1 Introductory Remarks

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1.1 The Need for a Philosophical Approach to *Svasaṃvedana* (TIB *Rang rig*): A Cross-Cultural Perspective

This work aims to furnish a philosophical overview of the main aspects and relevance of the concept of self-awareness (SKT *svasaṃvedana*; TIB *rang rig*) in the Buddhist tradition, with a central focus on the Tibetan assimilation of this notion as part of its Indian heritage. The present text originates from the Author's doctoral dissertation, which emerged from a research project concluded in 2018 and was motivated by the attempt to explore the deeper implications of this fundamental trait of the mind's nature – an inquiry that continues to open up new avenues of thought and interpretation. As a philosophical reflection on self-awareness, this survey will relate the traditional accounts to the universal problems that underlie this topic and, in doing so, will open up possible resonances and fruitful interactions with the ongoing philosophical debate on self-awareness.

The typical understanding of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* sees it as the mind's knowing of itself, its reflexivity, the awareness that awareness has of itself. Thus, this work attempts to shed light on a term around which various issues concerning consciousness converge significantly – its nature, features, functioning and development. Although it is specific and technical, the concept of self-awareness, observed through different interpretations, reveals its importance and stands out as a key element in discussions of consciousness. Acting like a prism that refracts light, it clarifies the multiple components and levels of this vast subject. As such, even though self-awareness often appears to be a minor concept, it has the ability to reveal the ontological, epistemological and, in some cases, soteriological facets of the debates on consciousness that converge on it.

Specific conceptions of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* have been studied by a number of scholars over the last four decades. Only a handful, though, have attempted to examine the overall concept. Several scholars have noted that this issue still deserves much more investigation in its Buddhist formulations (Kellner 2010, 204; Kapstein 1993, 171 fn. 39), and its significance has often been underscored in discussions of contemporary epistemology and the philosophy of mind. Consequently, this study aims to present an overview of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* that captures its various interpretations – at least the main ones – and addresses the universal issue of self-awareness from multiple angles. This endeavor will then conclude with an attempt to create a dialogue between some Buddhist stances and those of the contemporary philosophy of mind, by enacting a cross-cultural praxis of thought.

The interest in this concept arises from its multifaceted importance within the Indo-Tibetan tradition. In fact, the way this concept is understood seems to be deeply affected by the different philosophical tenets that tap into its most fundamental coordinates. The epistemological perspectives of the various schools are also affected, with self-awareness playing a decisive role in the foundation of subjective experience. Thus, in a close survey of the controversy about *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*, it is interesting to examine the hermeneutical strategies that each Indian or Tibetan author applies to traditional sources. In this connection, it is important to recall how Buddhist thought exhibits a close link between philosophical inquiry and commentarial methodology. The various analytical philosophical approaches remain firmly grounded in scriptural exegesis and doctrinal elaboration; yet they continually engage with the concerns of contemporary scholarship. In addition to the ontological, epistemological, and hermeneutical implications of the *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* issue, it is crucial to remember that it cannot be separated from the broader soteriological objectives of the Buddhist tradition. In some interpretations, such as those within

the bKa'-brgyud school, it becomes evident just how significant this concept can be for attaining liberation (Dreyfus 1997, 438-42), insofar as *rang rig* guarantees "the continuity and identity of the subject of awareness", thus enabling the breakthrough towards emptiness (Van Der Kuijp 1987, 63).

From the very beginning of this volume, the main methodological guidelines that shape its approach will be outlined. In this context, Coseru's observations on his distinctive approach to philosophical practice serve as a key reference:

> I am committed to the view that both the specific style of these broadly Sanskritic argumentative strategies and the universality of the metaphysical and epistemological theses under dispute are better showcased (and understood) if made continuous with contemporary philosophical concerns. The principal methodological reason for emphasizing continuity over comparison reflects a specific intuition about the scope of philosophical inquiry: one which says that its problems, though often couched in historically and culturally contingent terms, are nonetheless grounded in all aspects of conscious experience for a person at any given time. (Coseru 2012, 2-3)

Using a philosophical approach, some relevant passages of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition will be read and contextualized in the endeavor to articulate them as parts of a wider reflection upon the universal philosophical problems related to the concept of self-awareness. Although emerging from diverse historical and cultural contexts, these sources can enrich and expand the philosophical understanding of this topic. In doing so, they can be integrated into a global history of philosophy, of which contemporary philosophy of mind is simply the most recent development. A cross-traditional or cross-cultural perspective enables the use of a methodology that puts together, in a fruitful dialogue, accounts and models rooted in quite different commitments and assumptions, originating from distinct needs and experiences.[1] The richness of interactions among several stances is guaranteed by retaining the diversity of their contexts, viewing them as different ways of sharpening questions about self-awareness.

So far there have been a few proponents of what is here called 'the cross-cultural philosophy model',[2] that is, a way of incorporating

1 For some encouraging statements about this approach cf., among others, Coseru 2012; MacKenzie 2017.

2 For references to the earliest proponents of this method, see Mills 2009, 275 fn. 15. Note that a similar approach is the one adopted and endorsed by Ganeri 2012.

stances belonging to different traditions and cultures into "one's philosophical practice" (Mills 2009, 124). As attested in several studies (Garfield 2015, 3; Mills 2009; Siderits 2003, xi-xiv), this marks a growing tendency within philosophical practice. It emerged alongside the decline of comparative philosophy, an approach initiated by the late nineteenth-century Indian philosopher, Seal (1899). Among those who welcome and reflect upon new and up-to-date methods for studying various cultures and traditions, scholars such as Mills and Garfield endorse the cross-cultural philosophical perspective; Siderits, on the other hand, prefers the 'fusion philosophy', a stance oriented towards a problem-solving practice that uses elements from one tradition to tackle issues in another.[3] Compared with the fusion approach, cross-cultural philosophy turns out to be more encompassing and methodologically different: it allows engagement in lively philosophical 'conversations' (and not merely 'comparisons' or 'combinations') between traditions. It includes not only a "problem-centered" method but also an "historical/interpretative" attention to sources considered in their own contexts (Mills 2009, 125). At this point, it is useful to recall Seyfort Ruegg's description of the modern philosophers who are engaged in a "global 'world philosophy'" (2016, 232): those who want to consider whether an old tradition has valuable thoughts to share with today's world proceed from the present back to the past, attempting to integrate the depth of earlier thought into a new philosophical context. Thus, the work of the contemporary hermeneut might be seen as crossing over with that of the translator-interpreter. The latter moves in the opposite direction, proceeding "forwards starting from the past" (the source-text) "and ending in the present" (its translation) (233).

In such a cross-cultural conversation, any philosophical stance can become an opportunity for self-transforming philosophical practice. This process involves a dynamic interplay among at least three interdependent factors: the questioning thinker and the two primary elements of each cross-cultural inquiry. Through mutual interactions, all three are shaped by one another (Pasqualotto 2005; Ghilardi 2012). Such a methodological approach should prevent any research from ending up as a mere list of resonances and differences between cultures, and from appropriating the ideas of historical traditions into a supposedly functional synthesis in service of a universal, global, and abstract philosophy. The very act of questioning affects and changes each element involved in the quest – especially the researcher – and this is exactly what should happen whenever a philosophical engagement takes place, given the relational nature

3 For Garfield's reasons for not adopting Siderits's fusion philosophy, see Garfield 2015, 3.

of this activity, whether it involves only one or more cultures. In exploring a subject, the thinker engages in a mutually transformative process with the topic and with the insights of those who have already approached it. Thus, it can be said that the very movement and breath that keep the philosophical task alive should unfold not only 'inside' each culture – in what could be called intra-cultural philosophy – but also, for the same reasons and with the same attention to detail, 'across' different cultures – as a cross-cultural philosophy. The outcome of such a dynamic, cross-cultural practice can never be a synthesis of different accounts or the selection of one as the favored perspective. All that can be set out is an ever-changing philosophical landscape: an open and infinite horizon where numerous mutual transformations can be enacted.

Given the wealth of primary sources dealing with the notion of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*, this study aspires to be merely a preliminary survey. It is based on doctoral research completed in 2018 and aims to highlight the multifaceted philosophical significance of the concept of self-awareness. Further research is needed to explore not only the multidimensional Tibetan approach to the topic – far from being fully covered in this study – but also the vast Indian literature, particularly in light of the complex relationship between the initial formulations of the Buddhist idea of self-awareness and its non-Buddhist counterpart. Moreover, since interest in the complex issue of self-awareness is rapidly growing within contemporary philosophy of the mind, it is important to monitor and attempt to bridge the gap between the Indo-Tibetan tradition and the lively discussions of the ongoing debate on consciousness, assuming that the image of a gap is an accurate representation of the intellectual landscape under consideration. This research, therefore, aims to serve as an encouragement towards further studies.

1.2 Self-Awareness in Modern Thought and the Buddhist Concept of *Svasaṃvedana* (TIB *Rang rig*)

In contemporary discourse, the notion of self-awareness is notoriously ambiguous owing to the various definitions that neuroscience, philosophy and psychology have provided thus far. To offer an introductory overview of this broader topic, it is necessary to conduct a brief examination of some of its key aspects.[4]

Stemming from the field of psychology, self-awareness is primarily associated with the notion of a self. In social psychology,

4 For a list of the main current definitions of self-awareness, with references to some of their proponents, see Zahavi 2005, 13-17.

self-awareness arises from adopting the perspective of the other toward oneself (Mead 1962). In developmental psychology the mirror-recognition task has occasionally been indicated as the decisive sign for self-awareness: it manifests itself in children when they are able to recognize themselves in the mirror.[5]

From the philosophical point of view, most perspectives tend to link the 'self' of 'self-awareness' or 'self-consciousness' (widely considered a synonym of 'self-awareness') with the subject of experiences. It is mainly seen as the ability to think 'I'-thoughts, to conceive of oneself as oneself.[6] Similarly, it is also understood as thinking of self-ascribed experiences as belonging to one and the same self, the bearer of various experiences (Cassam 1997, 117-19). Moreover, alongside self-awareness in thought, there is also a philosophical effort to identify self-awareness in experience. This approach focuses on the non-conceptual realm of the experiential dimension, distinguishing it from the activity of thinking. Along these lines, self-awareness revolves around the non-conceptual element or factor corresponding to first-person concepts. As explained, for example, by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

> The claim that there is a form of self-consciousness in experience, one which arguably grounds the capacity to entertain first-personal thought, can be understood in a number of ways. According to one view there is a perceptual, or quasi-perceptual, consciousness of the self as an object of experience. On another, there is a 'pre-reflective' form of self-consciousness that does not involve the awareness of the self as an object. A third claims that various forms of experience involve a distinctive 'sense of ownership' in which each of us is aware of our own states as *our own*.[7]

The three main philosophical accounts of self-awareness in experience typically consist of the following: (i) identifying it in subject-object forms of self-perception, (ii) considering self-awareness as the pre-reflective continuous awareness of oneself as the subject of one's stream of experience, and (iii) defining this issue as the awareness not only of one's mental states, but also of them as one's own. In any

5 Cf. Lewis 2003, 281-2; Gallup 1970; Gallup, Anderson, Platek 2011; Gallup, Platek, Spaulding 2014.

6 See, among others, Baker 2000, 67-8. Note also Block's definition of self-awareness (in his translation, 'self-consciousness'): "By this term, I mean the possession of the concept of the self and the ability to use this concept in thinking about oneself" (Block 1997, 389).

7 See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Self-Consciousness" (`https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness/`); italics in the original.

of the three formulations, self-awareness revolves around the subject as the owner of experiences.

One issue to consider in this preliminary survey is the relationship between self-consciousness (or self-awareness) and consciousness, specifically whether the former is a necessary condition of the latter. Generally speaking, the current philosophical debate on this matter is structured around three main theoretical frameworks – Higher-Order Thought theories, Higher-Order Perception theories, and Self-representational views – to explain the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness, often suggesting that the latter is, in fact, a necessary condition of the former. Interestingly, according to all these theories, simply being aware that a certain mental state is occurring does not suffice to make that state 'conscious'; self-consciousness must also be present. One must be aware of being in the (first-order) state in question and, in so doing, recognize oneself as the subject experiencing that state. Accordingly, these three perspectives are often interpreted to underscore the 'ownership' of mental states. In other words, the word 'self' in the expression 'self-awareness' refers – sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly – to the subject, the person who bears those mental states. This topic will be explored further in "Part Three: Contemporary Developments" of this volume, where these three accounts will be examined in more detail. As will be illustrated, it is possible to read them from a standpoint that does not necessarily focus on the person or the subject. Drawing from the Buddhist perspective, one might argue that each 'mental event' can be considered capable of knowing 'itself'; thus, self-awareness would refer to the subjectivity of experience as such, rather than to its subject. For now, however, it is worth noting that the modern approach to the issue of self-consciousness (or self-awareness) typically centers on the self, the subject who undergoes experiences.

Another constellation of meanings related to self-awareness comes under the label of 'self-knowledge', that is, the knowledge of one's own sensations, thoughts, beliefs, and other mental states.[8] In this context, self-knowledge possesses some distinctive epistemic features, and its acquisition varies depending on different accounts – for example, through acquaintance with one's mental state, an inner sense, transparency, or thanks to one's rationality. The emphasis is on the cognitive relationship between the subjects and their mental states, as well as the mechanisms through which they can be accessed.

Nevertheless, among the various ways in which self-awareness has been understood and investigated in contemporary philosophy,

8 See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Self-Knowledge" (`https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-knowledge/`).

the view that treats it as a property of mental events, specifically the mind's capacity to know itself, is particularly relevant here. This is because it aligns with the conception of self-awareness found throughout much of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition and forms the central topic of this volume. Accordingly, this research will bring into dialogue several Indian and Tibetan interpretations of self-awareness with contemporary philosophical perspectives that examine how a mental state or event becomes aware of itself.

The specific idea of *svasaṃvedana* (or *svasaṃvitti*, most commonly translated into English as 'self-awareness') is a concept that formally entered Buddhist discourse as part of Dignāga's (ca. 480-540) epistemological project. Subsequent to this formulation, it has been asserted, negated or held in various ways by different Indian authors and was later assimilated as *rang rig* (*pa*) by Tibetan scholars.[9] In short, it can be described as a mental event's awareness of itself.

Note that, within the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, any acceptance of self-awareness is far from referring to the awareness of a self or a person – and it ultimately has to be so, in order to match the philosophical tenet of selflessness.[10] Yet, upon closer examination, this point is not as straightforward and unproblematic as it may initially appear. There are strong reasons to argue that the topics of self-awareness, subjectivity and self are not utterly unrelated, even within the Buddhist tradition (MacKenzie 2011, 271 ff.; Matilal 1986, 111-12), but for now it is practical to adopt this general perspective. In short, when comparing the most commonly adopted perspective on self-awareness in modern philosophy with Buddhist accounts, which are based on the Abhidharma legacy on the one hand and the Madhyamaka contribution on the other, a remarkable difference in paradigm emerges. The first follows a subject-centered view, where self-awareness is primarily attributed to the subject of experience,

9 For the equivalence in translation between the Sanskrit word *svasaṃvedana* (or *svasaṃvitti*) and the Tibetan word *rang rig pa* (or *rang rig*), cf. Fukuda, Ishihama 1989, no. 4500, s.v. "svasaṃvedanam"; Sakaki [1916] 1987, no. 4514, s.v. "svasaṃvedanam"; Negi et al. 1993-2005, s.v. "rang rig pa"; Chandra [1959-61] 1976, s.vv. "rang rig pa" and "rang rig". For a definition of the Tibetan word *rang rig* (or *rang rig pa*), see Krang-dbyi-sun et al. 1993, s.v. "rang rig": "*'dzin rnam gyi shes pa ste | blo rang gis rang myong ba'am gsal bar mthong ba | dper na bum 'dzin mig shes kyi steng gi rang gis rang myong ba'i yul yul can gnyis su med pa'am rang yul gyi rnam pa med pa'i shes pa'o |*" (It is the consciousness that has the aspect of an apprehender: the self-experiencing of the mind by itself, or its clear seeing of itself by itself. For example, based on an eye-consciousness perceiving a vase, it is the absence of dualism between object and object-possessor (or subject) that self-experiences itself, or the consciousness that has no aspect of an object). No specific lemma for *rang rig* (*pa*) is found in Jäschke [1881] 1987, or in bTsan-lha Ngag-dbang-tshul-khrims 1997. As for the Sanskrit words *svasaṃvitti* or *svasaṃvedana*, neither Monier-Williams [1899] 1986 nor Edgerton [1953] 1985 records any lemma.

10 Cf. Williams 1998, 3; Yao 2005, 157. For further considerations on this topic, cf. MacKenzie 2008; 2015a.

while the second adopts a consciousness-centered view, where consciousness itself is considered self-aware. Moreover, the Buddhist perspective suggests understanding cognition as a succession of discrete cognitive events, unfolding one after the other, rather than conceiving of consciousness as a monolithic, substantial entity. Consequently, this approach to self-awareness implies that each cognitive state or event is self-aware, suggesting a perspective that examines cognitive processes in their detailed complexity.

1.3 On Translating the Terms *Svasaṃvedana* and *Rang rig*

Like the semantically equivalent *svasaṃvedana*, the word *svasaṃvitti* is composed of "the reflexive pronominal prefix '*sva-*'" followed by "a nominal form of the verbal root *sam*-√*vid* 'to be aware'" (Arnold 2008, 7 fn. 11). While Arnold prefers to leave it untranslated, allowing the contexts and passages where it occurs to reveal its meaning, other scholars have proposed various translations of the technical term *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*. 'Self-awareness' is the most commonly used term in English, followed by other similar renderings such as 'self-cognition',[11] 'self-knower' (Hopkins 2011), 'self-knowing' (Klein 1986; Hopkins 2011), 'self-consciousness' (Yao 2005), 'self-cognizing consciousness' (Hopkins 2011) as well as 'autocognition' (Cabezón 1992). A few attempts have been made to capture the phenomenologically-oriented nuance of this term, rendering it with expressions like 'self-intimation' (Seager 2007; Ryle 1949; Ganeri 1999) and 'self-presentation' (Kapstein 1993). Another quite technical rendering is 'self-referential awareness' (Van Schaik 2008; Davidson 2004), while 'apperception' (Arnold 2005a; 2005b; 2008) is reminiscent of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception. It is also worth mentioning the specific but potentially misleading translation of the term as 'introspection' (Germano 1992; Stcherbatsky [1932] 1962; Wayman 1991), which can be easily mistaken for the concept of *samprajanya* (SKT) or *shes bzhin* (TIB). In this context, it is crucial to consider what Lati Rinbochay (1980, 62) and Hopkins (1983, 377) emphasize with regard to the fundamental difference between *rang rig* and introspection. While the latter actually involves observing oneself and serves as a key element for effective meditation, it is characterized by a dualistic cognition that is not simultaneous with its object – a feature that, as will be explored throughout this volume, cannot be attributed to *rang rig*.

When it comes to the challenges of translating the term *rang rig*, some cases show an explicit choice to alternate between different

11 Suganuma 1963; Dreyfus 1997; Yao 2005; Almogi 2009; Komarovski 2011.

renderings, depending on the philosophical contexts in which the concept is used. One example is Williams's (1998, 3) well-known choice to utilize two main renderings of *rang rig*: on the one hand, the "reasonably literal 'self-awareness'", and, on the other, "reflexive awareness" or "the reflexive nature of awareness".[12] There are also a few rather unusual translations, such as 'self-excitatoriness' (Guenther 1984, 24, 222 fn. 37), tailored for the specific context of Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen). In order to appreciate the subtlety of these translation choices and to grasp how different the nuances and meanings of this concept can be, consider the methodological approach that Germano suggests at the beginning of his "Mini-Encyclopedia of Great Perfection Terminology":

> [I]n each context those terms' gestalt of meaning varies, and thus inordinate devotion to one's lexicon inevitably entails obscuration of the overall passage. Thus we need not only an extremely sensitive reading of the original […], as well as an extremely sensitive translation […]. The end result is the necessity for a difficult balancing act between sensitivity to contextual variance of terms' significance and an awareness of the remarkable continuity and interlinkage between individual syllables and terms throughout. (Germano 1992, 812-13)

Interestingly, in these general notes Germano mentions the word *rang rig* as the first of few concrete examples of difficulties in the translator's task:

> Apart from the numerous English terms we may be inclined to render it [*Rang*] with ("natural", "intrinsic", "auto-", "inherent", "self-", etc.), the grammatical relation of *Rang* to the following term in a compound is often unclear (*Rang Rig* can connote "aware *as* self", "aware *of* self", "aware *by* self", "aware *via* self", etc.), and/or the precise reference of *Rang* as "self" can be ambiguous (*Rang Rig* as "awareness inherent to the Universe itself" or "our own intrinsic awareness"). (Germano 1992, 814; italics in the original)

Also, in Germano's "Mini-Encyclopedia of Great Perfection Terminology", the entry "Awareness, aware-ing (*rig pa*; *vidyā*)" includes a specific paragraph on *rang rig*, where a concrete application of the delicate balancing act that translation entails can be observed.

12 These two phrases will be discussed later in this book, but for a concise overview, see Williams 1998, 6-7 fn. 8.

> Along these lines we must interpret the term *Rang Rig*, literally "self-awareness", and often used in the sense of "introspection" (i.e., aware of ourselves as the thinker). In the context of Great Perfection literature, it signifies the "inherent (*Rang*) intelligence" of the Universe itself, i.e., the aware-ing that is intrinsic to cosmos from its primordial beginnings, as well as our own "awareness-as-self": in our primordial encounter with the luminosity that presences to us as if external, we must recognize it as self-presencing, and thus be "aware of the presence *as* self" (*Rang Rig*), whereby we tune into the pure intensity of awareness within us (*Rang Rig*), and realize the hidden unity of all that is. (Germano 1992, 829-30; italics in the original)

Despite Germano's observations on the unclear grammatical relationship between *rang* ('self') and *rig* ('awareness') in the Tibetan compound *rang rig* – a relationship that the original Sanskrit term *sva-saṃvedana* does not clarify – Negi et al. (1993-2005, s.v. "rang rig") attempt to make this grammatical connection explicit. They argue that *rang rig* is equal to *rang gis rig pa* 'to be aware by self', with the agentive particle. Nevertheless, in Tibetan literature several occurrences of the technical term *rang rig* can be found expressed as *rang gi rig pa* 'one's awareness', linking the two components of the compound with the genitive particle. It appears that most contemporary scholars expand the compound *rang rig* by rendering it as *rang gi rig pa*.[13]

That said, keeping in mind the challenges involved in rendering this concept into English, the term 'self-awareness' will be used consistently throughout the following pages. Other expressions such as 'self-cognition', 'self-knowledge', or 'self-consciousness' will only appear in specific contexts where a deviation from this choice is explicitly noted.

1.4 Previous Studies on *Svasaṃvedana* and *Rang rig*

This section provides a brief overview of the main studies on *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* conducted by contemporary scholars. Although a comprehensive examination of the Buddhist concept of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* has not been made thus far,[14] at least two main studies aim to broaden the scope of the investigation

13 See, for instance, Williams 1998, 1; Davidson 2004, 237; Van Schaik 2008, 15; Higgins 2013, 90.

14 For similar considerations on the attention contemporary scholarship devotes to this topic, cf. Yiannopoulos 2012, 145-6.

beyond a single author or source. The first is *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defense* (Williams 1998), a philosophical inquiry primarily focused on a section of Tibetan Madhyamaka literature on the issue. The second is *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition* (Yao 2005), which attempts to identify possible precursors of Dignāga's notion of *svasaṃvedana* in earlier Indian Buddhist thought.[15]

Williams's reflections on the topic of *rang rig* first began with a short article entitled "On *Rang rig*" (1983) and later developed into his monograph (1998). So far, this seminal work has had the unquestioned merit of drawing the attention of several scholars to the issue, laying the groundwork for further studies. In fact, most subsequent works engage, in one way or another, with Williams's well-known distinction between "self-awareness (i)", understood as a result of the subjective aspect of consciousness taking the objective aspect as its object, and "self-awareness (ii)", or "reflexive awareness", which refers to the inherent self-knowing nature of awareness – the proper reflexivity of the mind. Williams's philosophical approach offers a framework for engaging with the textual materials related to this topic. Indeed, Kapstein, among others, commends Williams's "determination to unpack philosophical arguments thoroughly and with great care" and his ability to guide the reader "through the maze of conceptual and dialectical difficulties the material presents" (Kapstein 2000, 106). Williams's monograph is particularly significant for highlighting the originality of Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa (1357-1419) and his followers' interpretation of Śāntideva's (685-763) refutation of *svasaṃvedana*. While the broader Indo-Tibetan tradition unanimously considers Śāntideva's critique applicable only at the level of ultimate reality (SKT *paramārthasatya*; TIB *don dam bden pa*), the dGe-lugs school, following Tsong-kha-pa, extends its validity to conventional reality (SKT *saṃvṛtisatya*; TIB *kun rdzob bden pa*) as well. The volume also provides a clear and detailed analysis of the key developments in the debate on self-awareness, tracing them over the centuries. It examines the perspectives of major figures, such as Śāntarakṣita (725-788), Prajñākaramati (950-1030), and Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (1846-1912), and explores the interpretative tensions between the dGe-lugs and rNying-ma traditions, particularly

15 Besides Williams's book, Yao (2005, 2) also takes into consideration a second work on this topic, *Yuishiki no kenkyū: Sanshō to shibun*, by Shōshin Fukihara (1988). Yao reports that a substantial part of this book is devoted to the issue of self-awareness as conceived by Dharmapāla (530-561), therefore considering self-awareness and the cognition of self-awareness. Unfortunately, the language of this book restricts access to its material. Yao reviews it as follows: "Fukihara's book is sophisticated and detailed. However, his discussion is dominated by the later commentaries and relies too heavily on East Asian sources; and does not attempt to make use of the Sanskrit and Tibetan materials, which makes his book a bit outdated" (Yao 2005, 2).

in the polemical exchanges between Mi-pham and his dGe-lugs critics. Despite some critical remarks (Kapstein 2000; Tatz 2001; Wangchuk [2004] 2005, 175-6 fn. 14), the book remains a landmark study on self-awareness in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

With regard to Yao's monograph, the book[16] devotes a chapter to each major stage in the development of the idea of self-awareness across four Buddhist schools: Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika, and Yogācāra.[17] Drawing on sources in Chinese, Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tibetan, Yao argues that the idea of *svasaṃvedana* initially emerged within the Mahāsāṃghika school in the context of omniscience, a soteriological concern, before evolving into an epistemological issue in Yogācāra thought. Additionally, Yao addresses the longstanding debate over whether Dignāga includes self-awareness within mental perception or treats it as a distinct category; ultimately, he argues in favor of the latter position. The book concludes with an exploration of Dignāga's *svasaṃvedana* through the lens of contemporary philosophical terminology and categories. In doing so, it bridges the study of Buddhist sources with modern debates on the topic, albeit adopting a strictly comparative approach that highlights similarities and differences between the two.[18] By providing valuable resources for the study of Buddhist philosophy of the mind, this volume makes a significant contribution to the field.

Over the years, alongside these two monographs, key landmarks in the secondary literature on this topic, a number of more focused studies have further explored and refined specific conceptions of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*.[19] One key point of intense scholarly debate concerns whether Dignāga includes *svasaṃvedana* within mental perception or treats it as a distinct category. The former view has been advocated mainly by Hattori (1968), Nagatomi (1980), and Franco (1986; 1993; 2005); the latter by Wayman (1977-78; 1991) and Yao (2004; 2005) (see § 3.1.1). The special issue of the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (Kellner et al. 2010) is also worth mentioning for it considers various Indian perspectives on *svasaṃvedana*. Moreover, several books, articles, and papers have touched upon this topic in passing while addressing broader Indo-Tibetan Buddhist issues,

16 Originally submitted as his PhD dissertation (Yao 2003), it was published after two years of revisions (Yao 2005).

17 Part of the last chapter first appeared in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 under the title "Dignāga and Four Types of Perception" (Yao 2004).

18 As Yao (2005, 5) states from the beginning, the book is also to be conceived as a contribution to the study of the human mind, since the Buddhist tradition can play a significant role whenever it is put in dialogue with the contemporary analysis of consciousness.

19 See, for instance, Levman 2024, where the roots of *svasaṃvedana* are explored within the Mahāsāṃghika school, which has broken away from the Theravādins.

such as the theory of perception (SKT *pratyakṣa*; TIB *mngon sum*), the relationship between perception and its objects, the theory of memory or awareness (SKT *smṛti*; TIB *dran pa*) in Buddhist practice, the concept of luminosity in relation to the mind (SKT *prakāśatā* and *prabhāsvarātā*; TIB *gsal ba* and *'od gsal ba*), and the notion of *rig pa* in the Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen) tradition. Another relevant category of secondary literature includes early attempts to establish a dialogue between Indo-Tibetan perspectives on self-awareness and contemporary debates on the subject. The significance of these works will be explored in the third and final part of this volume.

1.5 Technical Note

When a passage from a source is discussed primarily in its original language, the quotation is first provided in that language, followed by its translation. In other cases, the original language is included in a footnote or, where possible, in the main text within parentheses.

For Sanskrit sources, existing translations of the quoted passages are used. For Tibetan sources, unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author. Whenever relevant for a clearer understanding of the sources, different translations of the same passage are compared. For the Pāli passages quoted, existing translations are used, with textual references provided in the footnotes. The same applies to Chinese sources.

Titles preceded by an asterisk (*) indicate that they have been reconstructed based on secondary sources or philological deductions.

Given their status as classical texts, Indian sources are cited by the name of the author and the title of the text rather than by the year of publication. This will ensure more immediate recognition.