



8 Concluding Remarks

The aim of this volume has been to examine the concept of self-awareness (SKT *svasamvedana*; TIB *rang rig*) as it developed in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, particularly in terms of its potential contribution to the ongoing philosophical discourse on the topic, with the aim of enriching and deepening its related philosophical field of research.

The mind's knowing of itself is a highly technical notion in Buddhist philosophy and represents a crucial subject of debate within the tradition. However, it has not yet been fully examined by modern scholarship. Specific conceptions of *svasamvedana* or *rang rig* have been studied over the years, while Williams (1998) and Yao (2005) have considered this issue in the broader contexts of Tibetan Madhyamaka and pre-Dignāga Buddhist accounts, respectively. Nevertheless, there are no studies that encompass the range and complexity of this concept across the Buddhist tradition as a whole. As such, this study has aimed to offer an overview of the topic by addressing some of its principal aspects. Through an examination of the main interpretations of this Buddhist notion, it has identified, analyzed, and compared a range of philosophical accounts that underscore the relevance of self-awareness in the domains of epistemology, gnoseology, soteriology, ontology and, by extension, doxography.

Recently, several scholars have suggested placing the tradition's understanding of self-awareness in dialogue with contemporary

exegesis and ongoing philosophical debates. In this spirit, the present work has situated the examined accounts within broader reflections on the universal problem of self-awareness, by exploring conceptual bridges between traditional views and contemporary perspectives. To this end, the methodological approach adopted here draws on a cross-cultural praxis in which each interpretation of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* has been examined in light of modern readings of the topic, intertwining classical sources with current investigations into the nature of consciousness.

After a few introductory remarks, the first part of the study examined the principal Indian developments of the Buddhist notion of *svasaṃvedana*. It was initially shown how this notion emerged in certain pre-Dignāga sources within a soteriological discourse centered on the Buddha's omniscience, only later becoming an epistemological concern with the advent of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's philosophical project.

The following section focused on Dignāga's formulation of *svasaṃvedana*, reconsidered through the lens of various modern interpretations. Drawing on recent philological studies of *PS* and *PSV* 1.8cd-10, where *svasaṃvedana* is presented as *pramāṇaphala*, the nature and function of epistemological self-awareness were re-evaluated. For decades, the dominant view held that *svasaṃvedana*, as articulated in those passages, served to bridge the gap between externalism and internalism by functioning as the intentional (and therefore dualistic) cognizance of the objective aspect by the subjective aspect of experience. More recently, however, it has been argued that its role as *pramāṇaphala* is better understood as providing access to any experience whatsoever, that is, to the how of the appearance of any possible object. From this angle, *svasaṃvedana* still bridges the externalist-internalist divide, but in a radically different manner than previously suggested.

This section was followed by an examination of the main post-Dignāga Indian developments of the notion, with particular attention to the memory argument and other significant positions. These first two parts have thus laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how the Tibetan tradition assimilated and reinterpreted the notion of self-awareness.

The central part of the volume investigated the multifaceted relevance of *rang rig* within the Tibetan context. It began by examining Williams's (1998) influential manifesto, in which he outlined two principal models – reflective and reflexive – that would later serve as a basis for classifying the various Indo-Tibetan understandings of self-awareness in modern scholarship. In this reassessment of these categories, the way Williams identified the reflective model in the Tibetan passage selected for his manifesto was called into question, as was his portrayal of it as representative of a traditional

Buddhist standpoint derived from Dignāga and the Yogācāra school, and reflected in the dGe-lugs interpretation. However, it was argued that the reflective model cannot be neatly mapped onto Dignāga's formulation. Rather, it may be read as an attempt at an analytical articulation of the conceptual relationship between the inner elements of Dignāga's non-dual account of self-awareness, without implying any form of dualism. This interpretive direction appears to resonate with the dGe-lugs critique of *rang rig*. Alternatively, the reflective model might be understood as pointing to a common misreading of self-awareness, one that arises when a non-dual mental phenomenon is reinterpreted within a dualistic framework or constrained by linguistic structures.

The section then turned to examine the theme of luminosity of consciousness, a quality closely linked to self-awareness in Indo-Tibetan thought. A distinction was made between luminosity understood as *prabhāsvaratā* (TIB 'od gsal [ba]) and as *prakāśatā* (TIB gsal [ba]) along with a proposal for a possible convergence between these two dimensions of meaning.

The subsequent section focused on the multidimensional controversy that arises when comparing the views of *rang rig* endorsed by Tsong-kha-pa and Mi-pham, showing how self-awareness proves to be a crucial element in their broader ontological and epistemological frameworks. Accordingly, the section explored some of the main epistemological issues implied by *rang rig*, such as memory and the validity of cognition, and examined the role of ontology in shaping interpretations of self-awareness, particularly in relation to the doctrine of the two truths.

Following this, the crucial soteriological role of *rang rig* in relation to spiritual practice and breakthrough was examined, with particular reference to rNying-ma and rDzogs-chen perspectives. It was shown that, in these traditions, salvific transformation ultimately depends on reflexivity: self-awareness – as conceived in connection with the self-manifestation of the ontological ground – marks the soteriological difference between a path leading to *nirvāṇa* and one that leads to *saṃsāra*.

The central part of the volume thus revisited the main dimensions of the philosophical notion of *rang rig* within the Tibetan tradition, always framed in relation to its Indian heritage on one side, and contemporary exegesis on the other.

The final part of this work explored how the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition may contribute to a contemporary theory of self-awareness capable of addressing the challenges posed by a diverse and multidisciplinary framework. By identifying the key issues with which such a theory must engage, this section investigated the possible resonances, contributions and forms of mutual enrichment between traditional accounts and modern phenomenological approaches.

In particular, a promising common ground was outlined – one in which, in partnership with Indian and Tibetan philosophical and contemplative traditions, cognitive science and phenomenology might collaborate in exploring consciousness, reflexivity and the nature of the self. Within this context, the potentials of neurophenomenology were highlighted as a fertile framework for innovative research, capable of both enriching and problematizing our understanding of consciousness and its specific features. The aim here was to envision some of the most compelling directions for further research, directions that only a genuinely integrated project, bridging scientific and contemplative methodologies, could pursue. One particularly intriguing question raised in this context concerns the possibility of investigating minimal pre-reflective self-awareness during sleep and dreamless sleep, that is, the presence of a reflexivity of mind that persists and unfolds across different states of consciousness.

To address such questions, a promising interdisciplinary path appears to involve combining first-person experiential transformation, through meditative or yogic training, with third-person empirical methods. In this way, the rich legacy of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, among others, proves highly relevant to contemporary phenomenological and scientific inquiries aimed at expanding the understanding of the dimensions and structures of consciousness. The full potential of this shared ground remains to be realized.

Regarding the limitations of this study, its scope has been intentionally confined to the Buddhist tradition, deliberately setting aside the broader debates between Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools within the Indian philosophical landscape. As a result, only the main elements of the Indian Buddhist tradition have been considered, primarily to prepare the ground for analyzing their Tibetan assimilation, while the valuable contributions of non-Buddhist schools to the development of *svasaṃvedana* have not been addressed.

In the Tibetan context, a limited number of emblematic accounts was selected with the aim of representing at least the principal dimensions of this rich philosophical concept, without any claim to exhaustiveness. A more comprehensive inquiry would undoubtedly need to encompass additional Tibetan perspectives and doctrinal nuances. For instance, examining the role of *rang rig* within the soteriological framework of Mahāmudrā would be particularly valuable and deserves dedicated analysis.

As for the secondary literature, as noted at the outset of this volume, the language barrier has prevented engagement with recent studies published in Chinese and Japanese, which remain outside the scope of this investigation.

This volume is the outcome of a doctoral research project completed by the Author in 2018, originally conceived as an exploration of the deeper implications of what is understood as a fundamental trait of

the nature of the mind. The inquiry continues to open up new avenues for interpretation and reflection: much remains to be explored in this field, particularly concerning the Buddhist tradition and its potential contributions to contemporary philosophical discourse. This need becomes even more pressing when viewed in relation to the neurophenomenological perspectives discussed in the final part of the study. What is presented here constitutes a preliminary contribution to this broader and demanding undertaking, engaging the transformative potential of a cross-cultural philosophical dialogue whose relevance is becoming increasingly evident and intellectually generative.

