

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics*

Root Text: *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen, translated by Jampa Gendun. Final draft October 2002, updated May 2011. © Jampa Gendun & FPMT, Inc.

Lesson 10**12 July 2016**

Exam Presentation for Module 8. The knower of paths (cont'd). The eleven topics: 5. Function of the Mahayana path of meditation - review. 6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief. 7. Beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief. 8. Path of meditation of dedication.

EXAM PRESENTATION FOR MODULE 8

(A student presents her chosen verses from Chapter Eight of *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*).

With reference to her drawing, the conclusion is that no matter how small you are, if you train hard, you will be able to carry the elephant one day. This is how I see the drawing.

As she mentioned, we all know that if we were to put effort in anything, we will be able to achieve something in the end. I think I mentioned this a long time ago. In 2004 or 2005, I went to New Mexico in America for two months to study English. The teacher who taught us knows Buddhist philosophy. He is a layperson. He mentioned to me that he can read and understand Tibetan but he can't really speak it. He also knows all the definitions by heart by memorizing all the definitions like chanting OM MANI PADME HUNG. He would recite one mala of each definition. He did that for each definition. In this way, he memorized all the definitions. So he can remember everything by heart.

Of course, you can remember for one week and after one week, you will forget. After one week, you have to memorize again. After one month, you have to memorize again. After six months, you have to memorize again. You cannot just leave it there.

Today I may remember but it doesn't stay there forever. After one week, you check whether you still remember. If you do, it is quite stable. If not, then you have to memorize again. It goes like that month after month, year after year, until ten years later, if you can still remember, then it is quite stable.

Sometimes we may remember some topic or definition for one week or one day. If you don't memorize it again but just leave it there, slowly you will forget it totally. But if you memorize for weeks and months like that, it will become more stable in your mind. After one or two years, it becomes very stable and you will be able to remember. Even if you were to forget, somebody says a word, then immediately you can remember it all again. So you need a lot of effort to remember the topic. This is one way. There is no other technique.

You have to remind yourself again and again.

This topic is challenging and so difficult at times. I understand why it is difficult because I can't give every detail now. It is not possible. I am just giving an overview of the seventy topics so don't expect to know each and every seventy topics right now. It is not possible. I am just giving you some idea—what are the seventy topics, what is to be learnt on each topic and so forth.

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**THE KNOWER OF PATHS (CONT'D)**

| Definiendum     | Definition                                                                                                                                     | Boundary                                          | No. of topics | Topics (Seventy topics)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Knower of Paths | Mahayana superior's clear realizer conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness within the continuum of the person who possesses it. | Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground | 11            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limbs of knower of paths</li> <li>2. Knower of paths that knows hearers' paths</li> <li>3. Knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths</li> <li>4. Mahayana path of seeing</li> <li>5. Function of the Mahayana path of meditation</li> <li>6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief</li> <li>7. Beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief</li> <li>8. Path of meditation of dedication</li> <li>9. Path of meditation of rejoicing</li> <li>10. Path of meditation of achieving</li> <li>11. The completely pure path of meditation</li> </ol> |

*5. Function of the Mahayana path of meditation—review*

We were at the fifth topic of the knower of paths, the function or result of the Mahayana path of meditation.

There are six beneficial qualities to the positive results of the Mahayana path of meditation. The fifth quality is that the bodhisattvas on this level have entered the path leading to enlightenment and has the ability to achieve it with the special practice of unifying method and wisdom. Because of this particular practice, it is said that wherever they reside, that place becomes worthy of worship (the sixth quality) due to their practice of the perfections, especially the perfection of wisdom.

*6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief*

This topic, the Mahayana path of meditation of belief comes as a side discussion to the **fifth** topic, function of the Mahayana path of meditation.

I thought to say this. In the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, the king of gods, Indra, asked the Buddha, “Which brings about greater merit—the writing down of the words of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and after having done so, making offerings of garlands, flowers, unguents, parasols, victory banners and so forth to it or making the same

offerings to the relics of the tathagata?”

After being asked this question by Indra, Buddha turned to Kaushika and asked him what he thought. Kaushika thought about it and asked Indra in return, “What do you think? Where did the tathagata come from? What practice did he depend on in order to become a tathagata?”

Indra thought about this and said, “One becomes a tathagata and achieves omniscience through practising and actualizing the perfection of wisdom. It is through the perfection of wisdom that one becomes inconceivable, unsurpassed and equal to the unequalled.”

Then Indra asked Buddha, “Even if all sentient beings were to write down the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and make offerings of garlands, flowers, unguents, parasols, victory banners and so forth to it, what purpose does this serve?”

Kaushika replied, “It is difficult for those who are lazy, who do not have joyous perseverance, who has faulty wisdom and who do not have high aspirations to achieve full enlightenment. Therefore, those who want to achieve enlightenment should strive to honour the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* by writing it down, making offerings to it and so forth.”

If you remember in one of the earlier classes,<sup>1</sup> when the perfection of wisdom was etymologically divided, there were four divisions:

1. the natural perfection of wisdom
2. the scriptural perfection of wisdom
3. the path perfection of wisdom
4. the resultant perfection of wisdom

If one writes out the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, honours and worships it, and makes offerings of garlands, flowers, unguents, parasols, victory banners and so forth to it, then one will accumulate a great amount of merit. Through that, one will come to realize the path perfection of wisdom. Through that, one will be able to achieve the state of unsurpassed full enlightenment.

This is encouragement for those who are lazy and lacking in joyous perseverance and high aspirations. There are so many virtuous practices that we do physically and verbally such as reciting mantras and sutras, studying and so forth. Whatever it is, we should hold in mind that one of the purposes for doing these practices is to actualize the path perfection of wisdom one day. This is why we need to accumulate merit and to purify our mind. This is why we engage in prostrations, reciting mantras and texts and so forth. We need to keep this in mind.

It is very important to work towards actualizing the path perfection of wisdom. Until we can generate the path perfection of wisdom in our mental continuum, it is going to be difficult for us to overcome the root of samsara. And without the path perfection of wisdom, it is impossible for us to achieve the state of full enlightenment. Until we realize

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<sup>1</sup> Lesson 3.

emptiness, we will not be able to cut the root of our own samsara and we will not be able to stop taking rebirth in samsara. Henceforth, whatever practice we engage in and whatever virtue we accumulate, we should do so with the goal of actualizing the path perfection of wisdom in our mind.

We may spend our lives reciting many mantras. We may be able to accumulate a great number of recitations in our lifetime. In fact, some people manage to recite tens, if not hundreds, of millions of mantras in their lifetime. Although one does accumulate a fair amount of merit if one manages to do this, the recitation of those tens of millions of mantras will not even come close to touching the root of samsara.

We may spend our lives putting a lot of effort into the recitation of this and that prayer but doing that alone will also not come close to touching the root of all our problems, ignorance.

There are people who can do a lot of meditation every day—maybe five to six hours daily—but no matter how profound their meditation may be and no matter how stable their concentration, that in itself is not exceptional. Their practice will not even touch the root of samsara.

The point I am trying to make is that it is not correct to be content with doing practices such as focussing on prayers and recitation for your whole life. We should not be content with doing just physical or verbal practice such as recitations or prayers. The whole point of doing these practices is that they should motivate you and contribute to your achieving the path perfection of wisdom one day.

You have to understand the importance of actualizing the path perfection of wisdom, which is essentially the wisdom realizing emptiness. Here, in particular, we are not just talking about the wisdom realizing emptiness alone. We are talking about the path perfection of wisdom, the wisdom realizing emptiness that is *conjoined with mind generation*. This is where our efforts should be directed and what we should be aiming for. This should be the main purpose of whatever practices we do.

As I have said earlier, we accumulate a lot of merit when we write out the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and then honouring and worshipping it with offerings like garlands, flowers, unguents, parasols, victory banners and so forth. The main reason is that the path perfection of wisdom is generated in dependence upon the scriptural perfection of wisdom that is contained in the words that make up the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. With the motivation of being able to quickly actualize the path perfection of wisdom in our own lives, we then write out the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, honour and worship it with flowers, garlands, unguents, parasols, victory banners and so forth. We will accumulate a lot of merit and this will become a favourable condition for us to actualize the path perfection of wisdom. At the same time, we engage in learning about emptiness and reflecting on this topic in order to gain an understanding of it.

The path perfection of wisdom is generated in dependence upon the scriptural perfection of wisdom. This is why we venerate and highly respect the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. Whenever a sutra is present, it is important to honour and respect it.

Shantideva said in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* that for one who is seeking to achieve enlightenment, both the buddhas and sentient beings are equally important. You need both to achieve enlightenment. If we only respect the buddhas but not the sentient beings, Shantideva asks “Why is this so?” when we need both to achieve enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> As such, Shantideva said we should respect sentient beings just as we do the buddhas because we need both to achieve enlightenment.

It was mentioned in an earlier lesson<sup>3</sup> that there are:

- the contaminated path of meditation
- the uncontaminated path of meditation

Here, the Mahayana path of meditation of belief is a contaminated path of meditation.

In this context, what defines contaminated and uncontaminated? There are conceptual and non-conceptual consciousnesses. The contaminated path of meditation is the path of meditation that is conceptual. As for the difference between a non-conceptual and a conceptual consciousness, there is no need to repeat this again as this was already covered in the module on mind and awareness.

In general, the word “contaminated” means accompanied by the defilements or afflictions. But when we say that there is a path of meditation that is contaminated and there is a path of meditation that is uncontaminated, you should not apply the general meaning of contaminated here.

In this context,

- contaminated refers to the path of meditation that is conceptual in entity or nature.
- An uncontaminated path of meditation is the path of meditation that is non-conceptual in entity.

Of the three contaminated Mahayana paths of meditation, the first is the Mahayana path of meditation of belief.

Why does this come first? Because if there is belief, then there is the accumulation of merit. It is said in the *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* that the root of all virtues is belief or aspiration.<sup>4</sup> The root of such aspiration is meditating on cause and effect.

The word “belief” can mean different things. Here, belief is related to aspiration and in particular, faith. Among the different kinds of faith, it is the faith of conviction. In this context, belief is akin to this faith of conviction.

The mental factor of belief is also one of the five object ascertaining mental factors. Belief is a mind that is certain of a fact that one has already realized earlier with a valid cognition. The certainty is such that one knows it is this and not anything else. It cannot

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<sup>2</sup> “A buddha’s qualities are accomplished/ From sentient beings and the Victors alike,/ So what kind of system is it that/ I do not respect sentient beings in the same way I respect the Victors?” Verse 113, Chapter Six.

<sup>3</sup> Lesson 8.

<sup>4</sup> “The Muni himself has said/ That interest is the root of every class of virtue;/ Its root is constant acquaintance/ With the ripening results.” Verse 40, Chapter Seven.

be anything else. It is like that. This is the mental factor of belief.

What then are the objects of the Mahayana path of meditation of belief? They are the scriptural perfection of wisdom, the path perfection of wisdom and the resultant perfection of wisdom. But the main object of this Mahayana path of meditation of belief is not the path perfection of wisdom but rather the resultant perfection of wisdom.

This is similar to what was stated at the beginning of this text—that the actual perfection of wisdom is the resultant perfection of wisdom, not the natural perfection of wisdom, the scriptural perfection of wisdom nor the path perfection of wisdom.

With the resultant perfection of wisdom as its main object, the Mahayana path of meditation of belief is an ascertainment or belief that the resultant perfection of wisdom has the potential or power to fulfil one's aim, to fulfil the aims of others and oneself and to fulfil others' aims. It is this faith of conviction that the resultant perfection of wisdom has the power to do this.

How does one generate this belief that is the faith of conviction? What is the method? The method is scriptural authority and reasoning.

What is the function of this belief in the power of the resultant perfection of wisdom to fulfil the one's aims, the aims of others and oneself and others' aim? Essentially, one will accumulate immeasurable heaps of merit.

#### *7. Beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief*

By cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation of belief comes the beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief. When divided, there are three sets of nine things:

1. the nine praises
2. the nine eulogies
3. the nine laudations

Due to cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation of belief, one accumulates immeasurable heaps of merit. The praises come because of having this immeasurable amount of merit. Even if one is not looking for praise, neither desiring nor having any interest in it, it comes for this bodhisattva.

For us, even if we desire praise, it doesn't come. Not only does it not come, instead, in place of praise, criticisms come. This happens because of not having merit. Not only that but not having a lot of merit.

One of the beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief is that there are praises, eulogies and laudations. Why do these praises come to these bodhisattvas? Because they have accumulated immeasurable heaps of merit. If that is the case, then the opposite must apply, i.e., if one doesn't get praise, this means that one doesn't have merit.

#### *8. Path of meditation of dedication*

Through the Mahayana path of meditation of belief, the bodhisattva accumulates

immeasurable heaps of merit. Because he has a heap of merit and strong roots of virtue, next is the topic of dedication. What dedication does is that it transforms the collection of merit into a cause for enlightenment.

In order for a dedication of merit to occur, there must be something to be dedicated. What is to be dedicated? It is all the roots of virtue of the three times. Within that, there are the roots of virtue of others and one's own roots of virtue. Dedication is a particular mind that transforms the roots of virtue of the three times of others and oneself into the cause of enlightenment.

If that is the meaning of dedication, how does dedication transform the roots of virtue of others into a cause of enlightenment? If we are talking about our own roots of virtue, since we own them, it is not difficult to see how one can transform them into a cause of enlightenment.

In the first place, is it possible for us dedicate the roots of virtue of others? If it is possible, that means one can necessarily transform the roots of virtue of others into a cause of one's own enlightenment, i.e., I can use your merit for my enlightenment.

*Student 1:* We can use the virtue of others for our own enlightenment because as you mentioned just now, Shantideva said that to be enlightened, we need sentient beings. So if we need sentient beings to be enlightened, why not use their virtues to be enlightened also? That is the extension of my thinking of why the virtues of sentient beings can be dedicated as a cause of enlightenment. You need sentient beings to be a fully enlightened buddha. You need bodhicitta to work for them to become a buddha. By riding so to speak on their virtue, you use them as an aspiration to become a fully enlightened buddha.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It is not so much to do with aspiration or rejoicing. How do you dedicate somebody else's virtue? The point is this. Let's say now there are bodhisattva superiors who possess this Mahayana path of meditation of dedication. Are you saying that these beings have been and are still dedicating our merit now as a cause for (their) enlightenment?

The main question is this: Can we dedicate somebody else's virtue, i.e., you create the merit then somebody comes along and dedicates for you?

*Student 2:* Maybe by first exchanging oneself for others, then we can dedicate the other person's virtue. But first, it would require exchanging oneself with others.

*Khen Rinpoche:* That is interesting. I don't know. One needs to think more about this.

*Student 3:* Let's say the bodhisattva is already on the path of meditation. They have already seen emptiness directly. There is no self and others. So it is actually selfless. This is why they can dedicate the merit of self and others. Actually, it is selfless.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Does anybody have a different idea?

*Student 4:* In the seven-limb prayer, there is rejoicing in other people's merit as well as your own merit. So I think it is possible to dedicate other people's virtue because at the end of the seven-limb prayer, you do a sort of collective dedication and within that dedication, it includes rejoicing in your own merit and other people's merit. I do think it is possible to dedicate other people's merit.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Can we transform the virtue of others into a cause of enlightenment? The main point of dedication is to transform the roots of virtue into a cause of enlightenment. So can we transform somebody else's virtue into a cause of enlightenment?

*Student 5:* Can I clarify whether we are talking about transforming that merit into their enlightenment or one's own enlightenment?

*Khen Rinpoche:* That is also embedded in the question. You can say whatever you think.

*Student 5:* I think maybe it is not possible to use their virtue and transform it into the cause of *their* enlightenment. Otherwise, the Buddha would have done this for us already.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What are you saying? I didn't get you.

*Student 5:* The question is whether the virtue of others can be transformed into enlightenment but whose enlightenment are we talking about? My enlightenment or their enlightenment? So there are two possibilities. I'm referring to the possibility of transforming their virtue into their enlightenment. I think this is not possible.

*Khen Rinpoche:* This is not possible?

*Student 5:* Not possible.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Then is the other scenario possible?

*Student 5:* That is still a question. But I think it is not possible with the reason that if it is possible, the Buddha would have done it for all of us. He would have transformed all our virtue for our enlightenment already. Yet there is still samsara.

*Khen Rinpoche:* So the second one is also not possible then?

**Student 5:** I don't know. That is still a question. I haven't figured it out yet

*Khen Rinpoche:* I mean it is interesting. Sometimes we say, dedicate, dedicate but ...

*Student 6:* If I were to dedicate the merit of other beings' to enlightenment, I would be thinking that by virtue of the merit of sentient beings', may it be a cause for them to have a connection with me so that when I become a buddha, due to the merit they have accumulated, this merit will not be wasted by resulting in worldly things. May the sentient beings' merit be dedicated to enlightenment. By this dedication, may I have the



connection with them so that when I become a buddha, I will be able to guide them to enlightenment.

*Khen Rinpoche: I didn't get everything that you said.*

What you have just said is essentially no different from dedicating the roots of virtue of others for your own enlightenment or for their enlightenment. Even if you do dedicate them for your own enlightenment, you are achieving enlightenment for their purpose.

Is it possible to dedicate the roots of virtue of others for your own enlightenment? Isn't our enlightenment for others? Is it possible or not to dedicate the roots of virtue of others?

*Student 7: Are we making the assumption that when these sentient beings engage in virtue, they have dedicated their merit already?*

*Khen Rinpoche: Not necessarily.*

*Student 7: If it is not necessarily so, then actually when I'm dedicating the merit that they have not dedicated anyway—this sounds terrible, I know—I'm doing them a favour. We have always been told that the reason we dedicate is to give a sense of direction to the merit that we have generated, directing it towards a particular goal.*

*Khen Rinpoche: The main question now is this: Is it alright to dedicate the roots of virtue of others towards your own enlightenment? And when we say, "I dedicate all roots of virtue of others for my enlightenment," does it actually contribute to your enlightenment?*

*Khen Rinpoche: That is the question. You have to answer that.*

*Student 7: I keep on thinking about Rinpoche's advice that when we dedicate our merit, we dedicate merit of the three times of myself, sentient beings and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. So when I dedicate the merit of others to my enlightenment, yes, it does contribute to my enlightenment because my own merit is not enough to get me there so I need other people's merit.*

*Khen Rinpoche: Now the question is whether you are robbing other people's merit or not?*

*Student 7: I don't think the motivation is to steal their merit for my own gratification.*

*Khen Rinpoche: That merit doesn't belong to you. You didn't work hard for that merit. Then you just use up others' merit. You have to answer now. So is it stealing or not?*

*Student 7: No, I don't think so.*

*Khen Rinpoche: It belongs to others. It doesn't belong to us. That is why it's called others' merit.*

*Student 7:* For example, when we make offerings, we are offering those that belong to ourselves and making offering of others like when we visualize the offerings of other people's altar as well. Is that stealing then?

*Khen Rinpoche:* It is not correct. It is incorrect to visualize offering things that belong to others if you have not been given permission. It is wrong.

*Student 7:* OK. But fundamentally I do not agree that it is a form of stealing.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It is not correct to make offerings of things on the altar of somebody without any permission.

*Student 7:* Right.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Why is it not correct? What's the reason?

*Student 7:* I am getting myself into a corner again! With merit, I think there is always an exception to the rule. Many people who do virtue may not have the benefit of learning the Dharma and may not even know how to dedicate. Then in the next moment, they have anger and their merit has disappeared.

*Khen Rinpoche:* So you come along and dedicate for them.

*Student 7:* I'm helping them dedicate. I'm helping to protect their merit. I don't see that as a form of stealing.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Who doesn't dedicate, she will come and do for you!

*Student 7:* Enlightenment at the end of the day is for their benefit. It is not for my benefit. Ultimately, the goal is not to work for my own benefit. I don't feel that it should be for one's own benefit. It's really for others, to repay the kindness of others. If we don't have that idea in our minds then ... Like I said, I don't think it's a form of stealing.

*Student 8:* Perhaps if you think of something that is common property, like the street lights that belong to the citizens of Singapore, if you visualize those lights and offer them, then it will not become stealing. If they are on private property, if you were to take them, of course, it becomes stealing.

How can we think about merit being common property that does not become stealing? In the *Tathagata Essence*, it says in Verse 27, "A perfect Buddha's body is pervasive,/ Suchness is without differentiation." So the merit of all sentient beings are carried along by them in their clear light mind, the clear light mind being the carrier of merit or imprints, both virtuous and non-virtuous. If it is "without differentiation," if you understand that the ultimate nature is emptiness, then perhaps the clear light mind is so-called common property and that is the carrier of merit. It is a different thing in Tantra. There, it is the most subtle clear light mind.

If we take that as the merit and dedicate it towards enlightenment, I think you are

taking all sentient beings' merit towards dedicating for you to become enlightened. One, it is common property. Two, how is it common property? The clear light mind is without differentiation. The clear light mind is a carrier of imprints. Maybe we can understand it in that sense.

*Khen Rinpoche: Anyway, this is open for discussion. Just say whatever you like. Please come and say your piece. It's good.*

*Student 9: My answer is yes because it is to fulfil the aims of others and oneself. Right before this, we were looking at the Mahayana path of meditation of belief that Khen Rinpoche explained to be the aspiration that is mainly the faith of conviction. It is the bodhisattva practice and it starts with making aspirations and coming down to oneself as ordinary people. We too generate that aspiration. This is why we make that dedication prayer, which is in the Medicine Buddha practice, dedicating the virtues of others and oneself to the great enlightenment. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense when we make that prayer every day. The answer is yes because it is to fulfil the aims of others.*

*Khen Rinpoche: I'm saying the prayer doesn't make sense. I'm saying that now.*

*Student 9: But we are trying to make it make sense.*

*Khen Rinpoche: I'm asking the question: The prayer doesn't make sense so why are we doing this prayer? It doesn't make sense. It doesn't work.*

*Student 10: I was thinking in terms of dedicating the roots of virtue of other sentient beings and oneself into a cause for collective enlightenment and in terms of cause and effect. At the time of the cause, i.e., one's dedication, one not only dedicates one's roots of virtue but also others' roots of virtue for their enlightenment and also for one's own enlightenment. If you were to compare dedicating only one's roots of virtue and dedicating the roots of virtue of other sentient beings combined with one's own roots of virtue into a cause of our collective enlightenment, at the time of such dedication, that mind is a more expansive and vast mind. This is how I interpret that there is no stealing of other people's merit in that sense because the dedication of one's roots of virtue and other sentient beings' roots of virtue is for our collective enlightenment. So it works!*

*Khen Rinpoche: OK. Whether it works or not, we will see in the next class. Hope it works.*

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee and Julia Koh; edited by Cecilia Tsong.