especially in the following two statements of the Satyadvayāvatāra.\(^{18}\) First, Atiśa recognizes only one ultimate truth (paramārtha) and denies the existence of two or more. He says:

There is only one ultimate [truth]. Others admit the twofold [ultimate truth]. How can the nature of reality (dharmatā), which can never be established, be two, three, and so on?\(^{19}\)

\[
\text{dam pa'i don ni gcig ŋid de // gžan dag rnam pa gñis su 'dod // cir yān ma grub chos ŋid de // gñis dañ gsum sogs ga la 'gyur // (k.4, EjIMA}
\]
Second, Atiśa denies direct perception (pratyakṣa) and inference (anumāna) for understanding emptiness (śūnyatā) like the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā. He states:

A fool who [only] sees this side (tshu rol mthoṅ ba’i rmoṅs pa, arvāgdaṛśin) says that Buddhists accept both direct perception and inference [as valid means of knowledge] and perceives the emptiness by both means.

[If so,] heretics and the Śrāvakas would also understand the nature of reality. What need would there be to speak of the Yogācāras? There would be no difference between them and the Mādhyamikas.

Therefore, all doctrines would be the same because they are determined by the [same] valid means of knowledge. [Otherwise,] since all reasonings are different, would the nature of reality determined by the valid means of knowledge be manifold? Direct perception and inference are not necessary. Scholars made [them] in order to refute the objections of heretics.20

So-called Svātantrikas like Bhāviveka, Śāntrakṣita, Kamalaśīla, etc. admit the secondary ultimate truth, which is often called don dam pa dan mthun pa’i don dam pa, and use inference at a certain level of their practice. Therefore, a contradiction seems to exist between the expression of the Satyadvyāvatāra and Atiśa’s attitude toward the four great reasonings in the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā.

However, it is clear that these statements are not intended to oppose
Bhāviveka because Atiśa states the following immediately after the verses:

Also in a treatise, Bhavya (= Bhāviveka) clearly states that [the Dharmaśāstra] could not be realized by means of both conceptual and non-conceptual knowledge.


luṅ las kyaṅ ni gsal po ru // rtog beas rtog pa med pa yi // ses pa gnis kyis mi rtogs šes // slob dpon mkhas pa bha bya gsuṅ // (k.14, Ejima [1983:364])

Atiśa also refers to Candrakīrti in the next verse.

Who realized the emptiness? It was Nāgārjuna, who was predicted by the Tathāgata and saw the truth of the nature of reality, and his disciple Candrakīrti.


ston nīd gaṅ gis rtogs še na // de bžin gšegs pas luṅ bstan žiṅ // chos nīd bden pa gžigs pa yi // klu sgrub slob ma zla grags yin // (k.15, Ejima [1983:364])

Here Atiśa makes a point of mentioning Candrakīrti in addition to Nāgārjuna. Of course, this shows how important Candrakīrti was for Atiśa. However, this is natural for Atiśa, who considers himself part of the lineage from Nāgārjuna, through Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka and Śāntideva down to Bodhibhadra, as shown above. Therefore, this statement can be only regarded as Atiśa tracing the lineage.

The emphasis on only one ultimate truth and the rejection of valid means of knowledge are also not odd, if we think of the position of valid means of knowledge in his description of practice. The ultimate truth can be attained only through vipaśyanā. However, scriptures and reasonings are required for removing uncertainty before cultivating the vipaśyanā, as we have seen in the description of the Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I surveyed the philosophy and practice of Atiśa, who considers practice as particularly important, by focusing on its sources. His description has very different sources depending on the subject, such as śīla, dhyāna and prajñā.
The Bodhisattva’s vow is explained from the standpoint of both the traditions of Asaṅga and Śāntideva. The work by Asaṅga referred to here is the *Yogācārabhūmi*, mainly the *Śīla-parivarta* of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. However, the tradition of Śāntideva remains unclear.

*Dhyāna* is described as *samatha* in the *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* and explained together with supernatural knowledge. The description of supernatural knowledge seems to be related to the tradition of Śāntideva. *Śamatha* is explained by quoting the *Samādhisamābhāraparivarta* of Bodhichadra. However, there is a problem that remains to be solved in the understanding of *samatha* and *vipaśyanā* in the *Samādhisamābhāraparivarta*. The understanding of *samatha* as discriminating knowledge and that of *vipaśyanā* as non-conceptual wisdom seems very unique. The source of the *Samādhisamābhāraparivarta* needs to be identified.

*Prajñā* is described as *vipaśyanā* accompanied by skillful means. The description mainly deals with reason and scriptures for removing uncertainty before entering the practice of *vipaśyanā*. Atiśa explains the four great reasonings as reason. He states that they are nothing but a summary for the purpose of practice. Therefore, we cannot argue his standpoint only from this description. However, it is to be noted that Atiśa always explains the Mādhyamika in contrast to the Yogācāra and does not divide the Mādhyamika into any subdivisions. He calls the Mādhyamika as such the *dbu ma chen po*, the great Mādhyamika.

Atiśa states that the tradition starts with Nāgārjuna, is transmitted to Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka and Śāntideva, and then to Bodhichadra. The relationship between Śāntideva and Bodhichadra, the connection between Bodhichadra and the description of the *prajñā*, and so on are still unclear and requires further study.

Moreover, the *Bodhimārgadīpa-pañjikā* mentions the teaching of the *Abhisamayālamkāra*. It needs to be examined how the teaching was transmitted to Atiśa. In this regard, the relationship to Suvarṇadvipa also remains to be examined.

A study on Prajñākaramati, a contemporary of Atiśa, may provide some clues. Prajñākaramati wrote a commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva as well as one on the *Abhisamayālamkāra*. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Abhisamayālamkāra* are both closely connected with Atiśa. Although Prajñākaramati does not mention the four great reasonings, he is very similar to Atiśa in that he often bases his thought on Candrakīrti while also mentioning the *Madhyamakālamkāra* as a source. Through a comparative study between Atiśa and Prajñākaramati, etc.,
we should be able to clarify the situation of the Mādhyamika between the tenth and eleventh centuries, which might give us an answer to the problem of these subdivisions of the Mādhyamika in Tibet.

Notes

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1) The Bodhipathapradīpa and the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā can be regarded as Atiśa’s main works and therefore have been mostly used for studies on Atiśa. SHERBURNE [2000] provides the English translation and MOCHIZUKI [1988, 1999a, 2000a, 2001a, 2002c, 2003, 2004] the Japanese translation. NAGASHIMA [2004, 2007] and I have the similar interests, and he often provided the English and the Japanese translations respectively for the quoted passages from the Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā and the Satyadvayāvatāra in this paper. My translation is especially indebted to NAGASHIMA [2004].

2) Satyadvayāvatāra, D 3902, 4467, P 5298, 5380, Samsāramaniniriyānikāra-nāma-samgīti, D 2313, 4473, P 3152, 5386.


4) MIMAKI [1982:29–30].

5) MOCHIZUKI [1990].

6) Ratnakaranyodghāta, D 99a6f., P 110b1f.

7) MIYAZAKI [1993] discusses the relationship between the Madhyamakarotpadīpa and Atiśa from the point of the prediction of Nāgarjuna.


9) Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā, D 275a7, P 318a1–2.

10) EJIMA [1980:201–248] attempted to clarify the history of summarizing the reasonings.

11) EJIMA [1980:232] pointed out that Kamalaśīla expresses the Mülamadhyamakakārikā, I-1 as “do rje gzegs ma thogs pa med pa'i bsī” in his Madhyamakāloka.


13) NAGASHIMA [2004:84], note.54.

14) Ratnakaranyodghāta, D 113a5f., P 126b6f.

15) He is also called Dharmakīrti or Dharmapāla.

16) MIMAKI [2000], FUNAYAMA [2000].

17) NAGASHIMA [2004:81].

19) Nagashima [2004:79].
20) Nagashima [2004:80].
22) Nagashima [2004:81].

Abbreviations

D The Derge edition. (Cat.) Seizo daizōkyō somokuroku Tōhoku teikoku daigakusō han 「西藏大藏經總目錄東北帝國大學藏版」, Sendai 仙臺, 1934.

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