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DAVID HIGGINS AND MARTINA DRASZCZYK

# MAHĀMUDRĀ AND THE MIDDLE WAY

POST-CLASSICAL KAGYÜ DISCOURSES ON MIND,  
EMPTINESS AND BUDDHA-NATURE

VOL. I

INTRODUCTION, VIEWS OF AUTHORS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS



ARBEITSKREIS FÜR TIBETISCHE UND BUDDHISTISCHE STUDIEN UNIVERSITÄT WIEN  
WIEN 2016





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TRANSLATIONS, CRITICAL TEXTS, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INDEX

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## CONTENTS

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Acknowledgement  | 12      |
| Introduction   | 14      |
| Current State of Research  | 17      |
| Politico-Historical Background   | 22      |
| Doctrinal Background   | 25      |
| Navigating the Middle Ways   | 29      |
| The Nature of Liberating Knowledge   | 41      |
| <br><b>Shākya mchog ldan</b>   | <br>44  |
| Shākya mchog ldan and the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā Tradition                          | 45      |
| Life, Writings and Influences  | 51      |
| Madhyamaka and the Dialectic of Emptiness: Rang stong and Gzhan stong              | 57      |
| The Three Natures ( <i>trisvabhāva</i> )   | 65      |
| The Two Truths ( <i>satyadvaya</i> )   | 67      |
| Mahāmudrā and Buddha Nature  | 74      |
| Direct Perception and Nondual Wisdom   | 101     |
| The Great Seal in Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā trilogy                            | 109     |
| Mahāmudrā: What it is and What it is Not   | 109     |
| Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā   | 116     |
| Mahāmudrā and What Remains ( <i>lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa</i> )                           | 121     |
| The Problem of Cessation   | 124     |
| Contested Methods of Realization   | 127     |
| Responses to Sa skya Paṇḍita's Criticism of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā                  | 131     |
| A Philosophical Defence and Justification of Mahāmudrā                             | 131     |
| Defending Mahāmudrā Views  | 135     |
| The Self-sufficient White Remedy ( <i>dkar po gcig thub</i> )                      | 135     |
| Mental Nonengagement ( <i>amanasikāra</i> ) and the Fire of Wisdom                 | 139     |
| Concluding Remarks   | 145     |
| <br><b>Karma phrin las</b>   | <br>148 |
| Overview   | 149     |
| Life, Writings and Influences  | 156     |
| Madhyamaka Approach  | 159     |
| Extant Writings  | 168     |
| Views of Reality   | 169     |
| The Compatibility of Rang stong and Gzhan stong                                    | 169     |
| The Two Types of Purity  | 181     |
| Buddha Nature Endowed with Qualities   | 184     |
| On the Unity of the Two Truths   | 200     |
| "Thoughts are <i>Dharmakāya</i> "  | 210     |
| Understanding Coemergence: the Inseparability of <i>Samṣāra</i> and <i>Nirvāṇa</i> | 217     |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Concluding Remarks  | 223 |
| <b>Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje</b>                                       | 226 |
| Overview  | 227 |
| The Differentiation and Identification Models                           | 229 |
| Reconciling Affirmation and Negation                                    | 238 |
| Life, Writings and Influences   | 242 |
| Blending Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka                                       | 250 |
| Emptiness and Hermeneutics of the Three Turnings                        | 253 |
| Core Soteriological Ideas and the Role of Philosophical Distinctions    | 265 |
| Buddha Nature   | 269 |
| Nature of Reality   | 275 |
| Nature of Mind  | 277 |
| The Problem of the Remainder ( <i>lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa</i> )              | 299 |
| On the Prospect of a Groundless Ground                                  | 314 |
| On Whether or Not a Buddha has Wisdom                                   | 320 |
| Mahāmudrā as Mental Nonengagement ( <i>amanasikāra</i> )                | 325 |
| Concluding Remarks  | 341 |
| <b>Padma dkar po</b>  | 342 |
| Overview  | 343 |
| Life, Writings and Influences   | 347 |
| The Basic Framework: <i>Mahāmudrā</i> and the Unity of the Two Truths   | 350 |
| Emptiness and the Hermeneutics of the Three Turnings                    | 352 |
| Hermeneutics of Mahāmudrā as Ground and Path                            | 356 |
| The Two Faces of Mahāmudrā: the Modes of Abiding and Error              | 357 |
| Mahāmudrā as the Mode of Abiding ( <i>gnas lugs phyag chen</i> )        | 359 |
| Mahāmudrā in the Mode of Error ( <i>'khrul lugs phyag chen</i> )        | 363 |
| Yang dgon pa on the Two Modes of Mahāmudrā                              | 369 |
| Padma dkar po's Transposition of Yang dgon pa's Distinction             | 376 |
| Interpretations of the Mahāmudrā Distinction                            | 378 |
| Mahāmudrā and the Unity of the Two Truths                               | 382 |
| Asymmetrical Unity and Rival Truth Theories (Jo nang and Dge lugs)      | 385 |
| The Ground of Truth   | 393 |
| Path Mahāmudrā and Liberating Knowledge                                 | 398 |
| Nonconceptual Knowing in the Shadow of the Bsam yas Debate              | 399 |
| Three Strands of <i>Amanasikāra</i> Interpretation in Indian Buddhism   | 403 |
| Padma dkar po's Three Grammatical Interpretations of <i>Amanasikāra</i> | 413 |
| Responding to Criticisms of <i>Amanasikāra</i>                          | 422 |
| Concluding Remarks  | 426 |
| <b>FINAL REFLECTIONS</b>  | 429 |

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In the early stages of the project, research trips were undertaken to India and Nepal (three weeks in 2012 by Martina Draszczyk and three months in 2013 by David Higgins) where the Vajra Vidya Library in Sarnath and the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute in Delhi were especially helpful in providing us with texts essential for our research. Dr. Higgins was able to obtain from the Vajra Vidya Library a xylograph copy of a rare edition of an early critical review of Tibetan tantric buddha nature theories by Mi bskyod rdo rje that the author originally referred to as *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*) but which appears in his Collected Works under the less irreverent title *Sublime Fragrance of the Nectar of Analysis* (*Dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*). This copy proved necessary for completing a proper critical edition and translation of this important text, parts of which appear in this publication. Our research in India and Nepal provided an invaluable opportunity to work closely with traditionally-trained scholars of Bka' brgyud doctrine on resolving various difficult points (*dka' gnad*) of Mahāmudrā exegesis in some of our main primary sources. In this regard, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks in particular to Mkhan po Tshul khri ms rgya mtsho of KIBI Institute, Delhi in India and David Karma Chos 'phel of Thrangu Tashi Yangtse Monastery, Namobuddha in Nepal, for taking the time to patiently address our many questions.

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2013), and Dkon mchog bstan 'phel (2013–2015). Our special thanks go to them for working with us through difficult sections of the texts included in our study.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mahāmudrā teachings that form the doctrinal nucleus of the various Tibetan Bka' brgyud<sup>1</sup> sects in Tibet have stimulated a rich heritage of philosophical, poetic and didactic writings since their inception in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the physician-turned-monk Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153). Yet they have also been the target of unremitting criticism by other Tibetan Buddhist schools beginning with Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's (1182–1251) denunciation of certain modern-day Mahāmudrā (*da lta'i phyag rgya chen po*) views early in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the doctrinal history of Bka' brgyud traditions has frequently been interwoven with polemics, and increasingly so as the expansion of their institutional networks and doctrinal influence brought them into closer dialogue and confrontation with other ascendant Tibetan Buddhist schools. In the midst of such exchanges, Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā teachings have always found able defenders, and not all of them having a primary affiliation with any Bka' brgyud lineage. Apologists have included the likes of the Sa skya master Shākya mchog ldan, and many Rnying ma masters including Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308–1364), Rtse le Sna tshogs rang grol (b. 1608), and Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug rang grol (1781–1851). The tradition was also to some extent validated by the Dge lugs polymath Thu'u kwan Chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802) who followed a standard Tibetan rhetorical strategy of defending the purity of the early Bka' brgyud founders while accusing modern-day proponents of various misinterpretations of their original teachings.<sup>2</sup>

Attempts to legitimize the authenticity of Dwags po Bka' brgyud teachings have generally proceeded from the contention that these teachings not only accord with authoritative Indian Buddhist doctrinal systems but also represent their ultimate import or definitive meaning (*nges don*). This placed the onus on defenders such as the four examined in this book to establish the continuity of Bka' brgyud doctrines and practices with authoritative Indo-Tibetan traditions of exegesis (*bshad lugs*) and praxis (*sgrub lugs*) and also show how they offered a distinctive path beyond the many errors, deviations, and impasses that result from a wrong or partial understanding of such traditions. Against detractors who had raised questions about the Indian provenance of certain Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā doctrines such as Sgam po pa's "White Panacea" (*dkar po gcig thub*), and also doubts about whether such teachings should even be considered Buddhist at all<sup>3</sup>, Mahāmudrā apologists stood united in promoting this tradition as a way firmly grounded in insights and methods of Indian Buddhist third

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<sup>1</sup> Dwags po is the name of a district situated south of the Gtsang po river and west of Kong po which was the birth-place of Sgam po pa, the "physician from Dwags po" (*dwags po lha rje*). The Dwags po Bka' brgyud is the major subsection of the Bka' brgyud tradition having numerous subsects which can all be traced back to Sgam po pa and his immediate disciples.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Jackson 2006, especially 13.

<sup>3</sup> For an illuminating full-length treatment of this controversy, see D. Jackson 1994.

turning sūtras, the tantras, and the *dohās* and *upadeśas* of the mahāsiddhas. It is presented as a path that distils from these traditions the most direct and effective means of reaching the Mahāyāna goal of spiritual awakening for the sake of oneself and others.

Some of the most cogent expositions and defenses of Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā doctrines and practices were advanced during the post-classical era (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries)<sup>4</sup> following the overthrow of the Sa skya hegemony by the founder of the Phag mo gru dynasty, Ta'i Situ Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364) in 1354.<sup>5</sup> This was a period when several of the Bka' brgyud lineages for the first time enjoyed sufficient institutional backing, religious authority, and intellectual freedom to begin replying to the criticisms of Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251) and his Sa skya and Dge lugs advocates. If one considers the long list of scholars who critically replied to Sa paṇ's Mahāmudrā criticisms by means of the standard methods of argumentation based on scripture (*lung*) and reasoning (*rigs*), one cannot fail to be struck by the fact that all belonged to the post-classical period or later.<sup>6</sup> The sectarian and heatedly polemical climate of the time ensured that their responses did not go unchallenged for long; in due course the critical responses of Shākya mchog ldan, Mi bskyod rdo rje, and Padma dkar po in their turn provoked fierce rebuttals from defenders of Sa skya pa and Dge lugs pa doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Such interactions must be seen as part of a broader post-classical

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<sup>4</sup> We have followed the periodization suggested by van der Kuijp 1989 who coins the term “post-classical” to refer to a period of Tibetan epistemology beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century “characterized by a reappraisal of Pre-Classical [late 10<sup>th</sup> to late 12<sup>th</sup> centuries] *tshad ma*, by critiques of Sa-paṇ's work, and by its defense” (6). Within the framework of our research, this period is characterized by an unprecedented increase in Bka' brgyud polemical responses to Sa paṇ and later Sa skya and Dge lugs critics.

<sup>5</sup> Van der Kuijp (2003) notes (431–32), on the basis of Byang chub rgyal mtshan's autobiography, that the Phag mo gru founder continued to face formidable resistance until at least 1361, during which time the Sa kya was still considered superior *de jure*, if not *de facto*.

<sup>6</sup> The list of scholars who critically responded to Sa paṇ's broadsides against Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings includes 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481), the Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524), Karma phrin las Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539), Chos rgyal bstan pa Dwags ram pa (1449–1524), Shākya mchog ldan (1423–1507), the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1511–1587), the Fourth 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592), the 'Bri gung Zhabs drung Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1661), 'Brug pa mkhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645), Ngag dbang 'Phrin las (17<sup>th</sup> c.), and Rtse le Sna tshogs rang grol (b. 1608). For a discussion of different respondents to Sa paṇ's *Sdom gsum rab dbye* criticisms of Bka' brgyud views, which includes some of the names listed above, see Huber 1990, 400. Several of the authors named here responded to Sa paṇ's critiques in the context of commentaries on Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don*. This largely unexplored commentarial literature which to date comprises thirteen extant commentaries (as well two minor works), the most recent being *Zab mo nang gi don 'grel ba'i lus sems gsal ba'i me long* of Thub bstan phun tshogs (b. 1955) published in 2004 (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang), is an invaluable source for understanding doctrinal developments in Bka' brgyud traditions during the formative 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>7</sup> For an “impressionistic” overview of Tibetan polemical literature during the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Cabezón and Dargyay 2006 (18–33). A detailed survey of post-classical polemical literature concerning Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā traditions would go well beyond the scope of this book. Confining ourselves to some of the polemical works associated with the authors considered herein, we can mention the following. Shākya mchog ldan posed one hundred questions regarding Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Sdom gsum rab dbye* in a work entitled *Good*

trend toward the consolidation and protection of representative views and practices of the major Tibetan schools. These were typically legitimized by claims of fidelity to Indian Buddhist sources and reinforced by the charisma and prestige of the traditions' spiritual founders. This phase of doctrinal consolidation developed in tandem with the expansion of religious institutions and the forging of institutional identities. Because scant attention has hitherto been paid to post-classical Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā traditions, the state of knowledge of key philosophical developments and exchanges during the most mature stage of their development has been piecemeal and inchoate.

The present work was motivated in part by the paucity of systematic knowledge about post-classical Mahāmudrā doctrinal and polemical trends, their major proponents, and their intellectual milieux. Our primary aim has been to critically examine the attempts to articulate and defend Bka' brgyud views and practices by four leading post-classical thinkers and offer a selected anthology of their representative writings on Mahāmudrā. Their contributions

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*Questions Concerning 'Differentiation of the Three Codes'* (*Sdom gsum rab dbye la dri ba legs pa*, see SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, vol. 17, 448<sub>7</sub>–462<sub>7</sub>). This was critically responded to by Go ram pa Bsod nams seng ge in his *Sdom pa gsum gyi bstan bcos la dris shing rtsod pa'i lan sdom gsum 'khrul spong* (see Jackson, David 1989b) and also by Glo bo mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub (1456–1532), on which see Jackson, David 1991, 235–237. On these works, see also Komarovski 2011, 20 and 313 n. 20 and 21. Rejoinders to Shākya mchog ldan's criticisms of Tsong kha pa are found in the *Chen po Shāk mchog pa'i rtsod lan* by Se ra rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, a subsection of the *Zab mo stong pa nyid kyi lta ba la log rtog 'gog par byed pa'i bstan bcos lta ba ngan pa'i mun sel*, in *Dgag lan phyogs sgrigs*, 175–385, on which see Cabezón and Dargyay 2006, 30 and n. 154. Mi bskyod rdo rje's criticisms of Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā-related epistemological and buddha nature views are found in his MA commentary *Dwags po'i shing rta* (Zi ling ed.), 19<sub>20</sub>–21<sub>2</sub> and 26<sub>10</sub>–54<sub>16</sub> and his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*, 1010<sub>2</sub>–1023<sub>1</sub>), on which see Volume II of present study, translation: 105–9 and 111–15, critical edition: 109–11 and 115–17. Mi bskyod rdo rje's criticisms of Dge lugs pa interpretation of \*Prasaṅgika-Madhyamaka in his aforementioned MA commentary were repudiated by Se ra rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan in his *Gsung lan klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* (in *Dgag lan phyogs sgrigs*, 69–173). Padma dkar po's criticism in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* that the Dge ldan pa “succumbed to an eternalist view regarding the ultimate and a nihilist view regarding the conventional” (examined in chapter four below) was countered by the Dge lugs scholar Sgom sde shar chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532–1592) in his *Byang chub sems 'grel gyi rnam par bshad pa'i zhar byung 'brug mi pham padma dkar pos phyag chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces par rje tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa'i gsung lan* (in *Dgag lan phyogs sgrigs*, 607–645). Padma dkar po's refutations of Sa paṇ's criticisms of Mahāmudrā doctrine in the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, a masterful exposition and defence of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā, were countered by the Sa skya scholar Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho (1523–1596) in his *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i dka' 'grel sbas don gnad kyi snying po gsal byed phyag chen rtsod spong skabs kyi legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer*, in *Klu sgrub rgya mtho gsung skor* vol. 5, 111–206. As a counter-response to Mang thos's rebuttal, Padma dkar po's leading disciple Mang thos Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645) in turn wrote a lengthy defence of his master's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* entitled *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces bya ba'i bstan bcos la rtsod pa spong ba'i gdam srid gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i dge mtshan*, in *Sangs rgyas rdo rje gsung 'bum* vol. 4, 293–636. For some of the Dge lugs responses to Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 70–71 and n. 160. Relevant parts of some of the above-mentioned works are considered in the chapters below. A balanced account of post-classical intersectarian debates concerning Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā doctrines would have to consider responses by Jo nang scholars to Bka' brgyud, Dge lugs and Sa skya critics. See, for example, Gnyag dbon Kun dga' dpal's (1285–1379) influential overview and defence of the Jo nang system entitled *Bde gshegs snying po'i rgyan gyi 'khrul 'joms dang bstan pa spyi 'grel gyi rnam bshad* in which he criticizes Sgam po pa's precept that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”.



represent a high-water mark in Mahāmudrā exegesis. The institutional expansions that occurred during this time undoubtedly exerted a ratchet effect on intersectorian dialogue and polemics, raising scholasticism to new levels of maturity and sophistication. It was a time when several Bka' brgyud traditions, most prominently the Karma Bka' brgyud, enjoyed unprecedented temporal power and religious influence thanks to the support of powerful Tibetan aristocratic clans. The scholars chosen for consideration are [1] Shākya mchog ldan (1423–1507), a celebrated yet controversial Sa skya scholar who developed a strong affiliation with the Karma Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition in the last half of his life, [2] Karma phrin las Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539), a renowned Karma Bka' brgyud scholar-yogin and tutor to the Eighth Karma pa, [3] the Eighth Karma pa himself, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), who was among the most erudite and influential scholar-hierarchs of his generation, [4] and Padma dkar po (1527–1592), Fourth 'Brug chen of the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud lineage who is generally acknowledged as its greatest scholar and systematizer.<sup>8</sup> The book is divided into two volumes, with the first comprising an overview of the Mahāmudrā treatments of the authors based on a close reading of their seminal Mahāmudrā writings and the second presenting edited texts and translations of selected materials by these authors on Mahāmudrā and related doctrines.

#### CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Although each of the authors considered in this work has received some attention in contemporary Buddhist studies, their views on Mahāmudrā have not been closely examined in light of the antecedent Buddhist philosophical views they built upon or in relation to the views of their coreligionists that they endorsed or opposed. What follows is a concise overview of previous work on these authors to define the parameters of our research.

Shākya mchog ldan's philosophical views have been the subject of several full-length studies including a book on his Yogācāra and Madhyamaka interpretations by Yaroslav Komarovski (2011). This author also published an annotated translation of three of Shākya mchog ldan's short treatises on Madhyamaka (2000) as well as a few articles that will be noted below. An unpublished PhD dissertation by Philippe Turenne (2010) investigates how Shākya mchog ldan understood the Five Dharmas of Maitreya as keys to assimilating the divergent aspects of Mahāyāna, especially its tantric aspect, and why he regarded all five as being of definitive meaning. Mention should also be made of an unpublished PhD thesis by Volker

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<sup>8</sup> One conspicuous absence in this cast of characters is the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho who was the main teacher of Shākya mchog ldan and Karma phrin las and predecessor of the Eighth Karma pa. His famous summary of Buddhist epistemology entitled *Tshad ma rigs gzhung rgya mtsho* is an important desideratum for future research which will require careful comparison with Indian *pramāṇa* sources.

Caumanns (2012) that offers a well-documented study of the life and works of Shākya mchog ldan.

There have been a number of shorter treatments of Shākya mchog ldan's position on buddha nature. David Seyfort Ruegg (1963, 74) briefly discusses Tibetan exegetes who attribute to both the Jo nang pas and Shākya mchog ldan the type of Gzhan stong buddha nature theory found in the *Brhaṭṭikā* according to which the perfect nature is empty of the imagined and dependent natures. Van der Kuijp (1983, 43 and n. 157) translates a short passage from Shākya mchog ldan's *Dbu ma'i byung tshul*, vol. 4, 239<sub>7</sub>–240<sub>3</sub> comparing Rngog Blo ldan shes rab's (1059–1109) 'analytical' *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV) tradition of defining buddha nature as a nonaffirming negation (*med par dgag pa : prasajyapratishedha*) with Bstan Kha bo che's (b. 1021) 'meditative' interpretation of it as naturally luminous wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Bstan Kha bo che's interpretation of buddha nature as natural luminosity of mind is also noted in Tillemans and Tomabeche 1995 (891–96). Kazuo Kano's unpublished PhD thesis on Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (2006) cogently summarizes Shākya mchog ldan's buddha nature position vis-à-vis that of Rngog and includes a translation and analysis of Shāk mchog's classification of the major lines of buddha nature interpretation in Tibet. Mathes 2004 offers an interesting comparison of the Yogācāra-based buddha nature views of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) and Shākya mchog ldan: while the former maintains that buddha nature is the perfect nature empty of the imagined and dependent natures, Shākya mchog ldan follows the Yogācāra definition of the perfect nature as the dependent nature empty of the imagined nature. This article includes a translation and discussion of Tāranātha's account of an imagined dialogue between Dol po pa and Shākya mchog ldan on the nature and status of *tathāgatagarbha*. Mathes 2008 (32 and n. 143) makes reference to Shākya mchog ldan's identification of Rngog's buddha nature theory in terms of a nonaffirming negation. Komarovski 2006 includes translations of two of Shākya mchog ldan's short treatises on buddha nature: the *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad mdo rgyud snying po*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, vol. 13, 124–136 and *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, *ibid.*, vol. 13, 113–124. This article also provides a useful listing of more than twenty texts of different genres by Shākya mchog ldan that discuss buddha nature. Komarovski 2010 discusses whether Shākya mchog ldan's interpretation is 'contemplative' or 'dialectical' without, however, mentioning the researches by Seyfort Ruegg, van der Kuijp and Kano on this important issue.

With regard to Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā writings, Seyfort Ruegg 1989 (105–108) briefly discusses the author's Mahāmudrā trilogy, seeing it as an attempt to harmonize tensions between Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticisms regarding Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā and the

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<sup>9</sup> See also Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 35–37 for a discussion of the accounts of these two lineages by Sum pa mkhan po and Taranātha.

Bka' brgyud tradition's own accounts of its views and practices. David Jackson 1994 (128–33) also emphasizes this harmonizing element in a short overview of some of Shākya mchog ldan responses to Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticisms of Dwags po Mahāmudrā from the Mahāmudrā trilogy. This harmonizing element is certainly evident in parts of the trilogy (especially the third work), yet other sections reveal a more openly critical style of engagement that explicitly takes issue with the criticisms of Sa paṇ, especially as reframed by his later advocates. The reader is referred to the translation and critical edition of this trilogy in volume II of the present study. The treatments of Jackson and Seyfort Ruegg illustrate the difficulty of making an unequivocal assessment of Shākya mchog ldan's stance on this complex issue.

Finally, Dreyfuss 1997 (27–29) gives a relatively brief but illuminating treatment of some of Shākya mchog ldan's Gzhan stong-oriented epistemological views in the context of commenting on some of the leading Sa skya Pramāṇa scholars in Tibet. Although Dreyfuss (1997, 29) has observed that Shākya mchog ldan endorsed a Gzhan stong position only in works following his first meeting with the Seventh Karma pa (1454–1506) in 1484, we have found textual evidence (see chapter one) to support an earlier date for his approval of Gzhan stong. Yet we have also documented a more ambivalent stance toward Gzhan stong that the author appears to have adopted in his later Mahāmudrā writings. The foregoing synopsis of previous scholarship on Shākya mchog ldan reveals the need for an inaugural study of the author's views on Mahāmudrā in relation to those of his coreligionists and in light of his own complex and shifting philosophical affinities. This we have attempted in the first chapter.

Turning to Karma phrin las, the limited range of his extant writings<sup>10</sup> has so far hindered any balanced treatment of his thought. As early as 1969, Herbert V. Guenther published an English translation of Karma phrin las pa's commentary on Saraha's *King Dohā*, having earlier used material from the author's *dohā* commentaries in his study of Nāropa (Guenther 1963). An unpublished MA thesis on Karma phrin las pa by Jim Rheingans (2004) offers a well-substantiated account of the author's life based on various hagiographical and historical sources and includes a short overview of his writings.<sup>11</sup> Jan Sobisch 2002 translates and interprets some Question and Answer (*dris lan*) materials by Karma phrin las pa on the Three Vow (*sdom gsum*) theories in Tibetan Buddhism and includes a brief summary of his biography.<sup>12</sup> Karl Brunnhölzl 2009 contains a translation<sup>13</sup> of a portion of the first chapter of Karma phrin las pa's commentary on Karma pa III Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don*

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<sup>10</sup> For a survey of his extant writings which are traditionally said to have filled ten volumes but currently amount to a few commentaries, a collection of songs (*mgur*) together with replies to queries on a variety of topics, and a few miscellaneous texts on ritual, see the introductory remarks in chapter two.

<sup>11</sup> Rheingans, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Sobisch, 2002, 217–71.

<sup>13</sup> Brunnhölzl 2009, 313–23.

which elucidates the latter's theory of buddha nature. Anne Burchardi 2011 includes a translation<sup>14</sup> of an excerpt of Karma phrin las pa's *Discussion to Dispel Mind's Darkness: A Reply to Queries of [Bsod nams lhun grub, the Governor of] Lcags mo*<sup>15</sup> that addresses the relationship between Rang stong and Gzhan stong, identifying Rang byung rdo rje as a proponent of a Gzhan stong view in which Rang stong and Gzhan stong are understood to be without contradiction. Because this text contains inter alia the best available statement of Karma phrin las pa's views on Self-emptiness and Other-emptiness, and their compatibility, we have included a complete translation of this text in volume II. The limited availability of the author's extant Mahāmudrā works has not allowed for a comprehensive assessment of his thought on this subject. However, it has enabled us to give a cursory overview of his Mahāmudrā views and to trace lines of doctrinal continuity between Shākya mchog ldan who was one of his teachers and Mi bskyod rdo rje who was his most renowned disciple.

The Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje's status as a formidable Buddhist thinker was first brought to the attention of the scholarly community via two pioneering articles by Paul Williams (1983) and David Seyfort Ruegg (1988).<sup>16</sup> Both were focused on the introductory section (*spyi don*) of the author's late *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary entitled *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*.<sup>17</sup> Williams provided a cursory treatment of the author's critique of Dge lugs pa positions, whereas Seyfort Ruegg offered a more substantial doxographical analysis of different Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka views and their sūtric and tantric lines of transmission, focusing on the first few folia of this commentary. Subsequent doctrinal research on the Eighth Karma pa has largely confined itself to this opening portion of the introduction<sup>18</sup> and the sixth chapter<sup>19</sup> of this commentary, as well as his early and influential *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentary that was recently examined and partially translated by Karl Brunnhölzl as part of his wide-ranging study of Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma commentaries on this *śāstra*.<sup>20</sup> This study contains some useful material on the Eighth Karma pa's interpretations of the Mahāyāna *gotra* theory in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Mention must also be made of an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation on Mi bskyod rdo rje by Jim Rheingans (2008) that offers the first systematic

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<sup>14</sup> Burchardi 2011, 317–43.

<sup>15</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel* (ca 88–92). See also Volume II, translation: 88–91, critical edition: 91–94.

<sup>16</sup> See Williams 1983 and Seyfort Ruegg 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Full title: *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad Dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal lung Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*. Seattle: Nitartha international, 1996. (733 p.)

<sup>18</sup> See Broido 1985 and Brunnhölzl 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See Goldfield et al. 2005. In this work four translators each translated “key portions” of Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on the sixth chapter of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* according to their own “individual translation styles and choice of terms” under the guidance of Mkhan po Tshul khriims rgya mtsho (b. 1934).

<sup>20</sup> For the Karma Bka' brgyud commentaries, see Brunnhölzl 2010 and 2011a.

biographical study of the Eighth Karma pa based on careful analysis of a wide range of primary historical and hagiographical sources.<sup>21</sup>

In sum, the current understanding of the Eighth Karma pa's philosophical views are based almost exclusively on portions of two early non-tantric Mahāyāna commentaries<sup>22</sup>, leaving the vast majority of his exegesis on tantric and Mahāmudrā systems a veritable *terra incognita* for research. These lacunae are noteworthy when one considers the preponderance of tantric over “sūtric” interpretations both in Mi bskyod rdo rje's exegesis of buddha nature and in his criticisms of rival theories, not to mention his writings on Mahāmudrā. The result is that the vast majority of the Eighth Karma pa's work on Mahāmudrā, buddha nature and other central topics has received little scholarly attention, and none at all has been devoted to his innovative efforts to relate Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā views to the broader currents of Buddhist doctrine and praxis, both sūtric and tantric. Our survey of the author's Mahāmudrā exegesis vis-à-vis his philosophical views, and the accompanying selection of important expositions and defences of Mahāmudrā doctrines and practices, are intended as a first attempt to fill this gap.

Padma dkar po's Mahāmudrā views have advanced gradually over the past half-century beginning with Herbert V. Guenther's pioneering use of the author's writings to help clarify Bka' brgyud views on *mahāmudrā*, the Six Doctrines of Nāropa (*nāro chos drug*), Four Yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) and other tantric materials in the context of his study of Nāropa (Guenther 1963) and several articles from this period. A later work (Guenther 2005) includes as its second chapter (15–24) an annotated translation and short discussion of Padma dkar po's *Explanation of the Four Yogas of Mahāmudrā: Eye for Seeing the Definitive Meaning* (*Phyag rgya chen po rnal 'byor bzhi'i bshad pa nges don lta ba'i mig*).<sup>23</sup> The only other scholar to critically engage with Padma dkar po's thought is Michael Broido who composed a series of articles on this master in the early 1980s. These articles discuss Padma dkar po's interpretations of *tantra* (rgyud) (Broido 1984) and *yuganaddha* (*zung 'jug : yuganaddha*) (Broido 1985), his contributions to Buddhist hermeneutics (Broido 1982, 1983 and 1984), and his critical replies to Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticism of Sgam po pa's White Panacea (*dkar po gcig thub*) doctrine (Broido 1984a). The last of these articles and his paper on Padma dkar po's view of the two truths (Broido 1985b) have provided some useful doctrinal background for our consideration of Padma dkar po's Mahāmudrā exegesis.

On the whole, the previous studies on Padma dkar po leave much to be said about how he developed the core elements of his Mahāmudrā exegesis in relation to their Indian and

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<sup>21</sup> See Rheingans 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Of these, Mi bskyod rdo rje's many digressions on buddha nature doctrine in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary have received no attention.

<sup>23</sup> In PKsb vol. 21, 423–29.

Tibetan sources and the intellectual climate of his age. It is hoped that our analysis of his Mahāmudrā views and accompanying translations of pertinent materials reveals the extent to which he not only adopted subject matter such as Yang dgon pa's distinction between *mahāmudrā* in the modes of abiding and error (*gnas lugs phyag chen* and *'khrul lugs phyag chen*) and the *amanasikāra* interpretations of Maitrīpa (alias Maitreyaṇātha), but also adapted them to his own post-classical philosophical, polemical and soteriological concerns.

The foregoing overview of previous studies on our authors has cast some light on areas of their Mahāmudrā exegesis in need of further research and clarification. With these in mind, our critical engagement with the authors' treatments of Mahāmudrā has consecrated special attention to three pertinent issues: [1] how the authors related Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings to prevailing Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophical views on emptiness, the nature of mind, nature of reality and buddha nature, [2] how they framed these teachings in relation to Indo-Tibetan Buddhist doxographical classifications such as Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, as well as hermeneutical categories such as the three *dharmacakras* and distinctions between provisional and definitive meaning, and [3] how they defended leading Mahāmudrā views and practices against charges of incoherence and even heresy (*chos min*, *chos log*) in an intellectual climate increasingly dominated and riven by sectarian exclusivism and religious conservatism.

Before embarking on our survey of post-classical discourses on Mahāmudrā, it may be useful to begin by sketching in broad strokes the politico-historical and doctrinal backgrounds out of which they arose.

#### POLITICO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

While our focus in this work is primarily doctrinal, we have been repeatedly reminded that ideas never develop in isolation from the societies and institutions from which they emerge. In this regard, it may be worthwhile to shed a little light on the religious and sociopolitical background out of which post-classical Bka' brgyud exegesis evolved. During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Bka' brgyud lineages, like other Tibetan Buddhist lineages, were in the midst of expanding their monastic networks to accommodate growing numbers of students. As the Tibetan Buddhist world transitioned from smaller local monasteries to larger monastic institutions, there was a proportionate increase in large fixed costs such as the construction and upkeep of monasteries and estates, the creation of artistic works and monuments, the performance of rituals, the commissioning and printing of sacred texts, and the authoring of biographies of important religious hierarchs.<sup>24</sup> All this required a steady source of income. As a result, the growth and survival of monastic institutions depended more and more on the

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<sup>24</sup> See van der Kuijp and McCleary 2008, 2.

patronage of wealthy Tibetan aristocratic clans. The need to look locally for protection and financial backing was precipitated in part by the political transition in China from the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). This regime change brought with it a significant shift in China’s foreign policy toward Tibet from the Yuan’s hands-on system of mutual benefit based on preceptor-patron (*bla yon*) relations<sup>25</sup> to the more hands-off approach and the liberalization of local politics characteristic of the Ming rulers.<sup>26</sup>

The Ming dynasty’s disengagement of China from Tibet meant that the expanding Buddhist institutions were forced to look to wealthy domestic clans for protection and patronage if they were to survive in an increasingly competitive political-ecclesiastical environment. For a time, the Karma Bka’ brgyud sect seemed to be clear winners in this regard, securing the patronage of the powerful Rin spungs pa clan. They did so by building on and domesticating its long history of forging preceptor-patron relations with foreign powers beginning with the Tangut court and continuing, after its overthrow, with the succeeding Mongolian Yuan dynasty. In exchange for patronage and protection, the Karma Bka’ brgyud hierarchs, like their Sa skya counterparts, typically offered the emperor and his family spiritual counsel and tantric rituals such as Kālacakra or Mahākāla rites both to confer a measure of spiritual authority on the rulers and protect the state from calamity. Religious hierarchs of the Sa skya and Karma bka’ brgyud sects served not only as ritual officiants and spiritual advisors to their patrons but were often promoted to high positions in the court such as Imperial Preceptor (*di shi* 帝師, Tib. *ti shri*).

A number of recent studies have demonstrated the close connection that existed between the institutionalization of Tibetan reincarnation lineages and the forging of cleric-patron relations with foreign powers during the Yuan dynasty, and with Tibetan aristocratic clans from the Ming dynasty onward. Elliot Sperling (1987a) has observed that the first Karma Bka’ brgyud hierarchs forged close ties with the Tangut court as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the tradition’s founder Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193) was said to have been invited by the emperor of the Tangut state of Xixia to give esoteric teachings but sent his disciple Gtsang po pa Dkon mchog seng ge (d. 1218/19) in his stead. Dkon mchog seng ge was the first Tibetan cleric to receive the honorific title Imperial Preceptor, a post assumed after his death by a cleric belonging to the ’Ba’ rom subsect of the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud

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<sup>25</sup> On the importance of the ‘preceptor-donor’ relationship in the ecclesiastical history of Tibetan Buddhist orders, see Van der Kuijp 2004, Sperling 1987a, Manson 2009, and three articles by Seyfort Ruegg (1991, 1995, 1997). In Seyfort Ruegg 1997 (860), the author states that the earliest use of *yon mchod* “as a copulative compound designating the relation between a donor and preceptor” is in the *Deb ther dmar po*, but Manson 2009 (38–39 n. 54) notes that Karma Pakshi’s autobiography already uses the term in that sense.

<sup>26</sup> Van der Kuijp and McCleary 2008. See also Sperling 1983.

named Ti shri ras pa Shes rab seng ge (1164–1236)<sup>27</sup>. Ti shri counted among his teachers a direct disciple of Sgam po pa, Darma dbang phyug (1127–1203), and two Bka' brgyud founders Zhang Brtson 'grus grags pa (1121/23–1193), founder of the Tshal pa Bka' brgyud sect, and 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), founder of the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud sect. 'Jig rten mgon po is said to have received lavish offerings from the Tangut emperor in exchange for his religious services. Among the clerics who survived the collapse of the Tangut state, was Ti shri ras pa's successor in the 'Ba' rom lineage, Gsang ba ras pa dkar po Shes rab byang chub (1198–1262). That he was born in the Tangut state but later reappears as a Tibetan cleric in the Mongol emperor Qubilai's retinue indicates, as Elliot Sperling has observed, the continuity between the cleric-patron models of the Tangut and Mongol courts. Tangut patronage of early Bka' brgyud clerics and its institutionalization of the office of Imperial Preceptor preceded and likely served as a paradigm for the later Mongolian patronage of Sa skya and Bka' brgyud clerics.

Leonard Van der Kuijp (2004) has shown that the Bka' brgyud Kālacakra system came to play a vital role in the forging of Tibetan-Mongolian relations during a critical stage in Tibet's political history. The *Kālacakra* tantra's strengthening influence on foreign relations can be largely attributed to its popular yet highly esoteric ritual system which proved instrumental in enabling high-ranking Karma bka' brgyud preceptors to curry favour with the powerful Mongol court after the Mongolian conquest of 1240 and throughout the period of its control over China during the Yuan dynasty (1276–1368).

It is well-established, then, that the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition proved remarkably adept at fostering relationships of mutual benefit with powerful families, first with foreign imperial dynasties and later with domestic aristocratic dynasties. The success of these reciprocal relations undoubtedly owed much to the prestige and stability associated with this tradition's system of reincarnate *bla mas* known as Karma pas. Not only could a high ranking reincarnate *bla ma* command much higher prices for services rendered than other teachers but lineal reincarnations could conveniently be “found” in strategically important persons and places, whether Tibetan or foreign. The Dge lugs pa would later successfully imitate this paradigm by introducing their own system of reincarnate Dalai Lamas<sup>28</sup> who were also

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<sup>27</sup> For information about this cleric who is also referred to as Sangs rgyas ras chen, see Sperling 1987b. Sperling suggests a possible Chinese precedent of this office of Imperial Preceptor in the Tangut state. A biography of the first Black Hat (*zhwa nag*) Dus gsum mkhyen pa relates that Dkon mchog seng ge was preceded by three previous reincarnations, the last of whom was also a preceptor to the Tangut emperor named Rgya (i.e., “Chinese”) Be bum ring mo or Rgya Byang chub sems dpa'. See Sperling 1987, 38.

<sup>28</sup> According to van der Kuijp and McCleary 2008 (22–23), “[t]he Gelukpa adoption of incarnates was an attempt to compete directly with the Karma pas. The increasingly hierarchical structure of Tibetan Buddhism meant that incarnates could command higher prices than other types of monks for their religious services. Thus, by taking on a unique feature of the Karma pa, the Gelukpa were benefiting from the prestige and economic success of the Karma pa incarnates.”



regarded not only as reincarnations of their predecessors but also as incarnations of the Bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara.

Building on their long history of successful cleric-patron relationships, the Karma Bka' brgyud, and to a lesser extent the other Bka' brgyud sects, were able during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries to establish unprecedented positions of temporal power and religious influence in central Tibet. Their ascendancy owed much to the patronage of the powerful Rin pung clan which in 1434–1435 defeated the Phag mo gru dynasty who had supported the Dge lugs pa sect. During its hegemony (1435–1565), the Rin spungs regime governed much of Western Tibet and some of Central Tibet. Indeed, it almost brought the Tibetan lands around the Tsangpo River under one central authority before its powers began to diminish after 1512. Following the final overthrow of the Rin spungs by the Tsang pa dynasty of Shigatse in 1565, the Karma bka' brgyud sect was able to secure the new regime's patronage up until its final defeat by the increasingly powerful militia of the ascendant Dge lugs sect in 1642. But prior to the ascendancy and eventual hegemony of the Dge lugs sect which has prevailed down to the modern period, the continuous patronage of the Karma Bka' brgyud sect, and to a lesser extent the 'Bri gung and 'Brug pa sects, by a succession of powerful aristocratic clans allowed for unprecedented expansion not only of their temporal power but also of their scholastic achievements and doctrinal influence, all of which reached their apogee during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## DOCTRINAL BACKGROUND

To give a better sense of the main philosophical trends in the Mahāmudrā exegesis of the four authors, it is necessary to touch briefly on some of the key Buddhist doctrinal issues they engaged with. It will become clear that, despite evidence of sectarian and doctrinal dissent between some of these authors<sup>29</sup>, they shared much common ground when it came to the nexus of core Buddhist soteriological ideas concerning the nature of truth/reality, the

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<sup>29</sup> A letter by Padma dkar po entitled *A Reply to the Queries of Bshes gnyen Rnam rgyal grags pa* (*Bshes gnyen rnam rgyal grags pa'i dris lan*), *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum* vol. 12, 491–508, provides an important source for understanding the at times strained relationships between the 'Brug pa, Sa skya and Karma bka' brgyud schools in the post-classical era. Interestingly, the letter attests to Padma dkar po's high regard for Shākya mchog ldan's "unparalleled" knowledge of authentic Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scriptures which he then cites as a major influence on Karma bka' brgyud scholasticism, but one that they unjustly repaid with criticism rather than open acknowledgement (ibid., 498<sub>1-3</sub>). He also makes this interesting observation (ibid., 507<sub>2-3</sub>): "Although [we] have no discord with those [in the] Sa[ kya], Dge [lugs], and Rnying ma [traditions], there is some discord with the Rje Karma teacher and disciples" *sa dge rnying ma su dang mi mthun pa ma byung kyang | rje karma dpon slob dang ma mthun pa cig byung* | In this regard, he registers his concerns (ibid., 503<sub>1-5</sub>) about the incursion of armed Karma Kam tshang troops dispatched by the Karma political party (*kar srid*) into the Kong po district, their use of weaponry including guns and missiles (*rgyogs dang me rgyogs*), the poisoning of rivers, their burning down of one of his vihāras, and the general atmosphere of discord between the 'Brug pa and Karma Kam tshang traditions. On the prevalence of sectarian rivalry during this time, see Shakabpa 2010, 274–75 and Sørensen and Hazod, 2007, 508.

nature of mind, buddha nature, and emptiness that had occupied centre stage in Tibetan scholasticism since the Royal Dynastic Period (8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> c CE). A key finding in our research was that the major participants in post-classical Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā exegesis shared a common concern to reconcile two basic models of truth or reality (*satya*) that had long been discussed and debated by Indian and Tibetan Buddhists: [1] a differentiation model based on robust distinctions between conventional and ultimate truths (*saṃvṛtisatya* versus *paramārthasatya*) and their associated modes of cognition and emptiness, and [2] an identification or unity (*zung 'jug : yuganaddha*) model of the two truths and their associated modes of cognition and emptiness.

Whereas the differentiation model was typically aligned with a strongly innatist view of the ultimate (buddha nature, the nature of mind, or the nature of reality) that underscored its “sublime otherness” (*gzhan mchog*) from all that is conventional and adventitious, the identification model, predicated on the view of a common ground uniting all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, emphasized the pervasiveness of the ultimate and its immanence within the conventional in order to indicate how the ultimate permeates the mind-streams of individuals in bondage. A central philosophical aim of our research was to consider and compare how the four representative authors and their colleagues sought to synthesize and reconcile these differentiation and identification models within pertinent traditional Buddhist theoretical contexts such as buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), the two truths (*satyadvaya*), the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), the two modes of emptiness (*rang stong* and *gzhan stong*), the hermeneutics of the three turnings of the *dharmacakra*, and the related hermeneutical distinction between definitive meaning (*nītārtha*) and provisional meaning (*neyārtha*).

A highly influential precedent for the differentiation model is a passage in Asaṅga's *Mahāyānaśāstra* (I.45–48<sup>30</sup>) where the author draws a sharp distinction between pure, supramundane mind (*lokottaracitta*) and the conditioned *ālayavijñāna*, thereby specifying an innate, unconditioned mode of cognition that is prior to and a precondition of the eight modes of consciousness (*kun gzhi tshogs brgyad*) as elaborated in the Yogācāra psychology. By contrast, influential examples of the identification model that are met with in the *Laṅkāvatāra* and *Ghanavyūha* sūtras explicitly identify buddha nature with the substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).<sup>31</sup> One may also mention here a parallel nondifferentiation model of truth/

<sup>30</sup> Davidson 1985, 215 and Mathes 2008, 58. Sthiramati draws a similar distinction between *ālayavijñāna* and the supramundane gnosis (*lokottarajñāna : jigs rten las 'das pa'i ye shes*) that fundamentally transforms or sublates *parāvṛtti* it in his commentary on *Triṃśikā* 29–30. See *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (Levi 1925), 44; Davidson 1985, 218 and n. 28. On replacement and elimination models of fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*), see Sakuma 1990.

<sup>31</sup> On this interpretation and some of its Tibetan adherents such as the bKa' brgyud scholars 'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal and 'Ba' ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang, see Mathes 2008, 18, 117 and 464 n. 612. 'Gos lo tsā ba noted (Mathes 2008, 341–42) that the equation of *ālayavijñāna* with *tathāgatagarbha* is based on the acceptance of two aspects of the former: a stained *ālayavijñāna* which needs to be reversed in order to attain buddhahood and a purified *ālayavijñāna* taken as an unconscious *vijñāpti* or subtle inward mind which 'Gos lo identifies with the

reality that was widely adopted in many non-tantric and tantric discourses emphasizing the nonduality of the two truths (*bden gnyis gnyis med*), and the inseparability of appearance and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*). In the context of Buddhist soteriology, the tension between these differentiation and identification paradigms had as its counterpart a long-standing dialectic between two competing views concerning the nature of goal-realization. One frames it as a *developmental* process of accumulating merits and knowledge that serve as causes and conditions leading to spiritual awakening, whereas the other characterizes it as a *disclosive* process of directly recognizing an unconditioned mode of being and awareness and then becoming increasingly familiar with it as the mind's reifications and their obscuring effects subside.<sup>32</sup>

Faced with the task of reconciling these seemingly incommensurable ontological and soteriological paradigms, leading post-classical Bka' brgyud thinkers adopted different versions of *soteriological contextualism*, a term we have coined to describe the view that the sense, relevance and efficacy of soteriological models can only be understood relative to the context(s) in which they are used.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, the differentiation and identification models with their contrasting categories and metaphors—the first positing a basic difference between conventional and ultimate and comparing it to the sky and its clouds, the second positing their essential equality as illustrated by the ocean and its waves—came to be regarded not as contradictory but as complementary, relating as they do to different contexts of salvific theory and praxis. According to Mi bskyod rdo rje, for example, an aspirant on the Buddhist path is urged to conceptually distinguish between what is to be abandoned (adventitious mind) from what is to be realized (innate mind). But this path is said to transcend such oppositional constructs, culminating in a nondual nonconceptual wisdom (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) of the undifferentiated nature of things (*dharmadhātu*) that recognizes antidotes (*gnyen po*) as being of the same unborn (*skye med*) and prediscursive (*spros bral*) nature as what is to be relinquished. This is the view of unity (*zung 'jug*) that is generally identified as a hallmark of Mahāmudrā teachings. On this view, the Buddhist path is ultimately self-

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*dharmadhātu*. Based on the identification of the *ālayavijñāna* with the *tathāgatagarbha*, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* interprets *āśrayaparāvṛtti* as the transformation or purification of the seventh consciousness (*manas*) which liberates the pure *ālayavijñāna*. See Lai 1977, 67 f. In a similar vein, the *Ghanavyūhasūtra* states (D 110, 55b<sub>1</sub>; L 113, 85a<sub>6-7</sub>): “The Tathāgata taught \**sugatagarbha* using the term *ālaya[vijñāna]*.” *bde gshegs snying po dge ba'ang de || snying po de la kun gzhi sgras | de bzhin gshegs pa ston pa mdzad |*

<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, the landmark comparative study of Seyfort Ruegg (1989) investigates the dual themes of “‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ in the twin realms of soteriology and gnoseology, a pair of topics that call for examination in terms of the notions of ‘innatism’, ‘spontaneism’ and ‘simultaneism’ as contrasted with graded acquisition and reinforcement through progressive cultivation.” (p. 3)

<sup>33</sup> For a general account of contextualist views, which have been gaining popularity in contemporary philosophy, see Price, A. W. *Contextuality in Practical Reason*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

undermining insofar as the conceptual distinctions that are necessary to realize nondual nonconceptual wisdom necessarily consume themselves at the time of its realization.<sup>34</sup>

We have attempted in the chapters to follow to determine and explain how our four authors could be at once advocates of robust soteriological distinctions and at the same time proponents of the Mahāmudrā view of the unity (*zung 'jug*) nonduality (*gnyis med*) or inseparability (*dbyer med*) of truth/reality. For example, in Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on Karma Pakshi's *Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* that he composed in the last years of his life, the author defends the view that the two truths/realities are nondual inasmuch as all phenomena, conventional and ultimate, have always been beyond discursive elaboration (*spros bral*).<sup>35</sup> In this regard, he maintains that the nonduality or inseparability of the two realities is a doctrinal cornerstone of both Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka philosophies, having been advocated by a long line of Indian Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka masters including Saraha, Śavaripa, Nāgārjuna, Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti, Maitrīpa, Atiśa, and as well as by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan Rnying ma master Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes were keenly aware that the method of radical negation employed in Madhyamaka must be self-consuming: since conceptual reasoning is by definition conditioned and adventitious and therefore not beyond the scope its own critical surveillance, it must at some point deplete or consume itself, as suggested by the analogy from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* of the *Ratnakūṭa* that Kamalaśīla had famously cited: “The characteristic of discerning reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣā*) is here [in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*] considered to be mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*). That [discernment] has the nature of being conceptual, but it is burned away by the fire of genuine wisdom arising from it, just as a fire kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood burns these very pieces.” *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (NPDhT), P: no. 5501, 157b<sub>5-6</sub>: *yang dag par so sor rtog pa'i mtshan ma ni 'dir yid la mi byed par dgongs so || de ni rnam par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin mod kyi | 'on kyang de nyid las byung ba yang dag pa'i ye shes kyi mes de bsregs par 'gyur te | shing gnyis drud las byung ba'i mes shing de gnyis sreg par byed pa bzhin no ||* See also Kamalaśīla's BK III (Skt. ed. Tucci 1971, 20) where the same example, and similar words, are used, and reference is made to the *Ratnakūṭa*.

<sup>35</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, Mi bskyod rdo rje *gsung 'bum* vol. 21, 148<sub>4-5</sub>: “Therefore, so long as the mind has not let go of [reifying the two truths in terms of true and false], and there is conceptualizing cognition that clings to and believes in [them], then it will never dwell in the lofty state of the equality of the two truths, inseparability of the two truths, single taste of the two truths and unity of the two truths. Then how does this equality of the two truths, and inseparability that is the unity of the single flavour of the two truths come about in a mind that does not take the two truths as objects, as mere established bases? As [truth] cannot be touched by thinking based entirely on linguistic representation [in terms of] subject and object, when it comes to the way of perceiving that which is other than mere talk stipulating ‘union’ as the consummate conclusion regarding the so-called “equality of the two truths,” where does there exist anything that can be posited as one or two, or equal or non-equal?” *de ltar blos ma btang bar ji srid zhen 'dzin rtogs rigs yod pa de srid du bden gnyis mnyam nyid dang bden gnyis dbyer med dang bden gnyis ro gcig dang bden gnyis zung 'jug gi go 'phang la 'gar yang 'khod pa med do || 'o na bden gnyis gzhi grub pa tsam du'ang yul du mi byed pa'i blo ngo na bden gnyis mnyam nyid dang bden gnyis dbyer med ro gcig tu zung du 'jug pa ji ltar 'ong zhe na | de ltar yul dang yul can kun nas smra brjod bsam pas reg par ma nus pa la bden gnyis mnyam nyid ces sogs zad par 'khyol ba'i zung chad pa'i gnam tsam las gzhan de lta'i tshul la gcig dang gnyis pa dang mnyam mi mnyam du bzhas tu ga la yod |* See below 228–29 and n. 642.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 144<sub>3</sub> f. Toward the end of his life, Mi bskyod rdo rje evidently became an advocate of Rong zom pa's Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka views and especially those based on “classical texts maintaining the inseparability of the two aspects of reality” (*bden pa rnam pa gnyis dbyer med par 'dod pa'i gzhung*). He cites Rong zom pa six times in this late commentary but not in any previous works. Concerning Rong zom's endorsement

Shākya mchog ldan similarly claimed that while realization of the unity of the two truths, and of appearance and emptiness, was the goal of the Buddhist path, it is nonetheless necessary to balance the divergent perspectives of consciousness and wisdom while on the path. Likewise, Padma dkar po uses Yang dgon pa's distinction between *mahāmudrā* in its modes of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*) and delusion (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*) to underscore the need to discern the irreducible unity of the common ground (*mahāmudrā* in the abiding mode) from the reifications that distort and conceal it (the mode of delusion).

## NAVIGATING THE MIDDLE WAYS

Interestingly, the common task of post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes to reconcile the differentiation and identification models was in many cases accompanied by an attempt to chart a middle course, using Madhyamaka canons of dialectical reasoning, between the polarized Gzhan stong and Rang stong positions that had deeply divided most Tibetan schools since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the Jo nang pas<sup>37</sup> and Dge lugs pas. To one side, the post-classical exegetes sought to avoid the type of eternalist view (*rtag lta*) of existence (*yod pa*) that had become associated in the minds of many Tibetans with Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan's (1292–1361) Empty of other (*gzhan stong*) doctrine that posited the ultimate as an eternal, transcendental truth above and beyond the causal complex of conventional truth/reality, and that characterized the two truths as two “great kingdoms” (*rgyal kham chen po*) “having nothing to do with each other”.<sup>38</sup> To the other side, they steered clear of the kind of “nihilist view of existence” that they associated with Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa's (1357–1419) Empty of own-nature (*rang stong*) doctrine which had wholly rejected positive appraisals of reality in favour of a purely negative account characterizing the ultimate exclusively in terms of a nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*).

It is against this backdrop that the Fourth 'Brug chen Padma dkar po had, on the one hand, criticized the Jo nang Gzhan stong adherents for adopting an eternalist stance regarding the ultimate and nihilistic stance regarding the conventional<sup>39</sup> and, on the other hand,

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of Apratiṣṭhānavāda and the “inseparability of truth/reality” view which he termed “special Mahāyāna,” see Almogi 2009, 39–42 et passim.

<sup>37</sup> For a pioneering survey of the history and doctrines of this school and an analysis of Dge lugs pa criticisms of it, see Seyfort Ruegg 1963.

<sup>38</sup> See for example *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, Peking ed. 1998, 418<sub>4</sub> f.; *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel*, Paro ed. 1984, vol. 1, 599<sub>6</sub> f., 612<sub>5</sub> f. et passim. In the words of Padma dkar po: “It is said [by Jo nang pas] that there is an immense dichotomy between the two truths, and between the pairs ‘*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*’ and ‘consciousness and wisdom’, together with their respective self-manifestations.” *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, Padma dkar po *gsung 'bum* vol. 21, 176<sub>4-5</sub>.

<sup>39</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, Padma dkar po *gsung 'bum* vol. 21, 188<sub>2-3</sub>: “This doctrinal position of yours has assumed a nihilist view vis-à-vis all that is [held to be] self-empty (*rang stong*) or conventional (*kun rdzob*) [but] an eternalist view in accepting all that is ultimate to be something real. Because it is thereby incompatible

criticized the Dge lugs Rang stong proponents for adopting an eternalist view of the conventional and nihilistic view of the ultimate.<sup>40</sup> This assessment helps us to understand Padma dkar po's rather unexpected admission that “my tradition is Rang stong” (*bdag gi lugs ni rang stong*) in contraposition to the views of “those who have fallen into a one-sided position known as Gzhan stong”. These he equates with opponents criticized by Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* who falsely imagine conditioned things to be empty—i.e., nonexistent—while “falsely imagin[ing] an intrinsic essence (*svabhāva*) of things for the purpose of [establishing] a basis of that [emptiness].”<sup>41</sup> Given that Padma dkar po had moreover identified Gzhan stong with Cittamātra, specifically the Alīkākāravāda strand, and that Cittamātra schools were said to be repudiated root and branch by the Apratiṣṭhāna-Mādhyamikas, his endorsement of a Rang stong view begins to appear all but inevitable.

The case of Shākya mchog ldan is just as interesting. In his Mahāyāna philosophical works, he often explicitly gives the affirmative Gzhan stong and Alīkākāra-Madhyamaka methods and discourses priority over their negational Rang stong counterparts, and even

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with the impartial explanations concerning the ultimate (*don dam*) in both the synopsis of views of the chapter on Inner [*Kālacakra*] and the *Summary of Yoga* [i.e., *Vimalaprabhā*] it is not at all acceptable.” *khyed kyi 'dod pa 'di rang stong ngam kun rdzob thams cad chad pa | don dam thams cad bden par khas blangs pas rtag ltar song bas | nang le'i lta ba'i mdor bsdu dang rnal 'byor bsdu ba gnyis kar don dam pa la phyogs med par bshad pa dang 'gal ba'i phyir gtan mi 'thad do ||*

<sup>40</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, *ibid.*, 105<sub>2-4</sub>: “[For] Dge ldan pas, ‘without nature’ (*rang bzhin med pa*) means that [1] *ultimately* there is nothing at all, like a barren woman’s son, and that [2] *conventionally* all entities never become nonexistent. For that reason, [the Dge ldan pas] say that “the extreme of existence is eliminated by appearance and the extreme of nonexistence by emptiness.” In this regard, [the Dge ldan pas] have fallen to the sides of both eternalism and nihilism. They have succumbed to an eternalist view regarding the ultimate and a nihilist view regarding the conventional. And by explaining the acceptability of maintaining these two stances, they do not know [how] to eliminate one-sided positions in terms of a single ground.” *de yang dge ldan pa | rang bzhin med pa'i don gyis don dam par cang med mo gsham gyi bu lta bu dang | rang bzhin med pa'i don gyis kun rdzob tu dngos po tham cad med par nam yang mi 'gyur ba zhig ste | de'i rgyu mtshan gyis snang bas yod mtha' dang | stong pas med mtha' sel lo zhes zer ro || 'di ni rtag chad gnyis ka'i phyogs su lung ste | don dam chad pa dang | kun rdzob rtag ltar song zhing phyogs gnyis su gzung rung bshad pas gzhi gcig gi steng du phyogs lung sel ma shes so ||*

<sup>41</sup> See *Chos 'khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum* vol. 7, 330<sub>3-5</sub> where the following passage from *Prasannapadā* is then quoted: “But one who, without seeing the distinction between the two truths, sees the emptiness of conditioned things—that person, seeing emptiness and aspiring to deliverance, may falsely imagine conditioned things to be nonexistent; or taking emptiness as something existent as an entity, he may also falsely imagine an intrinsic essence of things for the purpose of [establishing] a locus of that [emptiness]. In either case, emptiness wrongly viewed will certainly destroy him.” *Prasannapadā*, ed. La Vallée Poussin 1970, 495 (Vaidya 216): *yas tu evaṃ satyadvayavibhāgam apaśyan śūnyatām saṃskārāṇāṃ paśyati, sa śūnyatām paśyan mumukṣur nāstītām vā saṃskārāṇāṃ parikalpayet, yadi vā śūnyatām kāṃcid bhāvataḥ satīm, tasyāś cāśrayārtham bhāvasvabhāvam api parikalpayet | ubhayathā cāśya durdr̥ṣṭā śūnyatā niyatām vināśam kuryāt<sup>a</sup> |* <sup>a</sup>addit. suggested by Prof. Akira Saito (personal communication); Mss. *vīnaśam parikalpayet*; LVP *vināśayet*; Tib. (May 1959 ed.): *gang gis de ltar bden pa gnyis kyi rnam par dbye ba ma mthong bar 'du byed rnams stong pa nyid du mthong ba des ni stong pa nyid mthong bas 'du byed rnams yod pa ma yin pa nyid du rtog par byed la | yang na stong pa nyid 'ga' zhig dngos por brtags nas de'i rten gyi ched du dngos po'i rang bzhin yang rtog par byed de | de ni gnyis ga ltar yang stong pa nyid la lta nyes pas nges par phung bar byed pa yin no ||*

stipulates that the very idea of “unity” has its inception in Gzhan stong traditions but is unattested in Rang stong traditions (as will be discussed in chapter one). However, in his Mahāmudrā exegesis, the author assigns both Rang stong and Gzhan stong to the dialectician’s system of severing imputations (*sgro ’dogs bcad pa’i lugs*) through studying and thinking, adding that both are intellectually fabricated (*blos byas*) and in this sense “poisoned” (*dug can*). He proceeds to explain how both are transcended by the Mahāmudrā yogin’s system of first-hand experience (*nyams su myong ba’i lugs*) based on meditation (*sgom*) that alone leads to the realization of unity beyond extremes.

All this may also help to explain why Mi bskyod rdo rje, who was partisan to the same Madhyamaka traditions as Padma dkar po, became increasingly reluctant to side with polarized views of emptiness and instead ends up being as critical of the Gzhan stong views that had by his time become associated primarily with Dol po pa and Shākya mchog ldan as he is of the Rang stong views associated with Tsong kha pa and his disciples. This tone of reticence is conspicuous in the Karma pa’s lengthy response<sup>42</sup> to Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal, a student of Shākya mchog ldan, who had asked him about the role of *gzhan stong* in the state of meditative equipoise:

When it was explained [by Dol po pa] that the Gzhan stong of a permanent entity (*rtag dngos gzhan stong*) is superior whereas the Rang stong of freedom from elaboration (*spros bral rang stong*) is inferior, regarding such conceptual differentiations themselves, these distinctions [pertain] to the phase of distinction in the post-meditation state (*rjes thob*) but not to the phase of transcendence in the meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhas*). [Now,] when the phase of transcendence in equipoise was not [properly] investigated, then the profound permanent entity of your Gzhan stong [was deemed] consistent with [*post hoc*] explanations of what was experienced by meditators. [But] by whom among them would [this] permanent [nature] constitute transcendence?<sup>43</sup>

The author goes on to clarify that “in meditative equipoise when there is transcendence and [unmediated] experience, no such distinctions between *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* are actually found” because this state not only uproots the stains to be relinquished but also severs all discursive elaborations, leaving behind no ‘indispensables’ (*nyer mkho*) (i.e., no ontological commitments). It is therefore a mistake, in the Karma pa’s eyes, to ontologize such *post hoc* observations by embedding them in the nature of things and using them to support a

<sup>42</sup> This reply may match a dialogue reported to have taken place between the Karma pa and Paṇ chen dor rgyal in 1536 at ’Bri khung monastery in Central Tibet (*dbus*) when the former was twenty-nine years old. See Rheingans 2008, 137–38.

<sup>43</sup> Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba’i legs bshad, MKsb vol. 3, 252<sub>3-5</sub>.

metaphysical absolutism. He concludes a detailed criticism of opposing Rang stong and Gzhan stong positions by saying “as for me, I don’t subscribe to these extreme positions and [therefore] don’t proclaim either Rang stong or Gzhan stong.”<sup>44</sup> He concludes with an aspiration to follow the advice of his root teacher Bkra shis dpal ’byor (1457–1525) “to relinquish views and destroy all tenets in line with the illustrious Dwags po Bka’ brgyud lineage.”<sup>45</sup>

In general, post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes viewed the rapprochement between Mahāmudrā and anti-foundationalist strains of Indian Madhyamaka philosophy—specifically, the \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhāna systems<sup>46</sup>—as critical to their philosophical aims. Our authors framed this synthesis in terms of the reconciliation of affirmative (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic)<sup>47</sup> styles of thought and discourse. In the words of Mi bskyod rdo rje: “It is said that the instructions of Nāgārjuna were taught from a negative orientation (*bkag phyogs*) whereas those by Saraha were taught from an affirmative orientation (*sgrub phyogs*).”<sup>48</sup> Following the Second ’Brug chen Rgyal dbang rje, Padma dkar po similarly distinguishes the negating orientation (*dgag phyogs*) emphasized in the sūtra-based Vehicle of Characteristics (*mtshan nyid kyi theg pa*) from the affirming orientation (*sgrub phyogs*) emphasized in the tantra-based Vajrayāna. Viewed in terms of their associated styles of discourse, the former emphasizes negative determinations (*rnam bcad : vyavaccheda*) whereas the latter emphasizes positive determinations (*yongs gcod : pariccheda*). The difference, as the Second ’Brug chen Rgyal dbang rje had explained, is that the former “annihilates (*tshar gcad pa*) by counteracting objects to be abandoned,” whereas the latter “assimilates (*rjes su ’dzin pa*) through the nonduality of objects to be abandoned and their counteragents.” Now, for Padma dkar po, negative determinations are integral to the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka which dispenses with all epistemic and ontological foundations, whereas positive determinations are integral to Vajrayāna articulations of immutable bliss supreme (*mahāsukha*). The senses of both are combined in the term “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” (*sarvākāravopetāsūnyatā*) and this expresses the unity at the heart of the ’Brug pa Mahāmudrā tradition.<sup>49</sup> This idea of fecund emptiness conveniently unites the *via negationis*

<sup>44</sup> *Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba’i legs bshad*, MKsb vol. 3, 256<sub>4-5</sub>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 257<sub>1-2</sub>.

<sup>46</sup> As will be clarified below, both traditions claim that all phenomena are without any epistemic essence or ontological foundation, i.e., without any defining essence nor any inherently existent foundation on which all phenomena depend but which does not itself depend on anything.

<sup>47</sup> For an adaptation of these western philosophical-theological terms to the description of the two currents of Buddhist thought that Schmithausen 1981 (214 ff.) has distinguished as “positive-mystical” and “negative-intellectualist”, see Seyfort Ruegg 1989, 8 et passim.

<sup>48</sup> *Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa’i nor pa spang ba*, MKsb vol. 15, 1074<sub>5</sub>–1075<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>49</sup> This paraphrases a stanza in Padma dkar po’s *Zhal gdams tshigs su bcad pa’i rim pa bdud rtsi’i gter*, PKsb vol. 21, 24: “Negatively determined, [it is] without fixed standpoint; positively determined, [it is] immutable



of negative determinations and *via eminentiae* of positive determinations. A keynote in the Mahāmudrā philosophies of all four thinkers is that this inseparable unity of presence and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*) can only be fully realized through first-hand experience but not through deductive reasoning. This is because the goal itself is a fundamental mode of being or experiencing but not a judgement about that mode of being which is necessarily both derivative and contrived. By combining a disclosive Mahāmudrā path of first-hand experience with a rigorous Madhyamaka rejection of metaphysical foundations, the authors attempted to ply a middle course between the Scylla and Charybdis of eternalism and nihilism.

A few words are in order concerning the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka view that was endorsed by Karma phrin las, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po. The term *apratīṣṭhāna* has been subject to varying interpretations, having been taken as a characterization both of phenomena (i.e., that they lack fixed characteristics or foundation)<sup>50</sup> and of the cognition that apprehends them (i.e., a cognition that does not abide, or is not fixed, in extremes of eternalism or nihilism).<sup>51</sup> This latter interpretation is found in Maitrīpa’s Amanasikāra teachings. A case in point is the author’s *Sekanirdeśa* 29ab (“Not abiding/not to be fixed in anything is known as Mahāmudrā”<sup>52</sup>) and Rāmapāla’s explanation of it (SNP P 15b<sub>6-7</sub>): “‘In anything’ means in the dependently arisen *skandhas*, *dhātus*, and *āyatanas*. ‘Not abiding/not fixed’ means nonsuperimposition (*aropa*) and mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*).” Here it is precisely cognition which is “not fixed” on anything, but with the understanding that phenomena lack any fixed basis on which the mind may find purchase.

Among the few extant attempts to summarize the Apratiṣṭhānavāda view and the epistemological issues involved, the clearest seems to be the one given by the great 11<sup>th</sup> century Rnying ma scholar Rong zom pa Chos kyi bzang po. This is of interest to us not only for purposes of clarification but also because the Eighth Karma pa in his later years became an advocate of Rong zom’s Madhyamaka view which based itself on “classical texts maintaining the inseparability of the two aspects of reality” (*bden pa rnam pa gnyis dbyer med par ’dod pa’i gzhung*). In his synopsis of Apratiṣṭhānavāda, Rong zom draws attention to two related senses of its view, *viz.*, that all phenomena are [1] without any determinate characteristics despite the various names and other linguistic conventions used to denote them,

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bliss supreme. It is named ‘emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ (*sarvākāravopetāsūnyatā*). Although distinguished by [such] conceptual delimitations, [they have] the same meaning. Such is the *mahāmudrā* of our own tradition.” *rnam gcod rab tu mi gnas te || yongs gcod ’gyur med bde ba dang || rnam kun mchog ldan stong nyid ming || ldog pas ’byed la don gcig pa || nged rang lugs kyi phyag chen yin ||*

<sup>50</sup> The term *apratīṣṭhāna* is defined in Böhrtlingk as “ohne festen Ort,” “without fixed/permanent location”. See Monier-Williams s.v. *pratiṣṭhāna*: “n. a firm standing-place, ground, foundation... pedestal, foot”; Böhrtlingk: “fester Standpunkt,” “Grundlage,” “Fussgestell”.

<sup>51</sup> *sarvasmīn iti pratītyasamutpannaskandhadhātāvāyatanāḍau | apratiṣṭhānam amanasikāro ’nāropah |* See Mathes 2007, 555.

<sup>52</sup> See Mathes 2007, 555. For Rāmapāla’s explanation, see also Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 321.

and furthermore [2] without any deeper foundation, any metaphysical bedrock, that makes them what they are. In short all phenomena are unfixed (or indeterminate) both in essence and origin. They have neither determinate essences that define what they are nor any ontological foundation on which they depend. Consequently, the investigating mind arrives at no determinate essence or foundation. This observation, says Rong zom pa, applies not only to positive determinations of objects of knowledge but also to the stage of buddhahood wherein the purified *dharmadhātu* is said to be characterized by the stilling of all discursive elaborations. In his *Lta ba'i brjed byang*, he states: “For Nonfoundationalists, [1] although all phenomena are described and established in terms of various characteristics such as names, symbols, and conventions, one does not establish a basis/locus (*gnas pa*) for any such characteristics. [2] Since [phenomena] are not founded on, and do not rely upon, a unitary foundation (*gnas gcig*)—not even an extremely subtle or extremely profound one, let alone (*a cang che*) a gross one—[they] are said to be completely ‘nonfoundational’. This [tradition] determines [phenomena] in this way also when positively determining (*yongs su gcod pa*) the objects of knowledge, and also claims that during the stage of a buddha as well the purified *dharmadhātu* is characterized by the complete pacification of discursive elaborations.”<sup>53</sup>

Notwithstanding the considerable disagreement over which Buddhist traditions or thinkers represented the Apratiṣṭhāna view, our three Mahāmudrā exegetes equally took its synthesis of Mantrayāna and Madhyamaka as a prototype for their own efforts to unite affirmative Mahāmudrā *dohā* discourses of Saraha and the tantras with the negative Madhyamaka discourses of Nāgārjuna and his successors. It is noteworthy that Karma phrin las cryptically equates the Great Madhyamaka tradition of Nonfoundational Unity (*zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas pa*) with the ultimate view of Dignāga (480–540) and Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> cent.) that he correlates with the Dwags po Mahāmudrā view.<sup>54</sup> He further claims that Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā of Nonfoundational Unity is in accord with the five texts of Maitreya but “somewhat different” from both the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika systems which, in their concern to “overturn the beliefs in real entities of the lower philosophical systems,” end up maintaining that meditation is just “the reliance on a continuous process of memory/reflection (*dran pa*) based on prior analysis”.<sup>55</sup> We shall see that Mi bskyod rdo rje regarded both the so-called \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka systems as the summit of Buddhist

<sup>53</sup> *Lta ba'i byang brjed* (Almogi 2009, *rab tu shin tu mi gnas pa ni chos thams cad la ming dang brda dang tha snyad kyi mtshan nyid sna tshogs su bstan cing | rnam par bzhas kyang ji lta bu'i mtshan nyid du'ang gnas pa mi 'grub ste | rags pa a cang ches kyi | tha na rab tu phra ba zhe'am | shin tu zab pa'i gnas gcig la yang mi gnas mi rten pas | rab tu shin tu mi gnas pa zhes bya'o || 'di ni shes bya yongs su gcod pa'i dus na'ang 'di ltar gcod la sangs rgyas kyi sa'i dus na'ang chos kyi dbyings rnam par dag pa spros pa yongs su zhi ba'i mtshan nyid du 'dod do ||* We follow the critical text of this passage as translated and discussed in Almogi 2009, 228–29. See also Tauscher 2003, 209 & 244, n. 10. (translation our own)

<sup>54</sup> KPdl, 150<sub>6</sub>. See also below 161.

<sup>55</sup> See below, 160 and n. 441.

philosophical thought and frequently took them as the basis for critiquing other Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophical views. In his eyes, these systems not only serve as an ideal preparation for Mahāmudrā; they also share its basic view and goal of being free from discursive elaboration (*spros bral : niṣprapañca*). Padma dkar po sees the inseparable unity emphasized in Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka as an ideal model for reconciling the negative orientations and determinations of Nāgārjuna’s reasoning corpus (*rigs tshogs*) with the positive orientations and determinations contained in his hymnic corpus (*bstod tshogs*), as well as in the *dohās* and tantras. Putting it differently, he says that it is through “nonfoundationalism of mere discourse” (*smra tsam rab tu mi gnas pa*) that one realizes the “nonfoundationalism of unity” (*zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa*) that is in his eyes the “greatest of great Middle Ways” (*dbu ma chen po’i chen po*).<sup>56</sup>

For the three Mahāmudrā authors, the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka provided the philosophical underpinning of Maitrīpa’s Madhyamaka system of mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed pa’i dbu ma*). Mi bskyod rdo rje identified three main practice-lineages of this tradition in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MA) commentary: Mantra-Madhyamaka, Sūtra-Madhyamaka and Alīkākāra-Cittamātra-Madhyamaka, the last of which was represented by the Indians Vajrapāṇi (b. 1012) and Kor Ni ru pa (aka. Ni ru pa ta, b. 1062), and the Nepali Bal po A su (aka. Skye med bde chen).<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere in the commentary, and in his sixth *Dgongs pa gcig pa* (*Single Intent*) commentary, he further identifies two major lines of transmission of Amanasikāra-Mahāmudrā teachings from India to Tibet: [1] the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud doctrinal system passed down from Saraha and Śavari dbang phyug to Mar pa, Mi la ras pa etc., and [2] the Khro phu Bka brgyud tradition of instructions (*gdams srol*) on *amanasikāra* given by Mitrayogi to Khro phu Lo tsā ba etc. that contained the definitive meaning of sūtras and tantras.<sup>58</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje observes in his *Single Intent* commentary that the aim of these Amanasikāra-Mahāmudrā traditions is to realize in view and meditation profound emptiness, the pacification of discursive elaborations, which is simply the true nature (*chos nyid*) of cognition that is directly recognized when the conceptually-imputing cognition that gives rise to conceptually-imputed appearances of all phenomena resolves into its source, cognizant emptiness (or empty cognizance). “The [teaching] that primarily takes as its view and meditation the point where the nature of these two [awareness and emptiness] have resolved

<sup>56</sup> KPdl, 572<sub>3-4</sub>: *don skyes bu la skyon med pa zhes dang | ’di ni legs pa’o zhes pa lta bu | zhe ’dod kyis lta ba bzang ngan du mi srma || smra tsam rab tu mi gnas pa dang | zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa dang | dbu ma chen po dang | dbu ma chen po’i chen por ’jug pa’i khyad tsam yod ces lan du bgyis so |*

<sup>57</sup> See also Seyfort Ruegg 1984, 8–9, and below 332–33 and n. 959 for further details.

<sup>58</sup> *Dbu ma la ’jug pa’i rnam bshad*, 325<sub>13-21</sub> and *Dgongs pa gcig ’grel pa* VI, MKsb vol. 6, 99<sub>3-100</sub>. For further details on these lineages and authors, see below, 330–36.

like water poured into water is called “sustaining natural awareness”.<sup>59</sup> He adds that “if a profound emptiness other than that is taken as view and meditation, then some nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*) wherein the phenomenal awareness and the rest is never connected with its abiding nature is posited as a mental object. A view and meditation on emptiness that makes one inordinately attached to that [object] through the mode of apprehension is therefore not acknowledged by this [Mahāmudrā] approach to be totally pure.”<sup>60</sup>

The Eighth Karma pa notes in the MA commentary that many proponents of reasoning such as Gro lung pa were ill-disposed to the explanations of Madhyamaka in traditions such as Maitrīpa’s Amanasikāra, saying they were not in accord with Madhyamaka and should therefore be suppressed. Mi bskyod rdo rje adds that Sa paṇ and all sorts of Bka’ gdams pas developed a hostile attitude toward the Amanasikāra teachings of Saraha and Maitrīpa, in spite of their purity.<sup>61</sup> In light of such criticisms, it is understandable why scholars such as Karma phrin las, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po devoted as much attention as they did to clarifying and legitimizing the sources and contents of these teachings. To form a clearer picture the view of Apratiṣṭhānavāda and its relation to other Buddhist philosophical systems, let us consider the following annotated overview of the different Tibetan Madhyamaka traditions given by Mi bskyod rdo rje in the third section of his first *Dgongs gcig* commentary:

For Mādhyamikas, by negating the claim that mind is established as a real entity, the bases of designation of the two truths are not truly established as separate [things]. Hence, there is nothing to posit as two truths established in terms of intrinsic essences. {It is not the case that two truths are posited by truly establishing the mode of being of knowable objects in terms of two truths. Nonetheless, when they are established as “truths” in order to negate that the knowable is truly established, then if we analyze whether they [can be] established as ultimate truth or established as conventional truth, it is in order to negate that either can be established as true [or real].}<sup>62</sup> However, in terms of mere conventional discursive practice, the designation “ultimate truth” was used to show just the aspect that all phenomena are not established by nature, discursive elaborations having been at rest from the very beginning. And the expression “conventional truth” [was used

<sup>59</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa VI*, MKsb vol. 6, 99<sub>4-5</sub>: *de gnyis rang bzhin chu la chu bzhag tu song ba'i cha de la gtso bor lta sgom du byed pa de la ni | tha mal gyi shes pa skyong ba zhes |*

<sup>60</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa VI*, MKsb vol. 6, 99<sub>6</sub>–100<sub>1</sub>: *de las gzhan du zab mo stong pa nyid lta sgom du byed pa na chos can shes pa sogs dang rang bzhin gtan mi 'brel ba'i med dgag cig yid yul du bzhag cing de la 'dzin stangs kyis cher zhen par byed pa ni stong nyid kyi lta sgom rnam par dag par phyogs 'di pas mi bzhed pa'i phyir te |*

<sup>61</sup> See below, 330.

<sup>62</sup> Interjected interlinear notations (which make up most of the quoted passage) are included in braces { }.

to show] simply the dependent arising of appearances that are only an illusion, being captivating only so long as they are not investigated.

In this regard, there are two Madhyamaka [traditions]: the “Madhyamaka of the Illusory that is Verified by Reasoning” (*sgyu ma rigs sgrub kyi dbu ma*) and the “Madhyamaka of Nonfoundational Unity”<sup>63</sup> (*zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa’i dbu ma*).<sup>64</sup> In general, since the term “Tīrthika” (*mu stegs pa*; “one who holds to extremes”)<sup>65</sup> means one who maintains extremes of eternalism or nihilism, it refers not only to non-Buddhists, but to Buddhist Tīrthikas as well, up to and including the Cittamātra. The Madhyamaka do not receive the name Tīrthika because they have uprooted all views and philosophical tenets.

{Concerning the classification of Madhyamaka: in India, there were the three called Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka, Yogācāra-Madhyamaka<sup>66</sup>, and \*Lokaprasiddha-

<sup>63</sup> The division of the Madhyamaka into *Sgyu ma lta bu* and *Rab tu mi gnas pa* is already made by Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153) in his *Tshogs chos legs mdzes ma* where he further subdivides the *Rab tu mi gnas* strand into *Zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa’i dbu ma* and *Rgyun chad rab tu mi gnas pa’i dbu ma*. See Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 35 n. 60.

<sup>64</sup> This classification of Madhyamaka is discussed by Stag tshang lo tsā ba in his *Grub mtha’ kun shes* (203), a work frequently cited by Mi bskyod rdo rje. Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438) maintained that the Madhyamaka of the Illusory Verifiable by Reasoning was advocated by Śāntarakṣita, Vimuktasena and Haribhadra who claimed that the illusion-like constellation (*tshogs*) of appearance and emptiness is the ultimate truth, whereas the Madhyamaka of Nonfoundational Unity was advocated by Candrakīrti et al. who believed that the nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*) consisting in the refutation of there being any truth to appearances is the ultimate truth. Mkhas grub then notes that Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) “repeatedly explained in *An Epistle Called a Drop of Nectar* (*Spring yig bdud rtsi’i thig le* verse 14) that ‘to classify them in this way is to posit [something] that will astonish even the foolish’” (see edition of Kano 2007, 11). Because the illusion-like conjunction of appearance and emptiness in fact is a conventional truth, there is no single Great Mādhyamika who accepts it as the ultimate truth. Were it an ultimate truth, it would follow, absurdly, that everything established [by valid cognition] (*gzhi grub*) would be an ultimate truth, for it is impossible that a phenomenon not be empty of truth.” See Cabezón 2010 and 1993, 89.

<sup>65</sup> This is an hermeneutical etymology of the Tibetan term *mu stegs pa* which was originally a more literal rendering of the Sanskrit *tīrthika* (“forders”), literally, ‘those belonging to, associated with’ (possessive suffix – *ika*) ‘stairs for landing or for descent into a river,’ ‘bathing-place,’ ‘place of pilgrimage on the banks of sacred streams’ (see Monier-Williams c.v. *tīrtha*.); the term may have originally referred to temple-priests at river crossings or fords where travellers propitiated a deity before crossing. The Sanskrit term seems to have undergone metonymic transfer in referring to those able to ford the turbulent river of *saṃsāra* (as in the Jain Tīrthaṅkaras, “Ford-makers”) and it came to be used in Buddhist sources to refer to teachers of rival religious traditions. The Sanskrit term is closely rendered by the Tibetan *mu stegs pa*: “those on the steps (*stegs pa*) at the edge (*mu*)”. Mi bskyod rdo rje follows a common Tibetan hermeneutical etymology of *mu stegs pa* as referring to those who (*pa*) dwell (*gnas* for *stegs* : *avasthā*) in extremes (*mtha’* for *mu* : *tīrtha*).

<sup>66</sup> Tibetan exegetes introduced two subclassifications of Madhyamaka—that is, the division into Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka and Yogācāra-Madhyamaka prevalent during the early propagation of Buddhism in Tibet and the division into Svātantrika-Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka prevalent during the later propagation period—in order to systematically define and differentiate the various strands of Madhyamaka found in Indian sources.

Madhyamaka.<sup>67</sup> According to the *Notes on the Oral Tradition* (*Gsung rgyun zin bris*) by 'Brom ston, “there also existed in India one [called] Vaibhāṣika-Mādhyamika. When those in India who had abided by the two [early] Buddhist schools (*rang sde*) and the third, Cittamātra, joined the Mādhyamikas, then whatever conventions they previously posited regarding conventional-obscurational truth in their respective philosophies, they also maintained later on [when they became Mādhyamikas].” The illustrious Candrakīrti [said] “I don’t accept customary conventions according to the philosophical systems but accept only the consensus opinions of the world.”

Here in Tibet, the tradition of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti has been designated as “Prāsaṅgika” and the tradition of Bhavya as “Svātantrika”. As for the subclassification of Madhyamaka, the division into the Illusory [nature] Verifiable through Reasoning and Nonfoundational Unity appears to have been rejected by the Mahātma Translator father and son [i.e., Rngog Lo tsā ba and his disciple Gro lung pa].<sup>68</sup> According to the *Doctrinal Stages* [*Bstan rim chen mo*] by the great Gro lung pa<sup>69</sup>, “Some fools present traditions of Madhyamaka as being two-fold: the Aprati-ṣṭhāna[vāda] and Māyopamādvayavāda. They claim that Ācārya Śāntarakṣita and others maintained that illusions are ultimate. [They further claim that] having negated by negative determination the true existence (*bden pa*) imputed by Substance Ontologists (*dngos po[r] smra ba : vastuvādin*), [they proceeded] on the basis of logical reasoning, to affirm a false existence (*brdzun pa*) [by] a positive determination. This is not at all what was said. According to the *Madhyam-akālaṃkāra*:<sup>70</sup>

Hence, these entities  
Have the characteristic of [being] conventional.  
If one claims that [these conventional entities] are the ultimate,  
What can I do about it?

So [Śāntarakṣita] considered that false existence to be only an object of perception, and stated that the positive determination subsumed under the four [kinds of]

<sup>67</sup> Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 47–48: “according to Pa tshab, Bhavya with his Svatantrika followers advocated a *pramāṇa* that is *vastubalapravṛtta*, whereas the Prāsaṅgikas Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti accepted only one that is *lokaprasiddha*.” This last designation was used by Candrakīrti to characterize his acceptance of worldly views on a conventional level, but it has not been established that he used it as a doxographical category.

<sup>68</sup> See also Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 32–35. Tsong kha pa and his Dge lugs pa successors followed the lead of these two in denying the validity of this distinction.

<sup>69</sup> On this passage from *Bstan rim chen mo* (*Bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa rin po che la 'jug pa'i lam gyi rim pa rnam par bshad pa*. Lhasa: Zhol par khang, n.d., 437b<sub>7</sub>–438a<sub>3</sub>), see Almogi 2010, 164–65.

<sup>70</sup> See Ichigō 1989, 212. For English translation see *ibid.*, 213.

affirming negation [applied to] the negation of origination, is the false conventional [truth]. If one posits that [something], be it existent or nonexistent, is verifiable on the basis of logical reasoning, one would be possessed by the great demon of extreme views, and thus far from the Middle Way. For he also stated *inter alia* that if [one posits] existence, [it results in] eternalism.}”<sup>71</sup>

This quotation attests to the atmosphere of dissension among Tibetan schools over the acceptability of the late Indian distinction between Apratiṣṭhāna and Māyopamādvaya traditions and how it was to be aligned with existing Tibetan classifications of Madhyamaka. Orna Almogi (2010) has suggested that the widespread rejection of the classification within the Bka’ gdams pa community had to do with the fact that “the Indian proponents of this scheme, being strongly inclined towards Tantric teachings, did not enjoy much authority among Tibetan masters more inclined towards non-Tantric teachings.”<sup>72</sup> She also notes that the scheme did not correlate in any straightforward manner with the widely accepted Tibetan subclassifications of Madhyamaka into Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka and Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (in the early propagation period) or into Svātantrika-Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (in the later propagation period).<sup>73</sup> The authors in our study reflect the widespread divergence of opinion on how best to combine these different classifications.

The majority of Tibetan exegetes had identified Apratiṣṭhāna (or at least one strand of it) with \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka, and the Māyopamādvayavāda with Svātantrika-Madhyamaka.<sup>74</sup> This group included many scholars from different traditions such as Mkhas pa Lde’u jo sras (13<sup>th</sup> c.), the Bka’ gdams pa scholar Bcom ldan Rig pa’i ral gri (1227–1305)<sup>75</sup>, the Sa skya pa Stag tshang lo tsā ba (b. 1405)<sup>76</sup>, the ’Brug pa ’Ba’ ra ba Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang (1310–1391)<sup>77</sup>, the Dge lugs scholars Mkhas grub rje (1385–1438) and many of his successors<sup>78</sup>, and Rnying ma pa Mi pham Rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846–1912)<sup>79</sup>. There were also a few scholars such as the Rnying ma pa scholars Rog bande Shes rab ’od (1166–1244) and Klong chen rab ’byams pa (1308–1364) who subsumed both Apratiṣṭhānavāda and

<sup>71</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ic, MKsb vol. 4, 912–913.

<sup>72</sup> Almogi 2010, 182.

<sup>73</sup> See Almogi 2010, 182–83.

<sup>74</sup> On these classifications, see Almogi 2010 and Seyfort Ruegg 2000.

<sup>75</sup> On these first two, see Almogi 2010, 170 and 180–81.

<sup>76</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 34; Almogi 2010, 170.

<sup>77</sup> See Mimaki 1982, 34; Seyfort Ruegg 200, 34.

<sup>78</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1981, 58–59, n. 174.

<sup>79</sup> See Almogi 2010, 170.

Māyopamādvayavāda under the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka tradition<sup>80</sup>, thus implicitly according a higher status to \*Prāsaṅgika.<sup>81</sup> Still others, we have seen, rejected the classification of Madhyamaka into Apratiṣṭhānavāda and Māyopamādvaya entirely, among them the early Bka' gdams pas Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109)<sup>82</sup>, his students Gro lung pa Blo gros 'byung gnas (b. 11<sup>th</sup> c.) and Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169)<sup>83</sup>, and the later Dge lugs pa founder Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419).<sup>84</sup>

The positions of our three authors are less clear-cut since none of them composed a summary of philosophical systems (*grub mtha'*), the type of work wherein such classifications are typically delineated. We have indicated that Karma phrin las regarded the Apratiṣṭhānavāda tradition as superior not only to the Māyopamādvayavāda but also to both \*Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika since meditation on unity beyond extremes transcends the analytical meditation of these two Madhyamaka traditions that is focused on undermining the varying beliefs in real entities characteristic of the lower philosophical schools. Mi bskyod rdo rje seems to have viewed the Apratiṣṭhāna as being on par with \*Prāsaṅgika to the extent that both emphasize the absence of discursive elaboration (*spros bral*) and he regarded both as having decisively invalidated not only the foundationalist presuppositions of the so-called lower schools of philosophy but also the types of inferential reasoning in ascertaining the ultimate employed by the Svātantrikas and Māyopamādvayavādins.

Padma dkar po appears to have stood alone in presenting both Svātantrika and \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka traditions as subclasses of the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka. In his treatise *Elucidating the Three Exegetical Traditions of Madhyamaka* (*Dbu ma'i gzhung lugs gsum gsal bar byed pa*), he explains his own somewhat atypical classification by suggesting that what both Svātantrika and \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka traditions share in common with the Apratiṣṭhāna tradition is their objective to eradicate discursive elaborations (*spros pa*).<sup>85</sup> Where they differ is that the Svātantrika believes that this can be achieved through reasoning based on reliable epistemic procedures, whereas \*Prāsaṅgika does not, seeking instead to simply point out how opponents' conclusions are at odds with their own

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<sup>80</sup> See Almogi 2010, 165–68.

<sup>81</sup> See Almogi 2010, 170. This may have had something to do with the fact that Rnying ma masters traced their teachings to a period two or three centuries before the Indian Māyopama and Apratiṣṭhāna distinction was introduced. It bears recalling, however, that the 11<sup>th</sup> century Rnying ma pa Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po was partisan to the Apratiṣṭhāna Madhyamaka tradition.

<sup>82</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 32–33.

<sup>83</sup> See Almogi 2010, 165–68.

<sup>84</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 32–33 and also n. 60 where the author notes that Tsong kha pa endorsed “Rngog’s criticism of the applicability of this pair of terms to the level of the *paramārtha*.”

<sup>85</sup> See below, 354 and n. 1024.



original beliefs.<sup>86</sup> What emerges clearly from examining the Madhyamaka views of the three authors is that the Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā synthesis of the late Indian Apratiṣṭhāna view provided them with an ideal framework for integrating Mahāmudrā teachings on the luminous nature of mind with Madhyamaka teachings on emptiness. They therefore accorded this tradition the highest position in their doxographical systems.

#### THE NATURE OF LIBERATING KNOWLEDGE

In light of the authors' philosophical affinities, it is hardly surprising that all four stood united in giving direct (yogic) perception (*mngon sum*) or personally realized wisdom (*so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*) priority over rational inference. All would agree with Shākya mchog ldan's assessment that an emptiness arrived at through analytical reasoning can only be an abstraction (*don spyi*) that is conceptually determined, and cannot be the nonrepresentational ultimate (*rnam grangs pa ma yin pa'i don dam*)<sup>87</sup> which is amenable only to direct perception and personally realized wisdom. The reasons are largely phenomenological. Since discursive analysis derives from a prediscursive or nonconceptual mode of perception, it can at best play the preparatory role of eliminating reifications that obscure or distort the perception of reality. This assessment was crucial to the ways they individually distinguished the uncontrived type of knowledge arising from meditative experience (*sgom*) from the adventitious type of knowledge employed in studying and thinking (*thos bsam*). Distinctions of this kind proved integral to their differing attempts to specify the roles and relative efficacy of discursive and prediscursive modes of soteriological knowledge, an issue that in one form or another had been repeatedly discussed and fiercely debated in Tibet since the time of the Sino-Indian Bsam yas Debate hosted by the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan toward the end of the eighth century.

The question at the heart of this debate was whether goal-realization occurs gradually through analytical meditation, as argued by the Indian participant Kamalaśīla, or all at once through contemplating the nature of mind, as proposed by his Chinese Chan adversary Heshang Moheyan (Tib. *hwa shang mo ho yen*). It is well known that the account of the debate preserved in Tibetan historical sources has Kamalaśīla roundly defeating his opponent, thereby securing Indian Buddhism as the official state religion and sanctioning the banishment of Chinese Chan practitioners and their suddenist teachings from Tibet. The reality must have been otherwise since Sino-Tibetan Chan communities are known to have existed in Tibet well into the tenth century CE. At any rate, the standard debate narrative soon assumed the status

<sup>86</sup> *Dbu ma'i gzhung lugs gsum gsal bar byed pa nges don grub pa'i shing rta*, PKsb vol. 9,

<sup>87</sup> On the translation of the term *paryāya* (Tib. *rnam grangs*) as it occurs in the distinction between a "represented ultimate" (*rnam grangs [dang bcas] pa'i don dam* : [\*sa]paryāyaparamārtha) and "nonrepresented ultimate," see below, 96 n. 241 and especially 102 n. 263.

of a comprehensive founding myth<sup>88</sup> within the Tibetan cultural memory, one that has since been used, in various rhetorical contexts, both to valorize a standard Indian Buddhist scholastic model of reason-guided gradualism and to ostracize as ‘non-Buddhist’ (*chos min*) any subitist elements—especially those found in Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen teachings—that were thought to advocate a stuporous Chinese Heshang form of meditation.

There were certain key epistemological and soteriological problems raised at the Great Debate that continued to smoulder in the centuries to follow and that often enflamed conflicts between Tibetan schools. By the post-classical period, a great deal of scholarly attention from all sides was fixed on a set of issues concerning [1] the relationship between view (*lta ba*) and conduct (*spyod pa*), or between insight (*shes rab*) and skillful means (*thabs*), [2] the transition from studying and thinking (*thos, bsam*) to meditation (*sgom*), [3] the function and scope of the more and less conceptually-mediated cognitive styles, [4] the proper contexts for gradual (*rim gyis*) versus simultaneous or all-at-once ([g]*cig char*) styles of pedagogy and realization, and [5] the connection between premeditated versus unpremeditated, or contrived (*bcos*) versus uncontrived (*ma bcos*), modes of altruistic activity. For our Bka’ brgyud exegetes, the key to understanding and resolving these problems lay in the insight that conceptual and nonconceptual modes of liberating knowledge are complementary rather than contradictory. It was crucial, however, to specify their respective roles within changing soteriological contexts. Padma dkar po consecrated considerable attention to showing that Mahāmudrā teachings on nonconceptual wisdom and mental nonengagement are fully compatible with the type of Madhyamaka teachings encouraging well-founded mental engagement (*yoniso manasikāra*) and discerning reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣā*) promoted by Kamalaśīla, but also fully concordant with the kind of objectless meditation emphasized in Mantrayāna Completion Stage (*utpannakrama*) practices wherein the mind, deprived of any object with which to identify, reposes in luminous emptiness.

In their attempts to mediate between these complex and contrasting views on truth, emptiness, buddha nature, the nature of mind, and styles of liberating knowledge, the four scholars each charted his own philosophical middle course between the prevailing eternalistic and nihilistic currents of Buddhist thought. If this meant avoiding the imputation of a permanent metaphysical reality, a view they linked with the Jo nang school, it also meant circumventing the kind of unwarranted depreciation of ultimate reality that they saw as the undesirable result of taking as the view of the ultimate an exclusive or sheer emptiness (*stong pa rkyang pa*)—a complete absence of anything whatsoever—that was the scope of a nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*), a view that they associated mainly with the Dge lugs pa school. It is in light of this shared concern to reconcile Gzhan stong-based and Rang stong-based Middle Way approaches within the framework of an affirmative but antifoundationalist

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<sup>88</sup> See Bretfeld 2004.

approach to goal-realization that we can broadly characterize the primary philosophical orientation of these leading post-classical thinkers as a “Mahāmudrā of the Middle Way”.

Given our still fragmentary knowledge of post-classical developments in Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā philosophy and polemics, it is hoped that the present study will offer the reader a panoramic overview of some of the central religio-philosophical issues and debates that defined this most fruitful period of Tibet’s intellectual history through the lens of four of its most productive and influential thinkers.

## SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN

## SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN AND THE BKA' BRGYUD MAHĀMUDRĀ TRADITION

Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) has long been regarded as one of the most prolific and learned scholars of his generation. As a testament to the breadth of his scholarship, his extant Collected Works fill twenty-four volumes and cover an impressively wide range of subjects, mostly of a philosophical nature. Within his own Sa skya tradition, Shākya mchog ldan's erudition and influence as a teacher earned him the title Great Ācārya (*slob dpon chen po*) and garnered him the recognition of being one of the tradition's Six Ornaments Beautifying the Snowy Land (*gangs can mdzes pa'i rgyan drug*). These accolades aside, Shākya mchog ldan has mainly been regarded as a controversial figure, even an apostate, whose probing reconsiderations of the views of Sa skya Paṇḍita, supreme authority of his own Sa skya school, and his vehement criticisms of the views of Tsong kha pa, founder of the Dge lugs pa school, led to the general neglect of his writings by his own school and their wholesale proscription by the Dge lugs pa establishment. It is only in the past four decades, with the resurfacing and distribution of the long-banned copy of his Collected Writings in 1975, that his works have begun to once again attract the attention they deserve.

Most of our current state of knowledge of this important master derives from the aforementioned studies of Komarovski, Kano, Jackson, Seyfort Ruegg, Van der Kuijp, Tur-rene, and Caumanns.<sup>89</sup> An important chapter in Shākya mchog ldan's development as a philosopher and exegete that has hitherto received only cursory treatment (by Jackson and Seyfort Ruegg) is his productive engagement with the Dwags po Mahāmudrā tradition that developed and intensified during the last half of his life. This development found its culmination in a trilogy of writings dedicated to articulating and defending this tradition that are analyzed, critically edited and translated in volume two of this work.

An assessment of Shākya mchog ldan's treatments of the Dwags po Mahāmudrā tradition may be expected to fill a crucial gap in our understanding of his philosophy, a gap of no small magnitude given the author's conviction that this tradition represents the summit of Buddhist thought and practice. Here, the question immediately arises: Why did a renowned Sa skya scholar and teacher choose to openly defend the validity, and even superiority, of a tradition that had come under relentless criticism by the supreme religious and scholastic authority of his own tradition, Sa skya Paṇḍita, and virtually all of the latter's successors? As a first step toward making sense of the author's growing allegiance to this contested tradition, we can take note of two controversial issues concerning Buddhist theory and practice that had long claimed his attention and briefly conjecture why he thought the Mahāmudrā tradition offered the best prospect of resolving them. One was the issue of how to reconcile philosophical analysis with contemplative experience by combining, within the traditional framework of study (*thos*), thought (*bsam*) and meditation (*sgom*), the key elements of the

<sup>89</sup> For previous research on Shākya mchog ldan, see Introduction.

diverse, and sometimes seemingly divergent, vehicles of Buddhism, exoteric as well as esoteric. The second was the issue of how best to realize a unity (*zung 'jug : yuganaddha*) beyond extremes of existence and nonexistence, affirmation and negation, within the sphere of spiritual praxis, a unity sometimes referred to as the inseparability of manifestation and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*). Of course, the very formulation of these issues makes use of conventional distinctions between view and practice, analysis and contemplation, and related rubrics that the author himself regarded as discursive constructs that must eventually be transcended. But, in the author's eyes, such transcendence is possible only when one recognizes the abiding nature or prereflective source of conceptual thinking that itself eludes the appropriations of negative and positive determinations. And in his eyes, the most viable path to this goal was that outlined in the teachings of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā system.

The present chapter looks at Shākya mchog ldan's assessment and defence of this system and its teachings within the broader contexts of the author's doxographical affiliations and philosophical views on buddha nature, mind, soteriological knowledge and emptiness. Although his Mahāmudrā trilogy forms the primary focus for assessing his contributions, we have also consulted a number of separate treatments of this tradition in his *Replies to Queries* (*dris lan*) texts and other writings. The trilogy consists of the following works which, in all extant editions of the author's Collected Works, are presented in the following sequence: [1] *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others: a Treatise Clarifying Mahāmudrā*<sup>90</sup>, [2] *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas: A Treatise Called 'Distinguishing Mahāmudrā'*<sup>91</sup>; and [3] *Distinguishing Mahāmudrā or the Great Ship of Unity: A Treatise Dispelling Errors in the Interpretation of Mahāmudrā of Scripture and Reasoning*<sup>92</sup>. Only the second of these texts can be assigned a date; in its colophon the author records that he composed it when he was 76 years old (just four years before his death). It is not unlikely that all three works were composed at a relatively late date since they explore an integrated set of themes and to some extent balance each other thematically, but we have no way of confirming this thesis. It is noteworthy that the dated work is the most openly critical of Sa skya Paṇḍita's condemnations of the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā system and its tone is less conciliatory than the other two. One plausible scenario is that this was the last of his Mahāmudrā works on the supposition that its candidly critical tone reflects a late point in the author's life when he would have felt

<sup>90</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor lo gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed*, (hereafter *Undermining* or PCdn), SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 359–376<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>91</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed ces bya ba'i bstan bcos grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges*, (hereafter *Ascertaining the Intent* or PCgn), SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 376<sub>1</sub>–385<sub>4</sub>.

<sup>92</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed or Lung rigs gnyis kyi phyag rgya chen po'i bzhed tshul la 'khrul pa sel ba'i bstan bcos zung 'jug gi gru chen*, (hereafter *Great Ship of Unity* or PCks), SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 385<sub>4</sub>–412<sub>2</sub>.

less inhibited to speak his mind than previously. But without corroborating evidence, this can only be a matter of speculation.

The Mahāmudrā trilogy reveals as clearly as any of the works in the author's corpus how Shākya mchog ldan understood and formulated the above-mentioned issues of reconciliation and unity and how he thought they could best be resolved. The three works mark a high point in the author's own development as a Buddhist thinker and open a window on some of the key soteriological issues that defined the vibrant but polemically tempestuous intellectual climate of his age. The distinctive doctrinal elements of his Mahāmudrā texts stand out most clearly when viewed against the background of the author's philosophical oeuvre as a whole and in light of its central preoccupations.

The author's *Collected Works* reveal a highly independent thinker who intrepidly grappled with the "big problems" of Buddhist philosophy such as truth, emptiness, the nature of mind, buddha nature, and soteriological knowledge. What is perhaps most striking in his treatments of such issues is the extent to which he attempts not only to assess multiple Buddhist viewpoints on such problems but also to work out how they should be coordinated and reconciled with one another from the standpoint of individual assimilation and praxis. In short, he was a master both of dialogical and dialectical thinking.<sup>93</sup> We have proposed that the task of clarifying the relationship between philosophical thinking and contemplative experience was at the heart of his philosophical project. He consecrated a great deal of attention to determining the proper role and relative efficacy of each based on the conviction that it was not only an issue of inestimable importance for combining the study and practice of Buddhism but also one that had generally been misunderstood by his contemporaries. In this regard, he identified two major strands of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist thought: [1] the dialectician's system of severing imputations (*sgro 'dogs bcad pa'i lugs*) based on studying and thinking, which can be approached either via Self-emptiness (*rang stong*) or Other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*)<sup>94</sup>, and [2] the *yogin's* system of first-hand experience (*nyams su myong ba'i lugs*) based on meditation. While Shākya mchog ldan considered both to be valid and important Buddhist approaches, he deemed it a serious mistake to privilege the former to the exclusion of the latter, to give methods and texts concerned with reasoning which investigates the ultimate priority over those concerned with first-personal attestation. The reasons he gives are largely phenomenological. As important or necessary as the elimination of reifications through rational investigation may prove to be, its result is always a deductive conclusion, a negative or positive determination, and should therefore never be taken as an

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<sup>93</sup> On these two styles of thinking, see below, 241–42 and n. 677.

<sup>94</sup> Like many other scholars of his time, Shākya mchog ldan used these Tibetan rubrics *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* to broadly characterize and distinguish between negating (apophatic) and affirming (cataphatic) strains of Indian Buddhist thought.

end in itself. To do so is to conflate the elimination of what is to be negated (*dgag bya*) with what is to be realized. For Shākya mchog ldan, the elimination of what is to be negated is not the goal itself but a preparatory clearing away of what conceals it.

As Shākya mchog ldan sees it, any emptiness arrived at through radical negation can only be an abstraction (*don spyi*) that is conceptually determined, it cannot be the nonrepresentational ultimate (*rnam grangs pa ma yin pa'i don dam*) that is amenable only to direct perception or personally realized wisdom. On this view, conceptual analysis can at best play the propaedeutic role of eliminating reifications that obscure or distort the real and thus prevent the disclosure of personally realized wisdom and the buddha qualities. Because the Gzhan stong view makes room for a positive appraisal of what *mahāmudrā* is from the vantage point of first-hand experience, it is thought to come closer to the perspective of unity (*yuganaddha*), the cornerstone of the Mahāmudrā teachings, than Rang stong which is focused on objects of refutation (*dgag bya*). However, in his Mahāmudrā writings, both the negating Rang stong and affirming Gzhan stong traditions, useful as they may be as preliminary methods, remain confined to the sphere of the dialectician, a sphere that is transcended in the personally realized wisdom of the *yogin* who realizes a unity beyond extremes of existence and nonexistence. In this vein, Shākya mchog ldan rather boldly characterizes Mahāmudrā as a system of thought and practice independent of the approaches of Self-emptiness (*rang stong*) or Other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) that are deemed to represent “poisoned”, i.e., conceptually fabricated, viewpoints.

In articulating this relationship between conceptual analysis and nonconceptual realization, Shākya mchog ldan makes an important distinction between the actual view (*lta ba dngos*), which he regards as a prephilosophical view grounded in first-hand experience, and the myriad viewpoints (*lta ba*) or established conclusions (*grub mtha'*) that make up the universe of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist philosophical tenet-systems. Shākya mchog ldan maintains that one's philosophical viewpoint should have the actual view based on first-hand experience as its point of origin and orientation. To give a philosophical viewpoint primacy over the prephilosophical view is to put the soteriological cart before the horse and to embark on a path of speculation and dogmatism. In sum, Shākya mchog ldan's philosophical project was dedicated in large part to striking a balance between negating and affirming modes of Buddhist knowledge and discourse and this is in his view possible only when one restores the phenomenological primacy of first-hand attestation over theoretical deliberation. The goal is to realize a unity in which the entire spectrum of dialectical positions regarding truth, knowledge and emptiness have given way to the inseparability of manifestation and emptiness.

For Shākya mchog ldan, the most efficacious and least convoluted path to this transcendent unity is the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā because it offers persons of requisite acumen a method of direct access to buddhahood, the abiding nature of mind, and



minimizes the need for conceptual and ritual mediation. Equating *mahāmudrā* with the unborn nature of mind, Shākya mchog ldan identifies it with unchanging buddha nature which is at once [1] the ground of the clearing process, [2] the clearing process itself which, through wisdom, clears away adventitious stains, and [3] its fruition as the transcendent qualities of purity, selfhood, bliss, and permanence.<sup>95</sup> He adds “there is no difference between the element of sentient beings (*sems can gyi kham*s) and that of buddhas (*sangs rgyas kyi kham*s)”<sup>96</sup>: what characterizes sentient beings—the unfounded mentations based on the aggregates (*skandhas*), sense-bases (*āyatana*s), elements (*dhātu*s), and sense-faculties (*indriya*s)—are purely adventitious and dependent upon the purity of mind.<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, as the adventitious impurities subside, the nature of mind, i.e., primordial wisdom, becomes manifest.

Shākya mchog ldan traces the view that forms the backbone of Mahāmudrā practice to three main exegetical traditions: [1] the Tathāgatagarbha discourses of the third turning, particularly the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, [2] the Siddha *dohās*, especially the *Dohā Trilogy* (*do hā skor gsum*) of Saraha, and their commentaries, and [3] the tantra corpus. These all affirm nondual wisdom as that which remains, or withstands critical assessment, when distorting dualistic reifications and afflictions have been dispelled.

Concerning methods of realization, Shākya mchog ldan is emphatic that *mahāmudrā* is accessible only to nonconceptual, nondeluded direct cognition. Unlike the Rang stong and Gzhan stong systems of severing superimpositions (*sgro ’dogs bcad pa*) by studying and thinking which employ inferential knowledge, the Mahāmudrā practice is said to be a matter of directly perceiving the nature of mind, of familiarizing oneself with ultimate *bodhicitta*.

Shākya mchog ldan neatly sums up the difference between the approaches of the dialectician and yogin by citing an unidentified quotation which states that “dialecticians (*mtshan nyid pa*) make outward observations, severing superimpositions outwardly, whereas yogins (*rnal ’byor pa*) make inward observations, severing superimpositions inwardly”.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the yogin redirects the capacity to find fault from externals to their inward

<sup>95</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17–18, critical edition: 29. “The element of *\*sugatagarbha* is that which has been given the name *mahāmudrā*. In this which is the ground for the clearing (*sbyang gzhi*) of stains, the *\*sugatagarbha* that is the cleanser (*sbyong byed*) of the nine kinds of stains that are the objects to be cleared (*sbyang bya*) clears them by means of the wisdom of awareness, whereby the fruition of the clearing process (*sbyang ’bras*) emerges, i.e., the transcendent qualities of purity, selfhood, bliss, etc.”

<sup>96</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 19, critical edition: 30.

<sup>97</sup> The author bases himself on *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.52–57 which gives the analogy of the elements of earth which is supported by water, water by air, air by space but space not being supported by anything. Likewise, the psychophysical aggregates, sensory elements and sensory capacities are supported by actions and afflictive emotions, which are supported by unfounded mentations, which are in turn supported by the purity of mind which, however, is not itself supported by any of these phenomena.

<sup>98</sup> Similar characterizations were employed by Karma phrin las (see chapter two) and the Second ’Brug chen Rgyal dbang rje and Fourth ’Brug chen Padma dkar po (see chapter four).

source, mind's mistaken self-identifications. All this may strike the reader as intriguing, coming as it does from a Sa skya scholar who was renowned for his wide-ranging erudition in critically assessing the many systems of Buddhist philosophy. Given that the author had in his earlier writings referred to himself, with more than a little self-irony, as a “dry dialectician” (*mtshan nyid pa skam po*), we can take his endorsement of the yogin's inward turn as indicative of his own changing orientation and shifting priorities.<sup>99</sup>

In his Mahāmudrā works, Shākya mchog ldan takes pains to clarify that his hierarchical ranking of the two systems of severing superimpositions and first-hand experience is by no means an attempt to advocate the latter at the expense of the former, to privilege knowledge based on direct experience over knowledge based on analytical reasoning. This would be to play into the hands of the dialectician. Rather his intent is to adequately characterize the relations of priority that exist between first-hand experience and critical analysis: all activities of reflection, thematizing and theorizing derive and deviate from a more basic nondiscursive mode of being and awareness and return to it at the moment of realization. To say that nonconceptual realization depends on conceptual analysis is to misunderstand the priority relation between them and take what is to be relinquished—conceptual fabrication—as the basis of the path. Mahāmudrā in his view restores the proper relation by recognizing the prereflective nature of thought and taking nondual wisdom as the basis of the path.

From this standpoint, the wisdom of Mahāmudrā does not unequivocally depend on the logical reasoning of either the Rang stong or Gzhan stong strands of Madhyamaka, though both may prove necessary to the aspirant who stands in need of a preparatory purging of illegitimate imputations and unwarranted deprecations by means of studying and thinking. Nor does such wisdom in all cases require the tantric methods of empowerments and Generation and Completion stages, as effective as these may be for those requiring the elimination of deep-seated afflictions and attachments. While Shākya mchog ldan holds this tantric preliminary method to be even more efficacious than Madhyamaka reasoning, he nonetheless accepts, in contrast to Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga rgyal mtshan (1182–1251), the validity of an *upadeśa*-based access to the experience of *mahāmudrā* that does not require the prescribed repertoire of tantric rituals and practices which may, to the most suitable recipients of these teachings, prove to be a distraction or even an obstacle.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 35.

<sup>100</sup> PCs, see Volume II, translation: 53, critical edition: 75. “In the words of some [others], it is said that there are two [types of practitioners], the gradualists and the simultaneists. To the first, this *mahāmudrā* is taught [once they have] adequately been made a suitable vessel for the Secret Mantra by taking refuge, developing *bodhicitta*, empowerment, blessing, and so on. To the simultaneists who, having thoroughly ripened their mind-streams during many previous lifetimes, do not need to rely on the sham of preliminary practices and so on in this life, the main practice is shown right from the start. In that regard, it is said that even though it is not possible to [directly] show them “*mahāmudrā* is this”, it will nonetheless come by simply instructing them to “rest naturally

Shākya mchog ldan characterizes the realization of Mahāmudrā as a process which involves the whole person, bringing into play innate altruistic capacities for thinking, feeling and acting that have been obscured and distorted by the mind’s own self-objectifications. While studying and thinking may play a crucial role in orienting the mind toward what is essential, it is certain affective and intersubjective dispositions such as confidence and devotion which may prove most effective in triggering the disclosure of mind’s luminous nature.<sup>101</sup> Mahāmudrā arises at the confluence of the student’s devotion and teacher’s blessings, whatever other preparatory measures may have preceded this emergence.<sup>102</sup>

## LIFE, WRITINGS AND INFLUENCES

To gain a clearer picture of the historical and doctrinal elements that shaped Shākya mchog ldan’s engagement with Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition, it may be useful to sketch in rough strokes the important milestones in his life, giving particular attention to his affiliations with Karma Bka’ brgyud teachers and teachings.<sup>103</sup> Shākya mchog ldan was born in 1428 in Central Tibet in the vicinity of the famous monastic seminary of Gsang phu ne’u thog.<sup>104</sup> At age ten (1437), following a course of preliminary studies, he received pre-novice

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in uncontrived mind,” once they are acquainted with what the words mean.” *la la’i gsung gis | gdul ba’i gang zag la | rim gyis pa dang gcig car ba gnyis | dang po la skyabs ’gro sems bskyed dbang byin brlabs sogs kyis gsang sngags kyi snod rung du byas | bzod phyag rgya chen po ’di ston pa yin no || cig car ba tshe rabs mang por rgyud yongs su smin pa la tshe ’dir sngon ’gro sogs kyi mgo skor la ma ltos par dang po nyid nas dngos gzhi de ston pa ni | de yang phyag rgya chen po de ’di yin zhes ston nus pa ma yin gyi | ’on kyang sems ma bcos lhug par zhog shig ces bstan pa tsam gyis brda’ don ’phrod nas ’ong pa yin gsungs |*

<sup>101</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 24, critical edition: 33.

<sup>102</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 35, critical edition: 43. “The emptiness of *mahāmudrā* is attained through devotion to the *bla ma*, blessings, karmic connection and the accumulation of merit.” *phyag rgya chen po’i stong nyid ni | bla mar mos dang byin rlabs dang | las ’phro ba sod nams tshogs las yin | grub ...*

<sup>103</sup> For a more comprehensive biography of Shākya mchog ldan based on various biographical and historical sources including the comprehensive biography of the master composed by Kun dga’ grol mchog (1507–1565/66) based largely on accounts by Shākya mchog ldan’s disciples and grand-disciples, see Komorovski 2011, chapter one. This work additionally provides a valuable survey of the socio-political atmosphere in which Shākya mchog ldan lived and worked, a period characterized by increasing political and polemical tensions. More details about Shākya mchog ldan’s life are to be expected with the publication in 2015 of the rivsed dissertation on the life and work of Shākya mchog ldan by Caumanns 2012, *Der Mahāpaṇḍita des Klosters gSer-mdog-can: Leben und Werk des Sa-skya-Meisters Shakya-mchog-ldan (1428–1507)*.

<sup>104</sup> Gsang phu was a Bka’ gdams monastery established in 1073 by Rngog Legs pa’i shes rab (11<sup>th</sup> c.), a disciple of the renowned Bengali master Atiśa alias Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054) who founded the Bka’ gdams order. Gsang phu was the most important and influential of six seminaries (*chos grva chen po drug*) established between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Dbus province, the others being Skyor mo lung, Zul phu, Dga’ ba gdong, Bde ba can and Gung thang (i.e. Chos ’khor gling). Gsang phu was under the authority of the Rngog clan and started operations with 500 students. Sørensen and Hazod (2007, 685) note that the six learning centres played a vital role in the establishment of the major Dge lugs pa key monasteries in the 15th century, being incorporated into their network. On formative developments in Buddhist epistemology at Gsang phu, see Van der Kuijp 1983,

ordination (*bar ma rab byung*) along with the ordination name Shākya mchog ldan from the Sa skya master Rong ston shes bya kun rig (1367–1449) who had by this time gained a reputation as a brilliant scholar and teacher, and a formidable critic of Tsong kha pa’s views. Rong ston identified the boy as the reincarnation of one of his own teachers, the Sa skya master Bag ston Gzhon nu rgyal mtshan (14<sup>th</sup> c.) and of the latter’s student Bag ston Shākya ’od zer.

In the same year, Shākya mchog ldan entered the Sa skya ’Phan yul Gnas sgo college at Gsang pu ne’u thog, the seat of the great *paṇḍita* Don yod dpal ba who also became one of his most important teachers. The monastery was at this time supported by the powerful Phag mo gru pa clan and mainly played host to Dge lugs and Sa skya students.<sup>105</sup> The young scholar began an intensive course of studies in classical Buddhist works on Vinaya, Abhidharma, Prajñāpāramitā, Pramāṇa, and Madhyamaka, as well as ritual, tantra and meditative techniques. Not confining his studies to Gsang phu, he travelled to many other learning institutions in search of specialists in various fields to broaden his knowledge of the main Buddhist traditions of exegesis and practice. The biographical sources characterize his early teenage years as a period of extensive intellectual studies combined with dedicated meditative practice. These resulted in contemplative experiences of luminous clarity that are said to have had the effect, among other things, that he could read during the night without the need for additional lighting. During this early phase of study and meditation, Rong ston pa continued to be one of his principal teachers, introducing his student to all the major areas of Buddhist philosophy.

At age thirteen (1440), Shākya mchog ldan received from him the novice vows (*dge tshul*). Despite his youth, he was already able to give instructions on Sa skya Paṇḍita’s *Tshad ma rigs pa’i gter* (*Treasure of the Science of Valid Cognition*) and Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa* and he soon became known as the “boy teacher” (*slob dpon bu chung*). When he was fifteen (1442), the Phag mo gru pa rulers, who at this time gave special patronage to the Dge lugs tradition, ordered the monks to study in Dge lugs institutions, a directive that did not sit well with Shākya mchog ldan, particularly as he did not approve of Tsong kha pa’s Madhyamaka interpretations.<sup>106</sup> It is significant, for example, that in the spring of 1442, Shākya mchog ldan was required to go to the Dge lugs monastery of Se ra monastery to attend extensive teachings on Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā* according to decrees issued from Ne’u sdong that made the attendance of Sa skya and Dge lugs pa monks mandatory. These events seem to have left a deep impression on the youth who would, later in life, frequently lament

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chapters 1 and 2. On the traditions of debate and logic at Gsang phu, see Onoda 1992, chapter 2. On abbatial succession at Gsang phu, see Van der Kuijp 1987, Onoda 1988, and Sørensen and Hazod 2007, 686 f.

<sup>105</sup> See Shunzo Onoda 1988, “Abbatial Successions of the Colleges of gSang phu sNe’u thog Monastery”.

<sup>106</sup> Komarovski 2011, 28–29

the decline in understanding of the original Bka' gdams traditions of exegesis and praxis by so-called “latter-day” proponents of Madhyamaka reasoning who took the goal of Buddhist thought and practice to consist in the realization of emptiness as a nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*). Although he would later comment that it was at age twelve that he first had the courage to differentiate his own philosophical view from those of rivals (mainly the Dge lugs pa), it was not until age thirty-two that he began writing his own refutations of Dge lugs pa views<sup>107</sup>, a trend that would continue for the remainder of his long life.

Already by the age of eighteen (1445), Shākya mchog ldan began his teaching career at Gsang phu where he earned the epithet “adjunct instructor” (*zur 'chad pa*), and, a year later, “master” (*slob dpon*). At the age of twenty, he undertook the study of Sanskrit and became completely fluent in this language, able to converse in it and translate from and into it. From the age of twenty-two onward, he obtained the Lam 'bras and the tantric Mahāmudrā transmissions as well as extensive Bka' gdams mental training (*blo sbyong*) teachings from different teachers. It was also during this time that he began receiving tantric transmissions and empowerments from teachers of various traditions, mainly Sa skya and Bka' brgyud pa. Shākya mchog ldan received empowerments on the Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, teachings on the Hevajra and other tantras, and various other instructions, from the Karma Bka' brgyud master Grags pa 'od zer (15<sup>th</sup> c.). From another famously nonsectarian Bka' brgyud teacher, Spyang lung sdings pa Gzhon nu blo gros (1372–1412), who had studied with Tsong kha pa and Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros (1349–1412) as well as many Sa skya and Bka' brgyud masters, he received extensive Bka' brgyud teachings.<sup>108</sup> These are but two indications of the close ties he was beginning to forge with the Karma bka' brgyud tradition, ties which would strengthen in the years to follow as he developed a growing familiarity with its systems of exegesis (*bshad lugs*) and praxis (*sgrub lugs*).

When he was twenty-five (1452), Shākya mchog ldan received full monastic ordination from Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456) who became another of his most important teachers. He excelled in his monastic examinations (*grwa skor*), greatly pleasing his ordination master. Shākya mchog ldan had by this time become one of the most learned scholars of his generation and was elevated to the title of a Sa skya Dge shes (*sa skya pa'i dge shes*) and then a “Great One” (*chen po*) at Gsang phu, the final step before becoming an Abbot (*mkhan po*). However, he seems to have become increasingly dissatisfied with the type of rote learning—the memorization of classical scripture by means of repetition—advocated at Gsang phu and in the summer of 1468, he left his teaching post in the hands of a high-ranking colleague and spent the next nine months in a Hevajra retreat at 'Od gsal rtse mo. He later

<sup>107</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 34.

<sup>108</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 30.

recounted that during this retreat he received indications that negativities had been purified and there arose many luminous visionary experiences (*'od gsal gyi 'char sgo*).

From the age of twenty-seven (1454) onward, Shākya mchog ldan had begun composing treatises on a variety of topics, and would eventually leave for posterity enough writings, many of them philosophical, to fill twenty-four volumes. Regarding his own philosophical orientation, it is clear from his collected writings that he devoted considerable attention to the Niḥsvabhāvavāda or \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka system until approximately 1470 (age forty-three), the year following his Hevajra retreat. From this time onward, his view shifted more and more to what he called Alīkākaravāda Madhyamaka, Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*) or Gzhan stong, though he continued to teach the works of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti extensively and to regard the \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka methods of reasoning as important preparatory tools for dispelling doubts and wrong imputations.

Although not opposed to \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka methods of reasoning per se, what he did object to was the tendency among his contemporaries to take such methods as an end in themselves and as the *conditio sine qua non* of goal-realization. As will become evident in the pages to follow, Shākya mchog ldan's distinctive doxographical identification of Alīkākaravāda as a Madhyamaka tradition par excellence—one whose adherents were said to have included the likes of the famous epistemologist Dignāga—would leave him vulnerable to harsh criticism by other scholars, not least of all by the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554).<sup>109</sup> It nonetheless gave Shākya mchog ldan a unique standpoint from which to make an important distinction within the doxographical universe of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies between two major strands of Madhyamaka: [1] traditions such as the Niḥsvabhāvavāda that rejected the existence, even conventionally, of any kind of transcendent awareness or wisdom that can be said to withstand critical assessment and be left as a remainder upon the realization of buddhahood, and [2] traditions such as the Alīkākaravāda that not only affirmed that such transcendent awareness is indeed what remains but also explicitly identify this remnant nondual awareness with the ultimate truth, the *dharmadhātu*, itself.<sup>110</sup> It was because this latter tradition also maintained that this transcendent cognition does not exist as a real entity (*dngos po*) that Shākya mchog ldan proposed that its view must be considered Madhyamaka rather than Cittamātra, an identification that many scholars such as Stag lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po would reject.

In sum, this doxographical scheme, though controversial, provided Shākya mchog ldan with a philosophical-epistemological orientation that could be shown to be completely in harmony with the affirmative third turning Mahāyāna, Siddha, and Tantra discourses and their shared disclosive view of goal-realization common commitment to the Madhyamaka principle

<sup>109</sup> For an analysis of Mi bskyod rdo rje's criticisms, see chapter three.

<sup>110</sup> See below, 59–60 et passim.

of freedom from extremes of existence and nonexistence. His own philosophical viewpoint was based on the complementarity between the Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda exegetical traditions and the reciprocity between their positive and negative determinations.

In his forty-third year (1471), Shākya mchog ldan was given his own seat at the monastery of Gzi lung (aka Zi ling/Zi lung) in Gtsang that had originally been established by Don yod dpal ba (1398–1484). In appreciation of his vast erudition and being the best of Don yod dpal’s students, the monastery was ceded to him by this master’s other students. Shākya mchog ldan renamed his new seat the “Golden Monastery” (*thub bstan gser mdog can*), after which he himself was sometimes referred to by the epithet “Great Teacher (*mahāpaṇḍita*) from the Golden Monastery” (*gser mdog paṇ chen*). It may be noted that this change of monastic venue signaled an important shift in Shākya mchog ldan’s political and spiritual alliances since this establishment was supported by the Rin spung pa clan. As powerful rivals of the Phag mo gru pa, the Rin spung pa had by the early fifteenth century become active supporters of both the Karma Bka’ brgyud and Sa skya traditions. From this time on, Shākya mchog ldan enjoyed the patronage of the Rin spungs family for whom he in turn gave teachings and tantric empowerments. At the same time, he seems to have increasingly fallen out of favour with the Sa skya establishment.

At the age of fifty-seven (1484) Shākya mchog ldan met for the first time the thirty-one year old Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), a renowned and highly influential scholar who received extensive patronage and land holdings from the Rin spungs family. Among much else, Chos grags rgya mtsho gave his senior student teachings on the Fourth Karma pa Rol pa’i rdo rje’s (1340–1383) *Great Madhyamaka Reasonings* (*dbu ma’i gtan tshigs chen mo*).<sup>111</sup> From this time onward, Shākya mchog ldan included in his teaching repertoire many Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā doctrines such as the Six Yogas of Nāropa (*na ro chos drug*) and Mahāmudrā of Coemergent Union (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*). In 1502 and again in 1503, Shākya mchog ldan, now in his mid-seventies, reunited with the Seventh Karma pa, this time accepting him as his root guru.<sup>112</sup> The last three decades of Shākya mchog ldan’s life were marked by a growing interest in the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition which had been so severely criticized by his own Sa skya tradition beginning with Sa skya Paṇḍita. It also marked a decisive shift in his own intellectual-spiritual vocation from that of a dialectician (*mthan nyid pa*) dedicated to the systems of severing superimpositions, Rang stong and Gzhan stong, toward that of the yoga-practitioner (*rnal ’byor pa*) devoted to systems of first-hand experience.

<sup>111</sup> Komarovski 2011, 43 and n. 157.

<sup>112</sup> This was reported by Chos grags rgya mtsho’s secretary and disciple Dpa’ bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1564/66). For references, see Komarovski 2011, 49 and n. 185.

Some of Shākya mchog ldan's most striking philosophical insights resulted from his ongoing efforts to clarify the complex relationships between these two vocations. We can see these same concerns mirrored in the Mahāmudrā writings of Karma phrin las, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po. Shākya mchog ldan's high regard for the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition would eventually find expression in the trilogy of works dedicated to elucidating and defending its teachings<sup>113</sup>, especially from its Sa skya and Dge lugs detractors, at least one of that was composed shortly before his death.<sup>114</sup> Shākya mchog ldan died at his monastery Gser mdog can in 1507 at the age of eighty.

Because of his substantial contributions to Buddhist philosophy and his enormous, if not always adequately acknowledged, influence as a teacher, Shākya mchog ldan earned the distinction of being one of the Sa skya school's so-called Six Ornaments Beautifying the Snowy Land (*gangs can mdzes pa'i rgyan drug*)<sup>115</sup>. He was also among the few Tibetan masters to receive the title Great Master (*slob dpon chen po*). Such tributes notwithstanding, Shākya mchog ldan's openly critical comments about the views of such prestigious religious authorities as Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his provocative reappraisals of the views of Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251)<sup>116</sup> his latter-day adherents ensured that he would find few allies among the Dge lugs pa or his own Sa skya pa coreligionists. His outspoken criticism of so-called “modern-day” representatives of various traditions eventually earned him the dubious distinction of being one of Tibet's most controversial thinkers.

Sa skya scholars have tended to maintain high regard for the breadth of Shākya mchog ldan's scholarship but a critical view of his reappraisals of the views of Sa skya Paṇḍita, his own tradition's supreme authority and most acclaimed scholar. This together with his treatments of Yogācāra and Gzhan stong views as complementary to or even superior to Madhyamaka and Rang stong views led to the general neglect of his writings within the Sa skya establishment, which generally saw the latter two views as superior to the former. By the same token, these philosophical affiliations and especially Shākya mchog ldan's unsparing criticisms of the views of Tsong kha pa, founder and supreme authority of the Dge lugs pa tradition, led to more serious reprisals. Long viewed as heretical by Dge lugs pa authorities, his works were, in the seventeenth century, included in a lengthy list of banned publications.

<sup>113</sup> This trilogy is critically edited and translated in Volume II of this monograph, 11 ff.

<sup>114</sup> The colophon informs us that *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas: A Treatise Called Distinguishing Mahāmudrā*, PCgn, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 346<sub>4</sub>–355<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 376<sub>1</sub>–385<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 457<sub>2</sub>–468<sub>3</sub>, was composed in the author's seventy-sixth year.

<sup>115</sup> Komarovski 2011, 3–4. The other five are G.yag ston sangs rgyas dpal (1348–1414), Rong ston smra ba'i seng ge (1367–1449), Ngor can kun dga' bzang (1382–1456), Rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456), and Rdzog pa kun dga' rnam rgyal (1432–1496). These Six Ornaments along with the Five Foremost Venerable Founders (*rje btsun gong ma lnga*) are considered to be the most important masters of the Sa skya tradition.

<sup>116</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 37–38.



Dge lugs supporters confiscated copies of his writings and sealed the printery in which his blocks were kept, where they remained virtually unavailable for centuries. An exception was one copy of the twenty-four volumes of his Collected Writings which managed to survive in Bhutan thanks to the efforts of the Head Abbot of Bhutan, Shakya Rin chen (1710–1759) who successfully petitioned the Tibetan Government for permission to obtain a copy of these writings on the pretext of his claim to being a reincarnation of the master.<sup>117</sup> Based on this copy, a modern reproduction of Shākya mchog ldan's works was published by Kunzang Tobgey in Thimphu, Bhutan in 1975 and have since become widely available to scholars. There is also anecdotal evidence that other copies of the master's writings were preserved in certain Sa skya monastery in Tibet but that they were hardly ever consulted.<sup>118</sup>

#### MADHYAMAKA AND THE DIALECTIC OF EMPTINESS: RANG STONG AND GZHAN STONG

Yaroslav Komarovski has observed in his *Vision of Unity* that Shākya mchog ldan's writings reflected a general Sa skya interpretation of Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka until his late forties, during which time he maintained that the tenet of the Gzhan stong followers “does not surpass the view of Alīkākaravāda even a little”.<sup>119</sup> During this earlier period, Shākya mchog ldan also endorsed the Tibetan consensus view that Alīkākaravāda was a Cittamātra subsect, though he would in later years come to regard it as a Gzhan stong Madhyamaka tradition on par with Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka, if not superior to it when it comes to meditation. It is therefore indisputable that Shākya mchog ldan changed some of his early views or, as Komarovski puts it, “broadened” and “clarified” his positions<sup>120</sup>. It should also be noted, however, that despite the widely held view that Shākya mchog ldan became a proponent of the Gzhan stong view only in his fifties, certain remarks in his earlier works indicate that in his thirties he already endorsed Gzhan stong as an indispensable Madhyamaka view grounded in the Maitreya texts and their commentaries as well as the tantras. Consider the following quotation from his commentary on Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Mkhas pa la 'jug pa* composed when he was thirty-eight years old<sup>121</sup>:

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<sup>117</sup> This was noted by Gene Smith in an unpublished article entitled “Banned Books in the Tibetan Speaking Lands”.

<sup>118</sup> According to one informant, Ngor Mkhan po Bsod nams rgya mtsho, some copies had been kept in the libraries of the Sa skya monasteries Ngor Ewaṃ Chos ldan and Rta nag Thub bstan rnam rgyal but that hardly anybody took an interest in them. Volker Caumanns, “Tibetan Sources on the Life of Serdog Pañchen Shākya Chogden,” as quoted in Komarovski 2011, 3 and n. 4, p. 307–08.

<sup>119</sup> Komarovski 2011, 104.

<sup>120</sup> Komarovski 2011, 4–5.

<sup>121</sup> This seems to be the basis for the first difference mentioned in Tāranātha's account of the imagined dialogue between Shākya mchog ldan and Dol po pa in Mathes 2004 (295–96).

The identification of the Madhyamaka view is twofold, the Perfections system and Mantra system. The first has two [aspects]: The Rang stong Madhyamaka which takes the middle turning literally, and the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka which takes the third turning literally. As for the first, the classical texts are the reasonings corpus (*rigs tshogs*) and commentaries by the \*Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas which explain them *in extenso*. As for the second, the classical texts are the Maitreya works and all the commentaries by Asaṅga and his brother that explain them *in extenso*, as well as the Mantra Madhyamaka.

[Now,] concerning [Gzhan stong Madhyamaka], when the extreme of eternalism is refuted, it is not at all the case that the entire spectrum of the conventional would not be explained as self-empty (*rang stong*). On the side of reasoning by way of study and thinking, the entire spectrum of ultimate truth is also ascertained as being empty of own [essence]. Therefore, the discipline for refuting the reification of all objects of knowledge is indeed exceedingly vast. At the time of meditative equipoise, whether this is explained in a convoluted or straightforward manner by anyone, be they learned or unlearned, there is no other way than identifying the view of Other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) as it is taught in precisely these classical texts and their commentaries.<sup>122</sup>

The author here presents Gzhan stong as a necessary corollary of Rang stong that becomes indispensable in the context of meditative equipoise when the aspirant is in a position to ascertain and affirm the ultimate.

Shākyamchogldan's identification of Alīkāṅkaravāda as a Gzhan stong Madhyamaka tradition can be roughly traced to the author's fiftieth year. This was prior to his becoming a student of the Seventh Karma pa (1454–1506) who, as Karma phrin las pa (1456–1539) informs us, upheld the view that there is no contradiction between the Gzhan stong and Rang stong views.<sup>123</sup> As Karma phrin las pa describes his teacher Chos grags rgya mtsho's position:

<sup>122</sup> *Mkhas pa la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad*, SCsb(C) vol. 24, 114<sub>2</sub>–115<sub>1</sub>: *dbu ma'i lta ba ngos 'dzin la gnyis te | phar phyin lugs dang sngags lugs so | dang po la gnyis te | 'khor lo bar pa'i sgra ji bzhin pa rang stong gi dbu ma dang | 'khor lo gsum pa'i sgra ji bzhin pa gzhan stong gi dbu ma dag las | dang po ni | gzhung rigs tshogs dang | 'grel ba thal rang du grags pa dag gis rgyas par bshad la | gnyis pa ni | gzhung byams chos dang | 'grel pa thogs med mched kyis rgyas par gang bshad de dag thams cad dang | sngags kyi dbu ma ni rtag pa'i mtha' 'gog pa'i tshe kun rdzob mtha' dag rang stong du mi 'chad pa ni gang na yang med la | thos bsam gyi rigs ngor don dam pa'i bden pa mtha' dag kyang rang stong du gtan la phab pas shes bya mtha' dag gi steng du rnam rtog gi 'dzin pa 'gog pa la chun shin tu che ba yin mod | sgom byung mnyam gzhas gi tshe na | mkhas mi mkhas su zhig gis 'khyog po dang drang po ji ltar bshad kyang | gzhung 'grel nyid las gsungs pa'i gzhan stong gi lta ba'i ngos 'dzin tshul las gzhan du 'das pa med do |*

<sup>123</sup> In the extant works of the Seventh Karma pa, difference between Gzhan stong and Rang stong is not explicitly discussed. For a brief presentation of the Seventh Karma pa's Gzhan stong position according to Karma phrin las pa, see Burchardi 2011, 318–31.

The ground of emptiness of *gzhan stong* is *\*sugatagarbha*, mind's nature, this very natural luminosity. What it becomes empty of, what is to be relinquished, are the adventitious stains that are referred to as the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender. Therefore, ultimate truth is nothing but the nature of mind which is free from the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender. [This], i.e., natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, natural awareness itself, is the profound view of *Gzhan stong*." Thus, my teacher explained that "even the so-called Rang stong and *Gzhan stong* are not incompatible".<sup>124</sup>

By the time he met Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho for the first time in 1484 at the age of fifty-six, Shākya mchog ldan had already composed *The Ocean of Scriptural Statements and Reasoning*<sup>125</sup> and *Ascertainment of the Dharma Sphere*<sup>126</sup>, two treatises which explicitly characterize the Alīkāravāda view as *Gzhan stong Madhyamaka*.<sup>127</sup> He had composed these texts in 1477 and 1479 when he was forty-nine and fifty-one respectively.<sup>128</sup>

In his later works, Shākya mchog ldan emphasized that Nāgārjuna and Maitreya/Asaṅga, the pioneers of the two Mahāyāna traditions, developed complementary systems of exegesis and praxis. On this view, whether the wayfarer approaches the goal of buddhahood through the nonaffirming Niḥsvabhāvacāra Madhyamaka system or the affirming Alīkāravāda Madhyamaka system, both offer conceptually-mediated approaches to the same meditative realization of nondual wisdom, the former dispelling reifications of its existence and the latter dispelling reifications of its nonexistence. The key difference between these two traditions, then, is that in post-meditation, the Niḥsvabhāvacāra Mādhyamikas deny that anything "truly established" remains upon realization, whereas the Alīkāravāda

<sup>124</sup> KPdl, 92<sub>2-3</sub>: *stong gzhi bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po ni || sems nyid rang bzhin 'od gsal 'di nyid yin || stong byed spang bya glo bur<sup>124</sup> dri ma de || gzung dang 'dzin pa'i rnam rtog 'di la zer || de phyir gzung 'dzin rnam rtog dang bral ba'i || sems nyid kho na don dam bden pa ste || rang bzhin 'od gsal zung 'jug lhan cig skyes || dbyings rig dbyer med tha mal shes pa nyid || gzhan stong zab mo'i lta ba yin zhes gsung || des na rang stong gzhan stong zhes pa yang || 'gal ba min zhes bdag gi bla ma bzhed ||*

<sup>125</sup> *Theg pa chen po dbu ma rnam par nges pa'i bang mdzod lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, SCsb vol. 14. This work was written in 1477.

<sup>126</sup> *Chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa chos kyi dbyings rnam par nges pa*, SCsb vol. 7. This work, a commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava*, was written in 1479.

<sup>127</sup> Komarovski 2011, 43.

<sup>128</sup> Dreyfus 1979, 29 attributes Shākya mchog ldan's shift from a typical Sa skya Rang stong position to his own distinctive *Gzhan stong* position to the period after Shākya mchog ldan had met with Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho for the first time. He also points out that Shākya mchog ldan's *Gzhan stong* view differed from that of Dol po pa sherab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361).

Mādhyamikas affirm the realization of the ultimate as stainless nondual wisdom, adding that this nondual wisdom eludes any kind of reasoning based on beliefs such as existence and nonexistence, or truth and falsity.<sup>129</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan claimed, perhaps most emphatically in his *Mahāmudrā* trilogy, that since both Rang stong and Gzhan stong depend on reasoning which is conceptual in nature, and since the nondual wisdom of *dharmadhātu* remains inaccessible to conceptual reflection and thematization, both approaches must ultimately be transcended. That said, the author is careful not to discount their effectiveness for those in the grip of mistaken perceptions and conceptions. In *Replies to Queries of Rab dkar*, he regards the Rang stong method of employing nonaffirming negation (*med par dgag pa*) in the phase of studying and thinking as a stepping stone on the path<sup>130</sup> to the main practice of realizing unity (*yuganaddha*).

In his *Replies to Queries of Bshes gnyen mus pa rab 'byams*, Shākya mchog ldan further explains that while the Gzhan stong and Alīkākāra views are relevant to the main practice phase (*dngos gzhi*) since they commonly endorse a conception of unity that is understood to be “without flaws of contradiction or conflation”, the Rang stong view falls short of the actual view (*lta ba dngos*) and thus pertains to the preliminary phase (*sngon 'gro*). Even if this Rang stong view proves indispensable while it is necessary to dispel the poison of total delusion, it is itself said to be “poisoned” in the sense of being conceptually-determined.<sup>131</sup>

Having explained the Rang stong view as preliminary in the phase of the view, the explanation of unity during the phase of the main practice is as follows. Since this [unity] which is also designated as being “without flaws of contradiction or conflation” is explained as something admissible in Gzhan stong, it is in accord with the Alīkākāra [system]. However, the preparation is said to be Rang stong because although it is not the actual view since it is poisoned [i.e. conceptually fabricated], one cannot do without it in the beginning because it is necessary to dispel the poison of total delusion. To give an example, to reach Vajrāsana [i.e., Bodhgayā, the seat of awakening], it is necessary to first get well-acquainted with the route.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 74, 86, 172–73.

<sup>130</sup> *Rab dkar gyi dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 23, 451<sub>2-4</sub>: “First, these [nonaffirming negation] are sought by means of studying and thinking.” *dang po* [= *med par dgag pa*] *de dag ni thos bsam gyis btsal ba yin la* |

<sup>131</sup> See above, 31 et passim.

<sup>132</sup> *Bshes gnyen mus pa rab 'byams dris lan mthong ba don ldan gyi skor*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 23, 483<sub>3</sub>–483<sub>5</sub>: *lta ba'i dus kyi sngon 'gro la rang stong gi lta ba bshad nas* | *dngos gzhi'i dus su zung 'jug bshad la* | *'di yang 'gal 'dus skyon med ces pa'i ming can gzhan stong na chog cig la bshad pas rnam rdzun dang mthun la* | *sbyor ba rang stong du bzhed kyang* | *dug dang bcas pas lta ba dngos ma yin kyang thog mar mi dgos ka med yin te* | *kun tu rmongs pa'i dug sel dgos pa'i phyir* | *dper na rdo rje'i gdan du sleb pa la thog mar lam ngo shes dgos pa bzhin no* |

As the analogy suggests, the Self-emptiness view may prove useful as a conceptual map to navigate one's way toward the destination of awakening, but should not be confused with the actual view (*lta ba dngos*) which the author elsewhere characterizes as “the view grounded in first-hand experience that is the mainspring (*gtso bo*) of views” (*lta ba'i gtso bor gyur pa nyams myong gi lta ba*).<sup>133</sup> What is at stake here is a difference between a philosophical “view” (*lta ba : dr̥ṣṭi*) in the sense of a doxographic belief-system to which one gives intellectual assent and a prephilosophical “de facto view” (*lta ba dngos*) grounded in the immediacy of lived experience. For Shākya mchog ldan, the task of the scholar-yogin is to ensure that one's philosophical view does not lose touch with its prediscursive grounding in first-hand experience. It is precisely because the Gzhan stong and Alīkākāra views take the experience of unity as their point of origin and orientation in the main practice phase that they are deemed to be a step beyond the preliminary stage of negatively determining what is *not* the goal, namely all the speculations and misconceptions we have about it.

It is evident from Shākya mchog ldan's assessment of Self-emptiness and Other-emptiness that he thinks the Gzhan stong view brings one closer to the unity beyond extremes since it frankly acknowledges the transsubjective sources of morality and meaning that are the final aim of negation or affirmation. However, in his Mahāmudrā writings he argues that since both poles of the negation-affirmation dialectic remain within the horizon of oppositional yet reciprocally determined constructs, they are in this sense both “poisoned” from the vantage point of nondual wisdom, the Mahāmudrā of indivisible unity. On this view, Gzhan stong is accorded a preeminent position in the doxographical universe of exoteric Buddhist philosophical systems since it endorses a unity beyond extremes; yet it is relegated to the exoteric system of severing superimpositions from the perspective of the esoteric Mantra and Mahāmudrā systems of first-hand experience.

We can discern in Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā trilogy the extent to which his distinction between the preliminary phase of studying and thinking by means of the dialectic of Self-emptiness and Other-emptiness and the main practice of meditation which realizes the underlying unity turns out to be integral to his philosophical emphasis on the primacy of *mahāmudrā* and the nondual wisdom with which it is equated. Provocatively, he asserts that the realization of *mahāmudrā* does not *necessarily* depend either on preliminary methods of analysis according to Madhyamaka canons of reasoning, nor on the elaborate sequence of

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<sup>133</sup> In his *Rab dkar gyi dris lan*, SCsb(C) vol 23, 5114, Shākya mchog ldan uses the term “actual view” (*lta ba dngos*) or “view based on first-hand experience that is the mainspring of views” (*lta ba'i gtso bor gyur pa nyams myong gi lta ba*) to demarcate the view of studying and thinking from the view connected with meditating. See above, 48.

tantric rituals, empowerments, and visualizations, powerful as these may be in cases where such preliminary “purifications” are deemed to be necessary:

Moreover, from among the two, the system of severing superimpositions and the system of first-hand experience, this tradition of the [Mahā]mudrā practitioner is the latter. Concerning the former, there are the two great traditions, the system of Self-emptiness and the system of Other-emptiness. However, the [Mahā]mudrā practitioner follows neither. The view of severing superimpositions by means of studying and thinking is taken [by him or her] to be an intellectually fabricated view and a poisoned view. As for the arising of the wisdom of *mahāmudrā*, it is not asserted that this must unequivocally depend on the bestowal of the higher empowerments, let alone on the logical reasoning of the Madhyamaka.<sup>134</sup>

The point could scarcely be stated more emphatically: as important and effective as Madhyamaka reasoning and tantric ritualism may be for clearing the myriad obscurations and obstacles that impede the realization of *mahāmudrā*, neither can be regarded as obligatory for all persons and situations. We will see the extent to which this contrasts with the views of Sa skya Paṇḍita who regarded the sequence of empowerments and *mudrās* as indispensable to *mahāmudrā* realization without exception. From Shākya mchog ldan’s perspective, individuals vary tremendously in their interests and abilities and, most importantly, in their relative capacities to recognize the nature of mind. Consequently, there is no single prescribed method of preparation, no master key that fits all the locks, so to say. As for the main practice (*ngos gzhi*) phase, what triggers the actual realization of *mahāmudrā* may have much more to do with situational affective and intersubjective dispositions such as devotion and faith (or confidence) than with any prescriptive course of intellectual or ritual preparation. As Shākya mchog ldan explains:

“Devotion” means having confidence in the qualities of realization. When this has arisen, self-luminous self-awareness, which one has had since beginningless time, becomes manifest. The great bliss of self-luminous self-awareness has pervaded all [beings] from the very beginning. The different ways of awakening in line with individual capacities are not unequivocally determined.<sup>135</sup>

At this juncture, it may be helpful to take stock of Shākya mchog ldan’s views of Rang stong and Gzhan stong in relation to other classical and post-classical thinkers. We have seen

<sup>134</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 68, critical edition: 83.

<sup>135</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 24, critical edition: 33.

that Shākya mchog ldan accorded high status to the so-called Alīkākāravāda view and that he controversially came to regard it not only as a Gzhan stong view but also as a Madhyamaka tradition par excellence. Shākya mchog ldan's inclusion of Alīkākāra in the ranks of Madhyamaka traditions did not go unchallenged by Bka' brgyud pa scholars. As will be discussed in chapter three, the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) devotes a substantial section of his *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MA) commentary and other writings to a criticism of this view. To summarize the main lines of his argument, he rejects Shākya mchog ldan's identification of Alīkākāra with Madhyamaka, as well as his parallel claim that the distinction between Satyākāra and Alīkākāra—i.e., those who believe representations to be true or false, respectively—should be understood as a distinction between Cittamātra and Madhyamaka respectively. According to the Eighth Karma pa, both these claims stand in flagrant contradiction to accepted Buddhist doxography. He argues that the distinction between Satyākāra and Alīkākāra was introduced to demarcate between two strands of Cittamātra philosophy that both took as their doctrinal basis (*gzhi*) the claim that mind is truly established as ultimate (*sems don dam bden grub par 'dod pa gzhi byas*) and diverged only on the issue of whether they affirmed or denied the existence of (true) mental representations (*rnam pa yod med*).

As for the basic distinction between Cittamātra and Madhyamaka, the Eighth Karma pa maintains that all lines of Cittamātra were said to have been decisively refuted and transcended by Madhyamaka philosophy, most decisively by the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā system of Maitrīpa and his colleagues that combined the Madhyamaka system of Nāgārjuna with the Mahāmudrā instructions of Saraha and his followers.<sup>136</sup> Coming to the nub of his criticism, he states that since the Madhyamaka tradition is by definition a “Middle Way” which avoids the extremes of existence and nonexistence, eternalism and nihilism, it is best characterized as a tradition which has transcended *all* realist positions, not least of all the Cittamātra viewpoint that mind or wisdom can be truly established as a real entity, and even as ultimate truth.<sup>137</sup> Bearing in mind that Mi bskyod rdo rje does not go so far as to dismiss Cittamātra models of mind and reality (he makes liberal use of both in his writings), and that he was a strong proponent of the Maitreya texts, his *Madhyamakāvatāra*

<sup>136</sup> See below, 291–95.

<sup>137</sup> *Dwags po grub pa'i shing rta*, 218–11: “Mind Only adherents claim that the factor of mind, knowledge, awareness, intellect, special knowledge, and wisdom—[treated as] synonyms having the same meaning—has the characteristic of the perfect [nature], being a knowable object that is truly established as ultimate. However, if one posits the characteristic of a perfect [nature] as a knowable object in this way, one falls into the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Hence those who relinquish extremes of eternalism and nihilism and advocate [a view which] has superseded that philosophical system are called Mādhyamikas.” *sems tsam pas sems dang shes pa dang rig pa dang blo dang mkhyen pa dang ye shes don gcig ming gi rnam grangs pa zhig don dam bden par grub pa shes bya yongs grub kyi mtshan nyid can du 'dod la | shes bya yongs grub kyi mtshan nyid de ltar 'jog na rtag chad kyi mthar lhung bas rtag chad kyi mtha' spangs te grub mtha' de las phul du byung bar smra ba de dbu ma pa'o ||*

commentary nonetheless leaves little doubt that he regards Madhyamaka, especially the \*Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka of Nāgārjuna and Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka system of Maitrīpa, as the pinnacle of Indian Buddhist philosophies and that, among these, he regards its expositions of emptiness as more lucid (*ches gsal*) than the rest.<sup>138</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan for his part recognized that the \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka method of ascertaining emptiness as a nonaffirming negation through conceptual analysis, which was fast becoming the default philosophical paradigm among his contemporaries, was endangering the necessary balance between negative-intellectual (cataphatic) and affirmative-experiential (apophatic) currents of Buddhist thought and praxis. His persistent concern about the privileging of an intellectual paradigm that systematically denied the validity and existence of the very modes of awareness (such as *buddhajñāna*) that had traditionally been regarded as the source and goal of the Buddhist path goes a long way toward accounting for his own endorsement of a cataphatic Gzhan stong approach to goal-realization that gives primacy to personally realized nondual wisdom. His position is well summarized by a statement in his *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary (written at age seventy-one) concerning the practice of deep insight (*lhag mthong* : *vipaśyanā*): “When the abiding mode as the aim of investigation is taken as a nonaffirming negation, it is designated as ‘a seeing that doesn’t see anything’, and when it is identified as the wisdom of emptiness, it is the ‘authentic unmediated seeing’ which is ‘personally realized wisdom’.”<sup>139</sup> Put simply, the reconciliation and transcendence of the negative and positive determinations are both realized in the unity of nondual wisdom.

In the polemically impassioned intellectual climate of his age, Shākya mchog ldan’s emphasis on recovering a unity beyond negative and positive determinations could not avoid sharp opposition from both sides of the spectrum. From one side, Rang stong \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka proponents of emptiness as a nonaffirming negation rejected his Gzhan-stong-oriented affirmation of nondual wisdom as Cittamātra-based hypostatization of the mental.

<sup>138</sup> *Dwags po grub pa’i shing rta*, 4<sub>16-20</sub>: “The extensive doctrinal systems on emptiness, are found in the precious scriptures of the Madhyamaka and Cittamātra of Mahāyāna as well as in the countless tantras. But among all these, the vast range of teachings commentaries of the Madhyamaka are found to be far more lucid [than the rest] because, by teaching an emptiness that leaves behind not even the slightest remainder of discursive elaborations and characteristics, this tradition takes the emptiness that remains to be fully comprehensive in scope.” *stong pa nyid kyi chos tshul rgyas pa ni theg chen dbu sems kyi gsung rab rin po che dang | rgyud sde mtha’ yas par bzhugs pa yin la | de’i nang nas kyang dbu ma’i bka’ bstan bcos mtha’ dag tu ches gsal bar bzhugs pa yin te | lugs ’dir spros mtshan gyi lhag ma cung zad kyang ma lus par stong nyid du bstan nas stong pa nyid kyi lus yongs su rdzogs par mdzad pa’i phyir |*

<sup>139</sup> *Mngon par rtogs pa’i rgyan ’grel pa don gsal ba dang bcas pa’i rnam par bshad pa shing rta’i srol gnyis gcig tu bsdu pa’i lam po che*, 108<sub>2-3</sub>: “When the abiding mode that is the object of investigation is taken as a nonaffirming negation, it is designated as ‘a seeing that doesn’t see anything’. When it is identified as the wisdom of emptiness, it is an authentic direct seeing, which is the ‘personally realized wisdom’.” *rnam par brtags pa’i don gnas lugs med dgag la byas pa’i tshe | ci yang ma mthong ba la mthong ba’i ming gis btags pa dang | stong pa nyid kyi ye shes la ngos bzung ba’i tshe mngon sum du mthong ba mtshan nyid pa ste | so sor rang rig pa’i ye shes so |* See Komarovski 2011, 271 who.



From the opposite side, Gzhan stong Jo nang proponents of a permanent metaphysical reality beyond temporality and dependent arising discounted his view of a momentary, impermanent wisdom, an idea we will examine shortly. To these opposed views we can add the criticisms of those such as the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje who were certainly in sympathy with Shākya mchog ldan's avoidance of eternalistic or nihilistic strains of Tibetan Buddhist thought but who would nonetheless allege that his anti-metaphysical critique did not go far enough since it still complied with the Cittamātra absolutization of the cognitive factor.<sup>140</sup>

We have seen that a cornerstone of Shākya mchog ldan's philosophy is the view that the Rang stong ascertainment of the ultimate through reasoning that establishes emptiness as a nonaffirming negation should be regarded only as a preliminary method of eradicating reifications and should *not* be taken as an end in itself. To take the elimination of obscurations as the final goal is to absurdly preclude the blossoming of wisdom and qualities that such purification is supposed to enable, at least according to tantric, Tathāgatagarbha and Siddha traditions. In Shākya mchog ldan's word's, "In the classical texts of the Niḥsvabhāva, it is asserted that all phenomena are empty of an own-essence and that settling one-pointedly in this emptiness is wisdom. I would say this is like calling a mother a 'barren woman'."<sup>141</sup> The analogy is clear: to regard the wisdom of goal-realization as a sheer absence (nothing whatsoever) misses out on its naturally occurring fecundity and dynamism.

It should be clear by now that the author's assessment of the Gzhan stong position is more complex and nuanced than his account of Rang stong. On the one hand, he approved of Gzhan stong's positive appraisal of the ultimate, but on the other hand, rejected the tendency among its most influential proponents toward the extreme of existence or absolutism. In this regard, he was inclined, particularly in his Mahāmudrā works, to parameterize both Rang stong and Gzhan stong as dialectical positions to be transcended. To better understand this critical stance toward Gzhan stong, it may be useful to consider how he diverged from the most influential Gzhan stong paradigm of his day, that of the Jo nang system.<sup>142</sup> The principal points of divergence are discernable in his accounts of the Yogācāra theory of three natures (*trisvabhāva*) and the general Buddhist theory of two truths (*satyadvaya*).

### THE THREE NATURES (*TRISVABHĀVA*)

In line with the *trisvabhāva* theory as presented in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS) and *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV), Shākya mchog ldan maintains that the dependent (*paratantra*)

<sup>140</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje's arguments are summarized below, 287 f.

<sup>141</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 40, critical edition: 46.

<sup>142</sup> See Mathes 2004 for an illuminating comparison between the buddha nature interpretations of Dol po pa and Shākya mchog ldan.

nature is empty of the imagined (*parakalpita*) nature is the perfect (*pariniṣpanna*) nature. The object of refutation (*dgag bya*) is thus the imagined nature, or dualistic appearances, corresponding to the basis of negation according to the Niḥsvabhāvavāda view that conventional phenomena are nonarisen and thus self-empty. The basis of negation of emptiness is the dependent nature in which dualistic appearances operate, and the way in which this is empty of the imagined is the other-emptiness which constitutes the perfect nature or the absolute. However, the view of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), which reflects more closely the Tathāgatagarbha theory as presented for example in the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*, defines the perfect nature as the emptiness of the imagined and dependent natures.<sup>143</sup>

The difference between these two models is that the Yogācāra system distinguishes three natures, whereas the Jo nang Tathāgatagarbha model only discerns the perfect and the imagined nature. On this view, since the dependent nature is included in the object of refutation (*dgag bya*), there is in the final analysis no difference between the imagined and dependent natures.<sup>144</sup> Shākya mchog ldan rejects the Jo nang model both on doxographical and logical grounds. As for the first, the Jo nang explanation of the perfect nature as the basis of negation and of the other two natures as the object of negation does not reflect the central Yogācāra view since it collapses the imagined and dependent natures into a single object of refutation and hence ends up being a two nature theory.

As for the logical reason for rejecting the Jo nang model, Shākya mchog ldan argues that it relies on an invalid syllogism. According to Buddhist logic, a syllogism must have a subject (*dharmīn*), a probandum or predicate to be proven (*sādhya*), and a reason (*liṅga*). To take the classic example, in proving the thesis “sound is impermanent”, one must first establish the subject ‘sound’, then the predicate to be proven ‘impermanent’, and the reason ‘because it is produced’. One mark of an invalid syllogism is to import the probandum into the subject, e.g., “impermanent sound” and take that as the starting point; the proof is illegitimately included in the subject of the proof, thus presupposing what is supposed to be proven. This is considered to be the flaw in Dol po pa’s thesis that the perfect nature is empty of the imagined and dependent natures. By taking the perfect nature as the basis of emptiness (*stong gzhi*), Dol po pa establishes the subject (perfect nature) and the predicate to be proven (empty of imagined and dependent natures) at the same time, thus accepting in advance what the syllogism is supposed to establish. In Shākya mchog ldan’s words: “As for invalidating [this thesis]: if the reasoning that establishes emptiness has to establish emptiness of the imagined and dependent [natures] at the same time as the perfect [nature], which is the subject [of the syllogism], then it absurdly follows that the predicate to be proven [probandum] is

<sup>143</sup> Komarovski 2011, 128–29 and n. 57, 351.

<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, this is similar to Candrakīrti’s view on the three natures in *Madhyamakāvarabhāṣya* on MA VI.96

already established at the time of determining the subject which is the basis of the argument. On the other hand, there could exist a correct reasoning which establishes the probandum without [pre]determining the subject, which is the basis of the argument.”<sup>145</sup> In other words, one could establish the emptiness of the dependent and imagined nature without presupposing in advance a metaphysical ground (of emptiness) that is empty of these. This seems difficult to reconcile with the standard Tathāgatagarbha formulation that buddha nature is empty of adventitious stains.

Yet, as Shākya mchog ldan argues on the basis of the Yogācāra theory of the three natures, it is not appropriate to interpret the dependent nature as self-empty, because its nature is the perfect nature which is other-empty.<sup>146</sup> Hence, he maintains that while the dependent nature, consisting in states of mind in which dualistic appearances operate, are unreal and nonexistent, they do not lack an own nature, because their actual nature is the perfect nature. Denying their actual nature is thus tantamount to a denial of the perfect nature and is therefore at odds with the basic Gzhan stong position.<sup>147</sup> In his *One Hundred and Eight Dharmas*, Shākya mchog ldan starts with the Cittamātra premise that all appearances are nothing but consciousness. The perfect nature which is the essence of consciousness in turn ‘seals’ all phenomena. Maitreya in this way considers the perfect nature to be the basis for all qualities.<sup>148</sup> We have given some idea of the extent to which Shākya mchog ldan’s Gzhan stong Madhyamaka-based account of the three natures diverged from that of Dol po pa. A number of parallel differences are discernable in his assessment of Gzhan stong and Rang stong views concerning the two truths.

#### THE TWO TRUTHS (SATYADVAYA)

While Dol po pa draws a clear line between conventional and ultimate truth, and between consciousness and wisdom, characterizing them as polar opposites like darkness and light, nectar and poison, or two different great kingdoms<sup>149</sup>, Shākya mchog ldan emphasizes

<sup>145</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 353, n. 74: *gnod byed ni stong nyid sgrub byed kyi rigs pas chos can yongs grub kyi steng du dgag chos kun btags dang gzhan dbang gis stong par sgrub dgos na rtsod gzhi’i chos can nges pa’i dus su bsgrub bya grub zin par thal ba dang | yang na rtsod gzhi’i chos can ma nges par bsgrub bya sgrub pa’i gtan tshigs yang dag srid par ’gyur ro |* (translation our own)

<sup>146</sup> Komarovski 2011, 134, and n. 75, 353.

<sup>147</sup> Komarovski 2011, 134.

<sup>148</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 306–307: “All appearances do not exist as something other than consciousness [and] the essence of consciousness is the perfect nature by which all objects of knowledge are sealed. Maitreya, [thus] considers the perfect nature itself to be the basis of all qualities ....” *snang ba kun || rnam rig tsam las gzhan yod min || rnam rig ngo bo yongs grub kyis || shes bya kun la rgyas ’debs byed || rje btsun byams pas yongs grub nyid || yon tan kun gyi rten yin par || dgongs nas ...*

<sup>149</sup> See Stearns 2010, 106–10.

that the two truths or realities and their associated modes of cognition are neither the same nor different. For them to be the same or different they would each have to possess an intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bo : svabhāva*), an individuating principle that makes them what they are: “Conventional [phenomena] are self-empty (*rang stong*) and thus without essence, while the ultimate truth does not exist as a real existent and hence is [likewise] without essence.”<sup>150</sup> In this regard, he rejects the Dge lugs pa theory that the two truths are “two delimitations of a single essence” (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*), that the conventional and ultimate truths inhere separately in one and the same object. As he explains, “‘delimitation’ (*ldog pa*) is synonymous with ‘other-exclusion’ (*gzhan sel : anyāpoha*)... [and] to that extent, a sprout and its ultimate reality are not established as different.”<sup>151</sup> To put it simply, although conceptions of conventional and ultimate truth are arrived at through conceptual delimitation—excluding in each case what they are not—there is no intrinsic difference between conventional phenomena and their ultimate nature. They are both equally devoid of intrinsic essence.

Shākya mchog ldan also rejects the opposite Jo nang thesis that the two truths consists in a “difference that negates identity” (*gcig pa bkag pa’i tha dad*), that the two truths represent separate spheres or “great kingdoms” (*rgyal khams chen po*) that have “nothing to do with each other” (Jo nang pa).<sup>152</sup> Against this view, and in line with well-known arguments against identity and difference advanced in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (SNS), he contends that if the two truths were different, it would absurdly follow that [1] the ultimate truth would not be the true nature of the conventional, [2] superimpositions would not be eradicated when the ultimate is realized, [3] that which is not found by analyzing the conventional is *not* ultimate truth, and [4] afflictions and purifications would be simultaneous. As for the identity thesis, he argues that it would entail the four absurdities that [1] when the conventional is seen, the ultimate is seen as well, [2] just as afflictions increase when one focuses on the conventional, they would likewise do so when one focuses on the ultimate, [2] there would be no ultimate to seek apart from the conventional, and [4] just as the conventional is discursive (*spros bcas*), the ultimate would be discursive as well.<sup>153</sup> To validate his conception of a middle path that

<sup>150</sup> *Dbu ma rnam par nges pa’i chos kyi dbang mdzod lung dang rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 15, 313: *kun rdzob rnams ni rang stong yin pas ngo bo med la | don dam pa’i bden pa ni dngos por med pa’i phyr | ngo bo med do |*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 15, 324–325: *ldog pa zhes pa ni gzhan sel gyi ming gi rnam grangs yin la | ... de tsam gyis myu gu dang de’i don dam bden pa tha dad du mi ’grub ste | ...*

<sup>152</sup> For Bka’ brgyud refutations of the Dge lugs and Jo nang versions of these theories, see Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 276<sub>12</sub> ff. and 292<sub>2</sub> ff. and below, 311 f. For Padma dkar po’s criticisms of these traditions, see below, 385 f.

<sup>153</sup> See *Dbu ma rnam par nges pa’i chos kyi dbang mdzod lung dang rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 15, 336–342 where Shākya mchog ldan summarizes arguments from the SNS: “Difference and identity each entail four fallacies. Regarding the first, it would absurdly follow that [1] the ultimate truth would not be the true nature of the conventional, [2] superimpositions would not be eradicated when the ultimate is realized, [3] that which is *not* found by analyzing the conventional is *not* ultimate truth, and [4] afflictions and purifications would be

avoids extremes of identity and difference, he quotes a passage from the SNS which states that “the characteristic of the conditioned realm and ultimate truth is the characteristic of being free from identity and difference. Those who conceive of them as either the same or different have succumbed to unfounded [speculation].”<sup>154</sup>

In his late commentary on the definitive meaning of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, Shākya mchog ldan argues that consciousness is not validly established and hence does not exist, although it is postulated as existing on the basis of delusion.<sup>155</sup> In this regard, he maintains that consciousness which deals with conventional phenomena and wisdom which cognizes the ultimate are radically different. Yet in his view, although they are incommensurable, having no common denominator (*gzhi mthun*), and are as distinct from one another as clouds and the sky or patina and gold<sup>156</sup>, they are nonetheless discernable as concurrent and interactive modes of cognition; each instance of consciousness is said to have an inward-oriented aspect of wisdom, even though “it is impossible for the clarity factor of wisdom to become the essence of consciousness and vice versa”:

Among the whole spectrum of delusory phenomena of consciousness, each instance has the factor of inward-looking wisdom. However, it is impossible for the clarity factor of wisdom to become the essence of consciousness, and vice versa. Otherwise, it would absurdly follow that wisdom is the experiencer of joys and sorrows of worldly existence. It would also absurdly follow that those unreal reifications that are named “consciousness” are the basis of accomplishing the full

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simultaneous. Four fallacies are [likewise] ascribed to identity: It would absurdly follow that: [1] when the conventional is seen, the ultimate is seen as well; [2] just as afflictions increase when one focuses on the conventional, they would likewise do so when one focuses on the ultimate; [2] there would be no ultimate to search for apart from the conventional and [4] just as the conventional is has discursive elaborations, the ultimate would have elaborations as well.” *tha dad pa la skyon bzhi | gcig pa la skyon bzhi | dang po ni | don dam bden pa kun rdzob kyi chos nyid ma yin par thal ba dang | don dam rtogs pas snang pa la sgro 'dogs mi chod par thal ba | kun rdzob rigs pas ma rnyed pa nyid don dam ma yin par thal ba | kun nas nyon mongs pa dang rnam par byang ba dus gcig tu thal pa'o || gcig pa la brjod pa'i skyon bzhi ni | kun rdzob mthong ba na don dam mthong par 'gyur ba dang | kun rdzob la dmigs nas nyon mongs 'phel ba bzhin du don dam la dmigs nas kyang der 'gyur ba dang | kun rdzob las logs su don dam btsal du med par 'gyur ba dang | kun rdzob spros bcas yin pa bzhin du don dam yang spros bcas su thal ba rnams so ||*

<sup>154</sup> *Dbu ma rnam par nges pa'i chos kyi dbang mdzod lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 15, 33<sub>5-6</sub>: *gnyis pa lung gi sgrub byed ni | mdo sde dgongs 'grel las | 'du byed khams dang don dam mtshan nyid ni || gcig dang tha dad bral ba'i mtshan nyid do || gcig dang tha dad nyid du gang rtog pa || de dag tshul bzhin ma yin zhug pa yin || zhes gsungs so* | See also Lamotte (ed.) 1935, 47. See also Mathes 2008, 79 and n. 420.

<sup>155</sup> *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcas kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 13, 121<sub>6</sub>–122<sub>1</sub>: “In general, even though consciousness is not validly established, it is accorded the superimposition of existence on account of delusion. So there is no need to even speak about awareness for it is not accorded existence [at all] because it is precisely conventional truth.” *spyir rnam shes ni tshad mas mi 'grub kyang | 'khrul pas yod par sgro btags pa nyid du khas len gyi | rig pa lta ci smos | yod par kyang khas mi len te | kun rdzob bden pa nyid kyi phyir ro |*

<sup>156</sup> Although patina (oxidation) does not occur on pure gold, it may form on alloys.

range of immaculate qualities. In the absence of primordial wisdom, adventitious consciousness does not arise as delusory appearances. Nonetheless, the possibility of a common ground of these two is not accepted because they are similar to clouds in the sky, patina on gold, and turbidity in clear water.<sup>157</sup>

We may conclude that consciousness and wisdom are concurrent but nonconvergent modes of cognition; they do not blend with one another. As the author here intimates, they stand to one another in a relationship of asymmetrical ontological priority according to which wisdom is the condition of possibility of consciousness but not the reverse. Each instance of consciousness has within it the clarity aspect of wisdom which, however, does not partake of the nature of consciousness. This account reflects the Alīkāṅkaravāda emphasis on the primacy of nondual wisdom within the framework of consciousness. The acuteness of the distinction between them also resonates to some extent with the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā differentiation between consciousness and wisdom, though the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje, as we will later see, accused Shākya mchog ldan' and his disciples of inconsistency in this regard. The Karma pa objects that whereas Shākya mchog ldan claims in his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* that consciousness arises as the clarity factor of wisdom, his disciple Paṇ chen Rdo rje rgyal ba conversely claims that wisdom arises as the clarity factor of consciousness.<sup>158</sup>

The sharpness of the distinction between wisdom and consciousness also invites comparison with the Jo nang view that posits the two as mutually exclusive, the former being truly established, permanent, ultimate, and beyond dependent rising and the three times (past, present and future)<sup>159</sup> and the latter being adventitious, impermanent, conventional, and

<sup>157</sup> Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don snon med nyi ma, SCsb vol. 13<sub>(A)</sub>, 121: *rnam shes 'khrul pa'i chos ji snyed<sup>a</sup> pa la nang blta ye shes kyi cha re re yod kyang | ye shes kyi gsal cha rnam shes kyi ngo bor 'gyur srid pa dang cig shos kyang der 'gyur srid pa ni ma yin te gzhan du na | ye shes srid pa'i bde sdug myong ba por thal ba dang | rnam shes kyi ming can yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa de dag zag med kyi yon tan mtha' dag gi sgrub gzhi nyid du thal bar 'gyur pa'i phyir ro || gdod ma'i ye shes de med par glo bur gyi rnam shes 'khrul snang du mi 'byung mod | gnyis po'i gzhi mthun srid par 'dod pa ni ma yin te | nam mkha' la sprin dang | gser la g.ya' dang | chu dangs ba la rnyog pa bzhin no | <sup>a</sup>text has nyid See Komarovski 2011, 239–40. (translation our own)*

<sup>158</sup> See below, 297–300, where Mi bskyod rdo rje assesses various mutually contradictory positions on the consciousness and wisdom relationship by Shākya mchog ldan and his disciples. A note on the relevant section of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Rgan po'i rlung sman* adds that “the teacher Shākya mchog ldan had asserted in his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* (*Bde mchog rnam bshad*) that consciousness (*rnam shes*) arises as the clarity factor (*dvangs cha*) of wisdom whereas his student Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba (a.k.a. Rdo rje rgyal mtshan, b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) asserted that wisdom is the clarity factor of consciousness. “Hence, the positions subscribed to by these two, master and disciple, are [as] opposed as East and West.” *bla ma paṇ chen śāka mchog pas ni bde mchog gi rnam bshad du ye shes kyi dvangs cha la rnam shes 'char ba dang | bla ma paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba ni rnam shes kyi dvangs cha ye shes su smra 'dug pas | dpon slob gnyis kha ltar phyogs shar nub 'dzol 'dug go ||*

<sup>159</sup> See for example Tāranātha's *Zab don nyer gcig pa*, Collected Works vol. 18, 213<sub>3-4</sub>: “[Opponent:] It is said that nondual wisdom is momentary awareness, i.e., it is not permanent, and without any possibility for abiding. [Tāranātha:] That [wisdom] is not momentary. Since it is beyond the three times [past, present and future] it is

dependently arisen and time-bound.<sup>160</sup> A key point of divergence, however, lies in Shākya mchog ldan's contention (examined below) that wisdom is momentary and also impermanent in the specific sense that only the present moment can be said to exist but this is “instantaneously disintegrating”. Thus wisdom is in Shākya mchog ldan's eyes not permanent and certainly not atemporal since it is itself simply the streaming present. All that said, wisdom is, in Shākya mchog ldan's view unconditioned in that it shares no common ground with karma and the afflictions, and given that moments are not triggered by any causes and conditions independent of mind's nature. It may be concluded that he on the one hand grants that wisdom must be accepted as impermanent on the ultimate level because as a real existent (*dnogs po*) it is instantaneously disintegrating (*skad cig gyis 'jig pa*). Yet, he can on the other hand maintain that wisdom may conventionally be taken as permanent in the specific sense of having ‘continuity’ (*rgyun*) with the proviso that this is only a conventional designation, used, in contradistinction to impermanence, to ascribe permanence to a real existent such as wisdom whose continuity is uninterrupted (*rgyun mi 'chad pa yi dnogs po*).<sup>161</sup>

Holding to a middle path that avoids interpreting the two truths as the same or different, Shākya mchog ldan arrives at the central philosophy of Buddhist tantrism and the Dwags po Mahāmudrā tradition: the inseparable unity of the conventional and ultimate. In the context of Sa skya Lam 'bras and Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā practices, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and the conventional and ultimate truths are found to be inseparable. In his *Discussions in the Presence of Mkha' spyod dbang po* addressed to the Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes (1453–1542),<sup>162</sup> Shākya mchog ldan proclaims that Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā and Sa skya tantric Lam 'bras teachings commonly emphasize the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*:

Here on this Snowy Plateau, the indistinguishability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* which is emphasized by the Sa skya pas and the Mahāmudrā of Zla 'od gzhon nu [Sgam po pa] are the same in meaning despite being given different names. The object of realization (*rtogs bya*) is the unity of clarity and emptiness, the process of realization (*rtogs byed*) is realization through empowerment rituals and the Bla ma's blessings... In short, because there are no other phenomena besides the lucid awareness—an experience that is empty of all concepts—this ‘Seal’ (*phyag rgya : mudrā*) is described as “Great” (*chen po : mahā*). When not realized, there is

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permanent and lasting.” *gnyis med ye shes de rig pa skad cig ma yin | rtag pa min | gnas pa'i go skabs med pa cig yin gsung | de skad cig ma ma yin | dus gsum las grol bas rtag pa brtan pa yin gsung |*

<sup>160</sup> See Padma dkar po's synopsis of this system in Volume II, translation: 157–69.

<sup>161</sup> Komarovski 2011, 231 and 380, n. 38.

<sup>162</sup> *Mkha' spyod dbang po'i spyan drung du 'bul ba'i mol mchid*, SCsb(B) vol. 17, 524<sub>4</sub>; *ces chos rjes zhwa dmar pa'i ka' shog gi lan du phul ba'o |*

*saṃsāra*, and when realized, there is *nirvāṇa*. Because one does not observe anything apart from these, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable.<sup>163</sup>

In a reply to queries by Bshes gnyen Mus pa rab 'byams, he expresses the view most succinctly by stating that “in the main practice phase, the view is characterized as ‘unity’”.<sup>164</sup>

We are now in a position to look more closely at how Shākya mchog ldan frames the Rang stong and Gzhan stong positions in relation to the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā views and meditation. It is clear that he regarded the Mahāmudrā tradition's emphasis on first-hand experience (*nyams myong*) and direct perception (*mngon sum*) as a decisive step beyond the more theory-bound Rang stong and Gzhan stong positions, which tended to be, at least when appropriated as oppositional doxographical categories, mutually implicated in a dialectic of denial or affirmation. By contrast, the Mahāmudrā tradition is seen as a path beyond affirmation and negation, existence and nonexistence. According to Shākya mchog ldan's *Undermining the Haughtiness*, Sgam po pa taught a view that did not take Nāgārjuna's method of severing elaborations or Asaṅga's method of ending dualistic thoughts as compulsory for the most suitable recipient. Moreover, he cautions that a Mantrayāna attainment of *mahāmudrā* unsupported by the genuine experience of self-luminous self-awareness runs the risk of deviation (*gol sa*). As he explains:

If one does not arrive at a genuine experience of self-luminous self-awareness, which is of definitive meaning, and realizes *mahāmudrā* based on the Mantra-[yāna], there is the danger of falling into deviations. Thus, when *mahāmudrā*, which is the pervasive factor that runs through everything, is realized as [explained] previously, one should examine whether the realization of it is stable or unstable. When it is unstable, it is not incongruous to familiarize oneself with the methods of ending dualistic [thoughts and] discursive elaborations as taught by the two charioteers [Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga]. However, those with diligence who have the inclination to leave behind these very [methods] which [they already] understood previously may correctly familiarize themselves [with mind's true nature in meditation] and familiarize themselves with the state of not grasping

<sup>163</sup> *Mkha' spyod dbang po'i spyang drung du 'bul ba'i mol mchid*, SCsb(C) vol. 17, 629<sub>4</sub>–630<sub>1</sub>: *gangs can ljong 'dir sa skya pas || rtsal bton 'khor 'das dbyer med dang || zla 'od gzhon nu'i phyag rgya che || ming 'dogs ma gtogs don gcig nyid || rtogs bya gsal stong zung 'jug de || rtogs byed dbang gi cho ga dang || bla ma'i byin brlabs kyis rtogs pa'o || ... || mdor na rtog pa thams cad kyis || stong pa'i myong ba gsal rig tsam || ma gtogs chos gzhan med pa'i phyir || phyag rgya 'di nyid chen por brjod || ma rtogs tshe na 'khor ba dang || rtogs tshe mya ngan 'das pa yang || 'di las gzhan pa ma dmigs phyir || 'khor 'das dbye ba med de yin ||*

<sup>164</sup> *Bshes gnyen mus pa rab 'byams dris lan mthong ba don ldan gyi skor*, SCsb(C) vol 23, 483<sub>3</sub>: *lta ba ... | dngos gzhi'i dus su zung 'jug bshad la |*



things by means of concepts the appearances of manifold dependent arising in post-meditation. That is said to be the main point of this [Dwags po Mahāmudrā] teaching.<sup>165</sup>

With regard to the Rang stong or Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka system, it would be a serious error in Shākya mchog ldan's eyes to either identify the nonaffirming negation of not finding anything upon analysis as *mahāmudrā* itself or to promote it as a necessary 'upgrade' to the Mahāmudrā view. This would contradict both the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and Saraha. "If you claim that *mahāmudrā* is a nonaffirming negation [deduced by] not finding anything by searching, this contradicts the *Uttaratantra* scripture as well as the works of Saraha. When the searching consciousness has not found anything by means of reasoning, the wisdom that is left behind as the remainder is identified as *mahāmudrā*."<sup>166</sup> Shākya mchog ldan elsewhere maintains that the very idea of unity—a cornerstone of the Dwags po Mahāmudrā teachings—is not attested within the orthodox Rang stong tradition, but rather had its inception in the Gzhan stong system. He adds that the luminosity taught in the *Pañcakrama* is also not in line with the Rang stong approach, nor is this tantra's claim that adamant nature of mind is of definitive meaning.<sup>167</sup> It is in view of such considerations that Shākya mchog ldan aligns the Dwags po Mahāmudrā more closely with the Gzhan stong than the Rang stong tradition. That said, he does, in another Mahāmudrā text, grant that although what is experienced as a result of the Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka is not in accord with the root Mahāmudrā scriptures, "it is nonetheless acceptable to ascribe the 'ascertainment of freedom from extremes leading to assimilation as unity' explained in that [system] to this Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition".<sup>168</sup>

As for the Gzhan stong- or Alīkāṅkaravāda Madhyamaka approach, emptiness is seen as the real (i.e. efficacious) existent of an affirming negation (*ma yin par dgags pa'i dngos po*) and can therefore be experienced directly in meditation.<sup>169</sup> Yet, this Gzhan stong

<sup>165</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 16, critical edition: 28.

<sup>166</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 26, critical edition: 34.

<sup>167</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan lta ba so so'i ngos 'dzin tshul nges don gnad kyi lde mig*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 104<sub>4-5</sub>: "In brief, within the orthodox (*lhad med*) Rang stong, the designation "unity" does not exist. Unity has its inception in the Gzhan stong system. Moreover the luminosity in the *Five Stages* (*Pañcakrama*) cannot be explained in line with the Rang stong texts. That which is the "vajra of mind" is explained in that [*Pañcakrama*] as being of definitive meaning." *mdor na rang stong lhad med la | zung 'jug zhes bya'i tha snyad med || zung 'jug gzhan stong lugs las 'byung || rim lnga pa yi 'od gsal yang || rang stong gzhung bzhin 'chad mi nus || sems kyi rdo rje gang yin pa || de la nges pa'i don du bshad ||*

<sup>168</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 51, critical edition: 74.

<sup>169</sup> Komarovski 2011, 178.

Madhyamaka approach falls short of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā as well<sup>170</sup> since it requires the analytical steps of establishing the lack of intrinsic essence of outer objects, determining them to be but appearances of mind, and establishing that the inner apprehender (subject) doesn't have any basis either. It now becomes understandable why Shākya mchog ldan assigns Gzhan stong a lower position in his Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā writings than in his other writings where he is more inclined to regard it as an experience-based meditation practice that is fully in line with the goal of unity of appearance and emptiness. From the Mahāmudrā perspective, the reasoning that establishes an absolute which is empty of the adventitious obscurations but not empty of buddha qualities has the clear advantage of endorsing a positive appraisal of the ultimate that draws attention to the actual dynamism and fecundity of lived experience in its most originary condition. Yet it stops short of the experience itself since the conceptual methods it employs keep it locked into a dialectic of reciprocal negation with those of the Rang stong position.

In sum, it is evident that although Shākya mchog ldan was inclined, in some of his Buddhist philosophical writings, to treat Niḥsvabhāvavāda and the Alīkākāravāda on relatively equal terms, as self-sufficient philosophical tenets leading to an ultimate realization that is beyond the conceptual formulations of these tenets,<sup>171</sup> there are clear indications that Shākya mchog ldan elsewhere, and perhaps most markedly in his Mahāmudrā works, not only ranked the affirmative Alīkākāravāda Madhyamaka higher than the negative Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka but also framed both as stepping stones on the path of preliminary philosophical therapeutics to a higher unity that transcends the negative-affirmative dialectic altogether. Let us now turn our attention to Shākya mchog ldan's position regarding the relationship between buddha nature and Mahāmudrā and then look at the complex views of buddha nature out of which this position evolved.

## MAHĀMUDRĀ AND BUDDHA NATURE

For Shākya mchog ldan, Mahāmudrā and Tathāgatagarbha discourses similarly build on the premise that the nature of mind or buddha nature is both the condition of possibility of goal-realization and that which the Buddhist path progressively reveals. In a general sense, this disclosive paradigm is identified by Shākya mchog ldan as the doctrinal nucleus shared by Tathāgatagarbha discourses of the third *dharmacakra*, the Maitreya texts, the tantras, and

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<sup>170</sup> PCs, see Volume II, translation: 52, critical edition: 75. "In short, [*mahāmudrā*] is ascertained simply as the modes of abiding (*gnas lugs*), emptiness (*stong lugs*) and realization (*rtogs lugs*) that are of definitive meaning as these are found in the tantra corpus, the Maitreya works, and the *Dohā Trilogy*. It was in this sense that previous teachers of the Mudrā [tradition] used the designation *mahāmudrā*. In that instance, this was definitely asserted in the statement that [*mahāmudrā*] is similar to the Self-sufficient White Remedy."

<sup>171</sup> This is a point emphasized by Komarovski 2011, 272.

the Mahāmudrā discourses of the siddhas. The state of research on Shākya mchog ldan's buddha nature view has advanced considerably in recent years with Yaroslav Komarovski's translation and analysis of two of his short treatises on buddha nature<sup>172</sup> and Kazuo Kano's analysis of his buddha nature position vis-à-vis that of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab which contains useful classifications of Tibetan buddha nature views as presented in two of Shākya mchog ldan's Reply to Queries texts. *Replies to Queries of Blo mchog pa*<sup>173</sup> and *Replies to Queries of Mus rab 'byams pa*.<sup>174</sup> Our attention in the present chapter is focused on the relationship Shākya mchog ldan draws between Tathāgatagarbha and Mahāmudrā views in his Mahāmudrā trilogy as seen in light of his own rather complex views of buddha nature.

To gain a preliminary sense of how Shākya mchog ldan understood and articulated this relationship, let us examine in some detail a passage from the first work in his Mahāmudrā trilogy, *Undermining the Haughtiness*. Shākya mchog ldan begins by stating that “the element which is buddha nature (\*sugatagarbha) has been given the name *mahāmudrā*”.<sup>175</sup> He then explains that *mahāmudrā* is the element of both sentient beings and buddhas, and is what the tantras describe as the continuum (*rgyud*) of ground, path, and fruition. The author then equates *mahāmudrā* with [1] “mind's luminous nature” as distinguished from ordinary mind in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (ASP), [2] the beginningless element (*dhātu*) characterized as the source of all phenomena in the *Abhidharmasūtra*, [3] the purity of mind which is said in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to be the founding basis of all unfounded mental engagements (*ayoniśomanasikāra*)<sup>176</sup> due to deluded perceptions, and [4] mind as such which Saraha's *Dohakoṣa* declares to be the seed of everything (*saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*) and a supreme wish-fulfilling gem since it grants all the fruits of one's desires. When the meaning of the

<sup>172</sup> Translations of these two works—the *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad mdo rgyud snying po*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, vol. 13, 124–136 and *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, ibid., vol. 13, 113–124—are included in Komarovski 2006. This also provides a useful listing of more than twenty texts of different genres by Shākya mchog ldan that discuss buddha nature. One of the latest of these was a Cakrasaṃvara commentary *Bde mchog rnam bshad dpal dang po'i sangs rgyas rab tu grub pa* (SCsb vol. 8, 1–193) which Shākya mchog ldan composed at the age of seventy-seven (1504), three years before his death. This work appears to have met with critical reception since he also composed a short reply to objections concerning this text (*Dang po'i sangs rgyas grub pa'i gzhung gi brgal lan*). This text's buddha nature theory was also the subject of a critical review by the Eighth Karma pa, on which see chapter three.

<sup>173</sup> *Blo mchog pa'i dri lan*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 739–57.

<sup>174</sup> These two works—*Blo mchog pa'i dri lan*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 739–57 and *Mus rabs 'byams pa'i dris lan*, in SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, vol. 23, 535<sub>6</sub>–551<sub>5</sub> (in *Rab dkar gyi dris lan*, ibid., 391–630)—are examined in Kano 2006, 235–36 which came to our attention only after completing a draft of this chapter. We are most grateful to the author for kindly clarifying the different positions outlined in this work and in his latest research during his tenure as Numata visiting professor at the University of Vienna. See also Kano 2006, 235–49 for a comparative overview of Shākya mchog ldan's Tathāgatagarbha views in relation to those of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab and other Tibetan masters.

<sup>175</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17 f., critical edition: 29 f.

<sup>176</sup> On various interpretations of this term, see below, 418 f.

statement in [ASP 5b.1–2] “That mind is no mind, mind’s nature is luminous”<sup>177</sup> and the statement in the *Abhidharmasūtra* “the beginningless element is the basis of all phenomena”<sup>178</sup> are commented upon, it is said [in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*] that unfounded mental engagements due to the *skandhas*, *āyatana*s, *dhātus*, and *indriyas* etc., “depend upon the purity of mind”.<sup>179</sup> Hence, because all *saṃsāric* phenomena have arisen from *tathāgatagarbha*, there is no difference between the element of sentient beings and the element of a buddha. In this context, the scriptural source for explaining [the element] as *mahāmudrā* was uttered by Saraha [*Dohākoṣa*, DK 41ab] “Mind alone is the seed of everything”.<sup>180</sup> This was proven by [saying] that it gives rise to all the good things of worldly existence and *nirvāṇa* and that it is therefore “like the wish fulfilling jewel”.<sup>181</sup>

In explaining the rationale<sup>182</sup> behind these characterizations of *mahāmudrā*, Shākya mchog ldan employs the distinction between consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*) which plays a key role in his philosophy. Interestingly, he maintains that the wisdom of *mahāmudrā* comprises both deluded consciousness and the undeluded wisdom of realization. Consciousness is said to be “in the grip of delusion or error (*'khrul pa*)” which perpetuates both the negative actions (*karma*) fueled by attachments and aversions and the bright actions motivated by virtue which lead, respectively, to the heights and depths of *saṃsāra*. By contrast, the wisdom (*ye shes*) of realization is precisely the buddha element or *mahāmudrā* which remains invariant amidst the flux of appearances. Although it is drawn into *saṃsāric* states with all their joys and sorrows, it remains incorruptible by them. And it is precisely because this *mahāmudrā* remains ever-present as the “very possibility to one day be separated [from such states]” that it is referred to not only as the “element of buddhas” but the “element of sentient beings” as well.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>177</sup> ASP, 3a<sub>3</sub>: The line in the original Sanskrit (Schmithausen 1977, 41, E.b.1–2), reads *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā |* which is rendered in the D as *sems de ni sems ma mchis pa ste || sems kyi rang bzhin ni 'od gsal ba lags so ||* Note that the Tibetan edition Śākya mchog ldan and many other Tibetan masters consulted had the erroneous locative particle *sems la* instead of the demonstrative *sems de* which corresponds to the *tac cittam* in the extant Sanskrit ms. We have followed the Sanskrit reading.

<sup>178</sup> On this oft-quoted passages, see below, 111, 192 and Volume II, translation: 19.

<sup>179</sup> See also RGV I.57a–b: *ayoniśomanaskāraś citta śuddhi pratiṣṭhitah ||*

<sup>180</sup> *Dohākoṣa*, DK 41ab: “Mind alone is the seed of everything, from which existence and nirvāṇa spring forth.” *cittam ekaṃ sakalabījaṃ bhavanirvāṇe-api yasya visphurataḥ |* Tib. D2224, 41cd: *sems nyid gcig pu kun gyi sa bon te || gang la srid dang mya ngan 'das 'phro ba ||*

<sup>181</sup> *Dohākoṣa*, DK 41cd: “Homage to the mind which, like a wish-fulfilling jewel, grants all the fruits of one’s desires.” *tac cintāmaṇirūpaṃ praṇamata [tat] icchāphalaṃ dadāti ||* D2224, 42ab: *'dod pa'i 'bras bu ster bar byed pa yi || yid bzhin nor 'dra'i sems la phyag 'tshal lo ||*

<sup>182</sup> The term *shes byed* has two related senses: [1] reason (*rgyu mtshan*) and [2] proof (*sgrub byed*).

<sup>183</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 19, critical edition: 30.

Although *mahāmudrā* amidst the accumulation of happiness and suffering has been drawn into saṃsāric states, it is impossible for it to mix inseparably with saṃsāric phenomena. Therefore, because it is present as the very possibility to one day <sup>[367]</sup> be separated [from these states], *mahāmudrā* is the element of sentient beings too. As for the delusion-free wisdom pertaining to this element, since it is mixed inseparably with mind as such which is cultivated through familiarization with it, the element of buddhas is *mahāmudrā* as well. In this way it is understood both through scriptural authority and reasoning that all sentient beings are sealed by *mahāmudrā*. However, by these alone it is not realized. As is stated [in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*]: “The ultimate truth of the self-arisen [i.e., the Buddhas,] is to be realized through faith”<sup>184 185</sup>.

It is in line with the distinction between consciousness and wisdom that Shākya mchog ldan next interprets the above ASP 5b.1–2 passage “That mind is no mind, mind’s nature is luminous”. Here, “that mind” refers to wisdom in the ground phase, whereas the mind which mind as such or wisdom is said to be absent *of* is identified as “the eightfold ensemble of consciousness, the entire range of mental factors and the delusory habitual tendencies of dualistic appearances” which obstruct and obscure wisdom and luminosity. It is when the dichotomies between the obscuring and obscured have given way to self-luminous self-awareness that one realizes the nondual *mahāmudrā* which is the “*dharmadhātu* experienced by the personally realized wisdom of the noble ones”:

The expression “That mind” (*tac cittam*) in the [*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*]*prajñāpāramitā* refers precisely to wisdom in the phase of the ground, while the “is no mind” (*acittam*) refers to the eightfold ensemble of consciousness, the entire range of mental factors and the delusory habitual tendencies of dualistic appearances, whereby [luminous mind] is not attained. Even an understanding that clings to a partial aspect of the purifications (*vyavadāna*) is something which obscures luminosity as well. When the respective essences of these obscuring factors have given way to self-luminous self-awareness, then there is no more dichotomy between the obscured and the obscurer. As long as there are notions that cling to the dualism between obscured and obscurer, because the essence of the obscuration is not recognized and one clings to a partial luminosity, there is no realization of *mahāmudrā*. ...

<sup>184</sup> See also RGV I.153ab: *śraddhayā eva anugantavyaṃ param arthe svayaṃbhuvām* || Tib. *rang byung rnam kyī don dam de* || ‘*dad pa nyid kyis rtogs bya yin* ||

<sup>185</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 19–20, critical edition: 30.

This meaning [as emphasized] in the texts of the master Maitreya is that there exists no other phenomenon (*dharmā*) apart from the expanse of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*). And since this *dharmadhātu* is experienced by the personally realized wisdom of the noble ones, it is the nature of mind.<sup>186</sup>

Here Shākya mchog ldan differentiates the luminosity of *mahāmudrā*, which is accessible only to personally realized nondual wisdom, from the partial or biased luminosity, i.e., a concept of luminosity imputed by and to the mind, which one clings to so long as dualistic beliefs in subject and object, obscurer and obscured, persist. He identifies this *mahāmudrā* as what remains (*lhag ma*) when all reifications that make it something it is not have been eliminated. This is the perfect nature, the definitive meaning, considered in the third *dharmacakra* to be empty of conventional phenomena and yet not a mere negation either. In other words, it is not *something*, but neither is it *nothing*. The author gives the example from the *Dharmadhātustava*<sup>187</sup> of a banana-plant which is found upon close analysis to be empty of any substantial core but which nonetheless bears sweet fruits. On this account, the discovery of emptiness goes hand in hand with the disclosure of its unimpeded dynamism and fecundity.

When one experiences that definitive meaning which constitutes the remainder left behind in the wake of such analysis according to that [reasoning corpus], then that is also designated as such [i.e., as the definitive meaning]. To illustrate with an example, [the Buddha]—after explaining in the middle *dharmacakra* that all phenomena are simply empty of own-nature—taught in the third *dharmacakra* that the unchanging perfect nature which is empty of that [self-emptiness] is the definitive meaning. Likewise, one doesn't find any core of a banana plant when one searches for it, yet in the middle of the unfolded leaves [bananas] nonetheless ripen as sweet fruits.<sup>188</sup>

*Mahāmudrā* is encountered in the immediacy of direct perception but never as an object of thought. Its cultivation is characterized as the union of calm abiding and deep insight.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 20, critical edition: 30.

<sup>187</sup> *Dharmadhātustava*, D1118, verse 15–16, 64a.

<sup>188</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 21, critical edition: 30.

<sup>189</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 21, critical edition: 31. “As for the way of familiarizing oneself with practice, there are the ways of calm abiding when settling in meditative equipoise and of irreversibly sustaining deep insight in both equipoise and post-meditation. First, what is to be seen is luminosity. So long as this is an object of thought, *mahāmudrā* is not seen. Seeing a mere abstraction is not advocated here. Consequently, in seeing it directly, one remains settled in it in one-pointed equipoise [and maintains] its continuity without

One method of Mahāmudrā meditation described by Shākya mchog ldan involves intentionally engaging the reflexivity of self-awareness in a kind of infinite regress: any thoughts that arise are seen by another conceptual analysis or “looker” which, in turn, is witnessed by a third looker, until the seer and seen mingle into the very essence of deep insight (*lhag mthong*). In this way, all conceptual fabrication comes to a standstill, including the grasping, reifying activities of thought which take subject and object, thoughts and their antidotes, to be different things.<sup>190</sup>

To better understand the connections Shākya mchog ldan draws between the Mahāmudrā discourses of the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud and the Tathāgatagarbha discourses of the third *dharmacakra*, it may be useful to look at how he classified the foremost Tibetan positions on buddha nature during his time and determine how he framed his own viewpoint in relation to these. A good starting point for this inquiry is his classification of Tibetan buddha nature theories presented in his *Replies to Queries of Blo mchog pa* which has been translated and discussed in Kano 2006.<sup>191</sup>

Among the great chariots [of Buddha nature doctrine] in the Land of Snow [Tibet] there were two traditions: [1] the tradition which maintains that all sentient beings are endowed with buddha nature and [2] the tradition which maintains that they are not. The first is twofold: [1.1] those who in identifying buddha [nature] maintain it is an instance of a nonaffirming negation which is not distinguished by qualities such as the [ten] powers, and [1.2] those who maintain it is an instance of an affirming negation which is distinguished by these [qualities]. [1.1] The first [view] is that of the great Rngog Lo tsā wa and his followers. [1.2] The second is that of the omniscient Dol po pa together with his predecessors and successors. [2] The second tradition, which maintains that sentient beings do not have buddha nature, is that of the venerable Sa skya Paṇḍita and the second omniscient one Bu ston, among others.

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distraction. Then there is the unity of calm abiding and deep insight because, when the eight preparations for abandoning [obstacles] come to the fore, the flaws of calm abiding and deep insight are eliminated.”

<sup>190</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 21, critical edition: 31. “As for the way to cultivate deep insight, there is meditative equipoise and post-meditation. In meditative equipoise, when any concepts of existence and quiescence that spring up are looked at by another conceptual analysis (*rtog dpyod*), the former dissolve in the expanse. When that conceptual analysis, the looker, is seen by the third insight, then seer and seen both mingle into the very essence of deep insight. On that occasion, one speaks of ‘the realization of deep insight that is clear and nonconceptual’. At that time, all unreal conceptualizations cease, not to mention the concepts on the side of the antidotes, which must also cease because they are precisely the grasping for [and believing in] discursive signs.”

<sup>191</sup> See Kano 2006, 235–36.

Also in this regard, the identification of buddha nature<sup>192</sup> comprises [1.3] those who maintain it is the feature of natural purity alone and [1.4] those who maintain it signifies a combination of that [natural purity] and qualities that are inseparable from it. As for this second [view], there are moreover [1.4.1] those who claim that these qualities fulfil the function of being qualities of the *dharmakāya* in terms of realization and [1.4.2] those who claim they are the qualities of natural *dharmakāya* [itself].

[1.3] The first tradition represents the majority of the well-known latter-day reciters<sup>193</sup> in the Land of Snow. [1.4.1] The second includes the master Phag mo grub pa and the many adherents of the Bka' brgyud lineage of the master from Dwags po [Sgam po pa]. [1.4.3] The third are a few [masters] such as Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal.<sup>194</sup>

A few points in this classification of Tibetan Buddha nature positions warrant further comment. The first point is that Rngog Blo ldan shes rab is identified as a representative of the view that identifies buddha nature as an instance of a nonaffirming negation which is not distinguished by qualities such as the ten powers, whereas Dol po pa's Gzhan stong lineage is said to represent the view of buddha nature as an affirming negation which is distinguished by qualities. In Shākya mchog ldan's view, Rngog's position reflects a second *dharmacakra* interpretation of buddha nature which is incompatible with the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, a work which, in his eyes, unquestionably reflects the affirmative stance of the third *dharmacakra*. By contrast, the Gzhan stong interpretation is generally said by the author to accord with the positive appraisal of the ultimate advocated by the third *dharmacakra* though he was critical of its tendency to absolutize buddha nature.

<sup>192</sup> These are a subset [1A] of those who maintain that sentient beings are endowed with buddha nature [1].

<sup>193</sup> The term *klog pa pa* ("literally those who recite [texts]") is often used pejoratively by Shākya mchog ldan with reference to those who uncritically parrot the words of others.

<sup>194</sup> *Blo mchog dri lan*, SCsb(C) vol. 17, 748<sub>5</sub>–749<sub>5</sub>: *gangs can gyi shing rta chen po dag la lugs gnyis te | sems can thams cad sangs rgyas kyi snying po can yin par bzhed pa'i lugs dang | ma yin par bshed pa'i lugs so || dang po la gnyis te | snying po'i ngos 'dzin stobs sogs yon tan kyis khyad par du ma byas pa'i med dgag gi cha la bzhed pa dang des khyad par du byas pa'i ma yin dgag gi cha la bzhed pa'o || dang po ni | rngog lo tswa ba chen po rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'o || gnyis pa ni | kun mkhyen dol po pa gong 'og gi brgyud pa dang bcas pa'o || lugs gnyis pa sems can la sangs rgyas kyi snying po med pa bzhed pa ni | rje btsun sa skya paṇḍi ta dang | kun mkhyen gnyis pa bu ston la sogs pa'o || yang 'di ltar | snying po'i ngos 'dzin rang bzhin rnam dag rkyang pa'i cha la bzhed pa dang | de dang yon tan dbyer med kyi tshogs don la bzhed pa'o | gnyis pa la'ang | yon tan de dag rtogs pa chos sku'i yon tan go chod por 'dod pa dang | rang bzhin chos sku'i yon tan du 'dod pa'o || lugs dang po ni | gangs can du phyis grags pa'i klog pa pa phal che ba dag go || gnyis pa ni | rje phag mo grub pa sogs rje dwags po'i bka' brgyud<sup>a</sup> 'dzin pa mang po dang go || lugs gsum pa ni | paṇ chen phyogs las rnam rgyal la sogs pa kha cig go ||* <sup>a</sup>text has *rgyud* See Kano 2006, 236–38. Translation is our own.



A second noteworthy point in the above classification is the author's inclusion of Sa skya Paṇḍita in the camp of those who deny that sentient beings have buddha nature, alongside Bu ston rin chen grub. This is a view Shākya mchog ldan endorses in the majority of his buddha nature works, but seems to have abandoned in his Mahāmudrā expositions where he unequivocally characterizes buddha nature as an ever-present and unchanging element in sentient beings, bodhisattvas and buddhas.

The last and most important point to note is the author's identification of Phag mo gru pa and many Mahāmudrā masters as representatives of the view that buddha nature “signifies a combination of that [natural purity] and qualities that are inseparable from it” and that “these qualities fulfil the function of being qualities of the *dharmakāya* in terms of realization”. This is a position which strikes a balance between recognizing the natural purity of buddha nature (and *dharmakāya*) and also acknowledging its soteriological efficacy in functioning as the ground of buddha qualities disclosed through realization. We shall see that this middle view, positioned between the extremes of nonaffirming Rang stong and affirming Gzhan stong positions, best exemplifies the view of buddha nature presented in Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā writings. It is a view which emphasizes the unity of manifestation and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*).

What is striking about this Mahāmudrā view of buddha nature is its incompatibility with the view of buddha nature the author generally endorses in his buddha nature exegesis. Shākya mchog ldan's more typical position on buddha nature has been aptly summarized by Tāranātha as follows: “Buddha nature does not exist in the mind-stream of sentient beings. The natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings is merely the cause and basic element of buddha nature... Thus, statements that this nature is endowed with the very nature of essentially inseparable qualities are [made in] the context of fruition [result] alone.”<sup>195</sup> And Shākya mchog ldan himself states in his commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava* 15–16 that “while it is explained that the buddha element (*sangs rgyas kyi khams : buddhadhātu*) exists in sentient beings, it is not explained that buddhahood itself is the element of sentient beings”.<sup>196</sup>

It is worth noting that ‘Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, in his *Deb ther sngon po*, had traced the Tibetan interpretation of ultimate truth as a nonaffirming negation which is an object of conceptual analysis to Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, and distinguished this from the views of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) and Gtsang nag pa Brtson ’grus seng ge (b.

<sup>195</sup> Tāranātha, *Zab don khyad par nyer gcig pa*, 790.3–4: *sems can gyi rgyud la bde gshegs snying po med sems can gyi sems rang bzhin 'od gsal de | bde gshegs snying po'i rgyu dang khams tsam yin pas | ...; ibid*, 790.7–791.1: *snying po la yon tan ngo bo dbyer med rang bzhin nyid ldan du gsungs pa 'bras bu kho na'i skabs yin la |*. See Mathes 2004, 307–308 and Kano 2006, 238–39.

<sup>196</sup> *Chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa*, 310<sub>5–6</sub>: *sem can la sangs rgyas kyi khams yod par bshad kyi | sangs rgyas nyid sems can gyi snying por ma bshad do |* See also Mathes 2008, 53.

12<sup>th</sup> c.) who considered buddha nature or ultimate truth to be a nonaffirming negation inaccessible to conceptual thought. According to ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, whereas “Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge maintained that a nonaffirming negation in the sense that entities are empty of reality (*bden pas stong pa*) is ultimate truth and thus an object of linguistic-conceptual conception,” Blo ldan shes rab and Gtsang nag pa conversely stated that “so-called ‘buddha nature’ is ultimate truth but explained, on the other hand, that not only is ultimate truth not an actual object of language and thought, it is not even a conceived object (*zhen pa’i yul*).”<sup>197</sup>

For his own part, Shākya mchog ldan ascribes the nonaffirming negation interpretation to those who explained Maitreya’s teachings in accordance with systems studying and thinking and the affirming negation interpretation to those who explained them in accordance with the system of meditation. Now, the equation of buddha nature with emptiness (or selflessness) can be traced in Indian Buddhism to the *Laṅkāvatāra* and works of several prominent thinkers such as Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka, Kamalaśīla, Jñānaśrīmitra and Jayānanda.<sup>198</sup> Shākya mchog ldan identifies Rngog as the major Tibetan proponent of this line of thought. In a subsection of his *Dri ba lhag bsam rab dkar gyi dris lan man ngag gi dgongs rgyan* entitled *Replies to Queries of Mus rab ’byams pa*<sup>199</sup>, the author outlines the two exegetical traditions of Maitreya’s teachings:

According to the teachings of former masters, people who identified buddha nature as emptiness of duality [either] as an instance of a nonaffirming negation or as an instance of a affirming negation were said to be distinguished according to whether they explained the Maitreya teachings in line with studying and thinking or in line with the system of meditation (*sgom lugs*). In the root[-text] and the commentary, the latter system is clearly attested.<sup>200</sup>

Here it is unmistakable that the author considers the meditative tradition’s affirming negation interpretation of emptiness and buddha nature—a view he associates with the Jo nang tradition of Dol po pa—to be the one that is in accord with the import of the Maitreya

<sup>197</sup> See Mathes 2008, 27 and n. 121. See also Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 302–3.

<sup>198</sup> The history of their views is discussed at length in Kano 2006, Introduction and Final Consideration.

<sup>199</sup> *Mus rabs ’byams pa’i dris lan*, in SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, vol. 23, 535<sub>6</sub>–551<sub>5</sub>. Shākya mchog ldan’s analysis of Tibetan nature views in this work is examined in Kano 2006, chapter five. As Kano notes, this text appears to be a reply to criticisms of the buddha nature theories presented in his commentary on the *Sdom gsum rab dbye* entitled *Gser gyi thur ma* (composed 1481). We wish to thank the author for making a draft of the forthcoming revised version of his thesis available to us.

<sup>200</sup> *Mus rabs ’byams pa’i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, vol. 23, 539<sub>3–4</sub>: *slob dpon snga ma dag gi gsung nas | gnyis stong med dgag gi cha dang ma yin dgag gi cha la snying po’i ngos ’dzin du byed pa | byams chos thos bsam ltar ’chad pa dang | byams chos sgom lugs ltar ’chad pa’i khyad yin gsung | rtsa ’grel na ni lugs phyi ma de nyid gsal bar bzugs |*

works. Of the two main traditions of exegesis of Maitreya's works—Rngog's analytical tradition which explains emptiness as a nonaffirming negation and the Bstan Kha bo che's meditative tradition which explains it as an affirming negation—it is the latter which is said to accord with the teachings of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV).<sup>201</sup>

To summarize, the meditation tradition of Bstan Kha bo che and the Gzhan stong explains buddha nature in accordance with the system of meditation (*sgom lugs*) of the Maitreya works, a system Shākya mchog ldan considered to be clearly evident in RGV and RGVV. However, a closer look at Shākya mchog ldan's earlier buddha nature writings reveals the extent to which he had developed an interpretation of buddha nature that diverged from both the major Tibetan strands of Buddha nature exegesis based on the RGV: [1] the so-called “analytical tradition” (*mtshan nyid lugs*) of the RGV of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) which equates buddha nature with a nonaffirming emptiness and [2] the so-called “meditation tradition” (*sgom lugs*) of the RGV of Btsan kha bo che (b. 1021) which by way of an affirming negation asserts that all sentient beings are endowed with buddha nature replete with all buddha qualities.<sup>202</sup>

Why does Shākya mchog ldan align the nonaffirming and affirming traditions of Tathāgatagarbha interpretation with the hermeneutical distinction between discourses of the second and third turnings of the *dharmacakra* respectively? In his *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad* (*Explanation of Buddha Nature*) composed when he was forty-seven (1474), Shākya mchog ldan explains that according to the second promulgation of the Buddha's teachings, buddha nature is considered to be the purity from adventitious stains and thus a nonaffirming negation. However, “according to the final turning, the underlying purport (*dgongs gzhi*) of 'buddha nature' (\**sugatagarbha*) is the so-called 'natural luminosity which is free from all extremes of elaborations'. Because it is that which is clearly explained as the object of experience of wisdom that is personally realized, it is necessary to characterize it as an affirming negation.”<sup>203</sup> This latter interpretation is, for Shākya mchog ldan, the definitive

<sup>201</sup> Shākya mchog ldan mentions in this connection (ibid., 539<sub>5-6</sub>) two other conflicting interpretations of buddha nature: that of certain *sūtras* belonging to the final *dharmacakra* (such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*) which teach that buddha nature is buddhahood itself (*sangs rgyas nyid*), and that of the RGV which teaches that it is the *dharmatā* of buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi chos nyid*). Shākya mchog ldan states that it is the former of these two corresponds to the third *dharmacakra* (ibid. 409<sub>3-4</sub>). See Kano 2006, 249 n. 106

<sup>202</sup> Btsan kha bo che's exegetical tradition goes back to Sajjana who is said to have instructed both Gzu Dga' ba'i rdo rje and Btsan Kha bo che in all of the five works of Maitreya, having given them the key-instructions (*gdams ngag*) for the associated meditation practice. See Kano 2006, 53–54. Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) refers to this tradition as the meditation tradition (*sgom lugs*) or Btsan tradition (*btsan lugs*) and describes it as “a superior lineage of extraordinary exegesis and practice.” See *Mi ldog pa seng ge'i nga ro*, 12<sub>13-14</sub>: *thun mong ma yin pa'i bshad pa dang nyams len gyi rgyun khyad par 'phags pa yin*

<sup>203</sup> *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad mdo rgyud snying po*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 133<sub>6</sub>–134<sub>6</sub>: “According to the final turning, the underlying intent of \**sugatagarbha* is the so-called natural luminosity that is free from all extremes of elaborations. Because it is that which is clearly explained as the object of experience of wisdom that

meaning of the RGV and sūtras of the third turning in general.<sup>204</sup> In a later short treatise on the definitive meaning of the RGV,<sup>205</sup> he defines buddha nature as both the purity from adventitious stains during the phase of a bodhisattva, and the natural purity on the level of buddhahood where it is said to be inseparable from all buddha qualities. In his late *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary*, he explains that there were two primary currents of Buddha nature exegesis, one based on the natural purity (*rnam dag rang bzhin*) of buddha nature and the other on its purity from adventitious stains (*glo bur rnam dag*) and that both exegetical traditions are attested in the RGV.<sup>206</sup>

Although Shākya mchog ldan finds the affirmative “meditation system” of RGV interpretation to be consistent with the RGV and RGVV, the majority of his works on buddha nature present views which pose difficulties for this interpretation. In these works, sentient beings do not have buddha nature. Only buddhas have buddha nature inseparable from all buddha qualities. In fact, buddha nature only ‘comes into existence’, so to speak, when the so called exalted (*ārya*) bodhisattva first sees ultimate truth on the first spiritual level at the beginning of the path of seeing. While bodhisattvas have the *buddhagarbha* purified of adventitious stains, only buddhas have *buddhagarbha* of natural purity inseparable from all buddha qualities. In the *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad*, Shākya mchog ldan interprets the three phases of buddha nature—impure, pure-impure, and pure—as distinguished in *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.47 as specifying that [1] sentient beings of the impure phase do not possess buddha nature at all (but only a *gotra* that is different from buddha nature known as “essence of sentient beings” (*sattvagarbha*)), [2] bodhisattvas of the partly pure-partly impure phase have only a part of a buddha nature, while [3] buddhas have it completely.<sup>207</sup>

Komarovski has drawn attention to an early exception to this view in the author’s *Abhisamāyālaṃkāra* (AA) commentary (1454) where he follows his teacher Rong ston Shes bya kun rig’s (1367–1449) view that all beings possess one and the same buddha nature, here

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is personally realized, it is necessary to characterize it as a nonaffirming negation.” *khorlo tha ma yis | bde gshegs snying po'i dgongs gzhi ni | spros pa'i mtha' kun dang bral ba'i | rang bzhin 'od gsal ces bya ba || so so rang gis rig pa yi || ye shes kyi ni myong bya la || gsal bar bshad pa nyid yin phyir || ma yin dgag par 'chad dgos so ||* See a complete translation of this text in Komarovski 2006, 539–56.

<sup>204</sup> Komarovski 2010, 6.

<sup>205</sup> *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 121–32:. See a complete translation of this text in Komarovski 2006, 556–66.

<sup>206</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad dpal dang po'i sangs rgyas rab tu* [text: *du*] *grub pa*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 8, 198<sub>6</sub>–199<sub>1</sub>: “There arose two exegetical traditions concerning whether or not sentient beings are pervaded by buddha nature: They were distinguished as two traditions of explaining the identification of that [buddha nature] in terms of natural purity and purity of the adventitious. Both traditions occur in the *Uttaratantraśāstra*.” *snying pos sems can la khyab ma khyab kyi bshad srol gnyis byung ba ni | de'i ngos 'dzin rang bzhin rnam dag dang glo bur rnam dag la 'chad pa'i srol gnyis kyi khyad par yin | srol de gnyis ka yang rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos su byung |*

<sup>207</sup> Komarovski 2006, 526.

described as the natural purity of mind, which is called the spiritual potential (*gotra*) or element (*kham*) in sentient beings and the \**sugatagarbha* in buddhas. In a later work, however, the author acknowledged that this interpretation was based on former *Abhisamāyālaṃkāra* commentator's explanations and was made with a middle *dharmacakra* interpretation of buddha nature in mind.<sup>208</sup>

It would seem that an obvious precedent for Shākya mchog ldan's view that sentient beings do not possess *buddhagarbha* was Blo ldan shes rab's (1059–1109) interpretation of *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.27c in which he takes *tathāgata* in the compound *tathāgatagarbha* as existent (*ngos*) but takes sentient beings' possession of it as merely nominal (*btags*) on the rationale that “their ‘being pervaded by it’ has been metaphorically applied to the existence of the opportunity to attain it [i.e., the *kāya* of perfect buddhahood]”.<sup>209</sup> In other words, the statement that “sentient beings have buddha nature” is a case of designating a cause on the basis of the effect. On Rngog's view, buddha qualities are not present in the causal state but nonetheless have a kind of conventional existence. They are not innate but acquired. As Rngog puts it, the realization of the ultimate brings the qualities into existence: they “gather as if summoned when you realize the *dharmadhātu*”.<sup>210</sup> This image of the qualities showing up en masse at the time of realization seems compatible with a disclosive model of buddha nature and should be kept in mind when assessing Shākya mchog ldan's identification of Rngog as a proponent of the nonaffirming negation interpretation of buddha nature.

It is here worth noting that Shākya mchog ldan considered himself to be a reincarnation of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (among other past masters) and reported having recollections of his past life as this teacher.<sup>211</sup> That said, in several works including his late commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, he is openly critical of Blo ldan shes rab's identification of buddha nature with the sheer emptiness of the mind possessing stains on the grounds that it is necessary to identify buddha nature from the standpoint of its buddha qualities, but this is impossible where a sheer emptiness (*stong pa nyid rkyang pa*) is concerned: “The Great Translator [Rngog Blo ldan shes rab] took the sheer emptiness of mind possessing stains as [buddha] nature. This is not felicitous because it is necessary, in identifying [buddha] nature, to explain it from the perspective of the qualities, but this identification is impossible where sheer

<sup>208</sup> See Komarovski 2006, 526, n. 13 where the author notes that Shākya mchog ldan in his late *Gser gyi thur ma* acknowledged that he had followed the lead of scholars in the past who, when commenting on the *Abhisamāyālaṃkāra* with its commentaries, had explained that all sentient beings have buddha nature, an interpretation that was made with buddha nature as taught in the Middle Wheel in mind.

<sup>209</sup> See Kano 2006, and 2010, 260–61, and Mathes 2008, 28 and n. 125.

<sup>210</sup> See Rngog's commentary on RGV I.151b where he states “The realization of the ultimate is the cause of all qualities, because all buddha qualities gather as if summoned when you realize the *dharmadhātu*.” As quoted in Mathes 2008, 31. Translation altered slightly.

<sup>211</sup> Komarovski 2011, 50.

emptiness alone is concerned.”<sup>212</sup> This critique, as noted, must be reconciled with Rngog’s view that although the qualities are acquired or emergent rather than innate, they nonetheless become fully manifest upon realization.

Let us summarize the main features of Rngog’s view of *tathāgatagarbha*: buddha nature is nothing but emptiness of intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin gyis pa stong nyid*), being the purity of *dharmakāya* which pervades all beings<sup>213</sup>; it is thus defined as “the mental continuum which has emptiness as its nature (*sems kyi rgyud stong pa nyid kyi rang bzhin*)”.<sup>214</sup> It exists only as a cause in sentient beings, and is therefore only a “sentient beings’ essence” (*sems can gyi snying po*) or potential (*rigs*), i.e., the causal *dharmakāya*, but not the buddha-essence (*sangs rgyas kyi snying po*), i.e., the resultant *dharmakāya*, which only buddhas and realized bodhisattvas possess. Further, because buddha nature *qua* emptiness cannot, on Madhyamaka terms, be considered a real, causally-efficacious entity, it must be considered as an efficient cause (*upādāna*) of *dharmakāya* only in the sense of being a conventional object (*tha snyad kyi yul*) devoid of real existence, in other words, as an instance of a nonaffirming negation (*prasajyapratishedha*).<sup>215</sup> Rngog’s view of buddha nature is best viewed against the wider background of Madhyamaka *tathāgatagarbha* interpretations which rejected, on the basis of Buddhist principles of impermanence and selflessness, the characterization of *tathāgatagarbha* as a permanent entity which pervades all beings and is thus akin to the Self (*ātman*) of the non-Buddhists.<sup>216</sup>

In clarifying Rngog’s attempt to explain how buddha nature is both empty and yet causally efficacious, Kazuo Kano states that Rngog “accepts neither that *dhātu* and *dharmakāya* should be entities in order to be causes nor that the causation in question is a causation of the type that occurs between a seed and a sprout. Even though all phenomena are empty by nature, everything is able to exist and function conventionally. In this sense Buddha-nature

<sup>212</sup> *Rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, vol. 13, 122<sub>5-6</sub>: *lo tsā ba chen po dri ma dang bcas pa’i sems kyi stong pa nyid snying por byas pa ni legs pa ma yin te | snying po’i ngos ’dzin ni yon tan gyi cha nas ’chad dgos kyi | stong pa nyid rkyang pa la ngos ’dzin de mi rung ba’i phyir |*

<sup>213</sup> See Kano 2010, 258, where the following passage from Rngog’s *Rgyud bla don bsdus* is quoted: “As for the previous case [i.e., *dharmakāya*], since the intrinsic nature of the pure state itself exists [in buddhas], the pure state is also present in sentient beings [for buddhas’ *dharmakāya* pervades all sentient beings]. Therefore, this very purity [i.e., emptiness] was called “the essence” (*snying po*). As for the present case [i.e., *tathatā*], though [ordinary beings] have no [such final resultant state] which is accomplished by accumulation of purifications, only the emptiness of intrinsic nature is called “essence.” (Kano’s translation). *sngar ni rnam par dag pa’i gnas skabs de nyid kyi rang bzhin yod pas | rnam par dag pa’i gnas skabs kyang sems can la yod pa yin la | des na rnam par dag pa de nyid snying por brjod pa yin no | da lta ni rnam par dag pa’i tshogs las ya dag par grub pa de med kyang | rang bzhin gyis stong pa nyid kho na snying por brjod pa yin no ||*

<sup>214</sup> See Kano 2010, 259.

<sup>215</sup> Kano 2010, 261–62.

<sup>216</sup> See Kano 2010, 249–50.

can fulfill a causal function.”<sup>217</sup> Shākya mchog ldan for his part summarizes Rngog’s position on buddha nature in the following way:

According to the explanation of Rngog Lo tsā wa, the great charioteer in the Land of Snow, buddha and buddha nature do not mean the same thing. “‘Buddha’ refers to the completion of qualities such as the powers etc., and the *dharmakāya* itself wherein all impurities are relinquished, whereas ‘buddha nature’ does not need to be characterized in terms of such relinquishment and realization. It is an instance of nonaffirming negation, the natural purity of the [*dharmā*] *dhātu* which pervades all the phases of ground, path, and fruition”. All the latter-day reciters in the Land of Snow reiterated, like an echo, that “all sentient beings have the nature of those [buddhas]” without undertaking the investigation of what this buddha nature (*buddhagarbha*) is.<sup>218</sup>

In attempting to specify what this buddha nature is, Shākya mchog ldan warns against taking the second *dharmacakra* view of buddha nature as the last word on the matter since a nonaffirming negation precludes the buddha qualities with which buddha nature is said in RGV to be inseparably united:

In short, in identifying buddha nature, it is not sufficient to posit it only from the perspective of natural purity. Rather, it must be presented from the perspective of its inseparability of the qualities such as the [ten] powers.<sup>219</sup> As is stated [in RGV I.29cd]: “Unchangeability [and] being inseparable from qualities is the intended meaning of the ultimate sphere”.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Kano 2010, 262. The author distinguishes (262 n. 43) two senses in which buddha nature may be considered a cause which we can call soteriological and phenomenal. It is the soteriological cause of becoming a buddha and the phenomenal cause of the existence of all phenomena (*saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*) on the conventional level.

<sup>218</sup> *Blo mchog dri lan*, SCsb(C) vol 17, 742<sub>4</sub>–743<sub>1</sub>: *gangs can gyi shing rta chen po rngog lo tswa ba'i gsung gis | sangs rgyas dang de'i snying po don gcig pa ma yin te | sangs rgyas ni stobs sogs yon tan rdzogs shing | dri ma mtha' dag spang pa'i chos kyi sku nyid yin la | sangs rgyas kyi snying po ni de lta bu'i spangs rtogs kyi khyad par du byed dgos pa ma yin pa | gzhi lam 'bras bu'i gnas skabs thams cad du khyab pa'i dbyings rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa med dgag gi cha de'o | zhes gsung | gangs can ljongs kyi klog pa pa phyi ma thams cad kyang | sangs rgyas kyi snying po ci la zer gyi dpyod pa mi 'jug par | sems can thams cad de'i snying po can no zhes brag cha bzhin du sgrog par byed do ||*

<sup>219</sup> “Powers etc.” presumably refers to the ten powers (*stobs bcu, daśabala*), the four fearlessnesses (*mi 'jigs pa bzhi, catvaravāiśārya*), the eighteen unshared qualities of a buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi chos ma 'dres pa bco brgyad, aṣṭādaśāveṇikabuddhadharma*), and the thirty-two major marks (*mtshan bzang po sum cu rtsa gnyis, dvatrimśadvaralakṣaṇa*). For details of these, see Takasaki 1966, 120–121.

<sup>220</sup> *Blo mchog dri lan*, SCsb(C) vol. 17, 744<sub>5</sub>–745<sub>1</sub>: *mdor na snying po'i ngos 'dzin ni | rang bzhin rnam dag tsam gyi cha nas gzhas pas chog pa ma yin gyi | stobs sogs yon tan dang dbyer med pa'i cha nas bzhas dgos pa yin te | de nyid las | ji skad du | rtag tu mi 'gyur yon tan dbyer med ni || don dam dbyings kyi dgongs don yin zhes bya ||*

We might do well to remind ourselves here that Shākya mchog ldan had identified a Tibetan view which regards buddha nature as a combination of natural purity and its inseparable buddha qualities with the Bka' brgyud tradition of Phag mo gru po and other Dwags po Bka' brgyud masters. From this standpoint, Shākya mchog ldan criticizes Rngog's buddha nature position for applying an interpretation of nonaffirming emptiness—which Shākya mchog ldan associates with the middle *dharmacakra*—to a text and commentary which reflect a third *dharmacakra* hermeneutic:

The great Rngog Lo primarily asserts that among the five Maitreya works, only the *Uttaratantra* (RGV) is a *śāstra* of definitive meaning and that what is taught is only freedom from elaborations as an instance of a nonaffirming negation. However, to primarily explain that the content of this treatise is the very emptiness [or absence] which is the main teaching of the middle *dharmacakra* is not in accord with either the treatise or commentary.<sup>221</sup>

On what philosophical grounds did Shākya mchog ldan consider it infelicitous to equate buddha nature with a nonaffirming negation? His principal objection is that a nonaffirming negation is nothing more than a deductive conclusion based on reasoning which investigates the nature of concepts. Ergo, because of its conceptually-determined nature, such deductive reasoning is dependent upon the network of the concepts it negates and thus remains constitutively separate from the sphere of direct perception which recognizes the unborn preconceptual nature of thought. From a soteriological standpoint, taking buddha nature as a nonaffirming negation is tantamount to taking sheer absence as the basis of the path and disregarding the disclosive qualities which are said to be constitutive of *tathāgatagarbha*'s mode of being. This is a view which his own Mahāmudrā tradition cannot accept.

To whatever extent one analyzes the essence of concepts by means of reasoning which investigates the ultimate, the factor of clarity and knowing which directly recognizes the abiding nature of those [concepts] is not thereby discovered. The aspect of emptiness as a nonaffirming negation that is thereby discovered is not their abiding nature because it is impossible for it to [enter] the sphere of direct

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*zhes gsungs pas so* | Translation of RGV I.29cd follows the Sanskrit (RGV, p. 26<sub>14–15</sub>): *sadāvikāritva guṇeṣv abhede jñeyo 'rthasamdhīḥ paramārtha dhātoḥ* ||

<sup>221</sup> *Mus rabs 'byams pa'i dris lan*, in *Rab dkar gyi dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 23, 539<sub>6</sub>–540<sub>2</sub>; **rngog lo chen pos** *byams chos lnga'i nang nas rgyud bla ma kho na nges don gyi bstan bcos dang* | *spros bral med dgag gi cha kho na bstan bya'i gtso bor bzhed mod* | *'khor lo bar pa'i dngos bstan gyi stong pa nyid de bstan bcos 'di'i brjod bya'i gtso bor 'chad pa ni gzhung 'grel gnyis ka dang ma mthun no* ||



perception which sees their abiding nature. Because that knowing cognition is conceptual and thus in error, it does not qualify as a perception that beholds the abiding nature. To explain the instance of nonaffirming emptiness as buddha nature is to superimpose nonexistence onto [that] nature. To thus explain [buddha nature] in this way is the tradition of the great Rngog Lo tsā ba. However, our own [Mahā]mudra followers do not accept this.<sup>222</sup>

However uncharitable this passage may be to Rngog’s buddha nature view, it gives us a clear indication of Shākya mchog ldan’s endorsement of the Mahāmudrā *tathāgatagarbha* interpretation which recognizes the unity of emptiness and buddha qualities.

Notwithstanding his reservations about Rngog Blo ldan shes rab’s buddha nature theory, it is undeniable that Shākya mchog ldan did endorse this master’s, and Sa paṇ’s, repudiation of the view that buddha nature replete with all major and minor marks exists in sentient beings.<sup>223</sup> It would appear, then, that Shākya mchog ldan followed Blo ldan shes rab’s lead in maintaining that the statement that sentient beings have buddha nature is to be understood metaphorically, i.e., as a statement having a veiled intent (*dgongs pa can : ābhiprāyika*). It thus is a statement of provisional meaning (*drang don : neyārtha*) that cannot be taken literally (*sgra ji bzhin ma yin*). It would seem that he also endorsed Blo ldan shes rab’s interpretation of the statement in *Ratnagotravibhāga* RGV I.27b “Because “result” was metaphorically (*nye [bar] btags [pa] = upacāra*) ascribed to the buddha potential, all sentient beings are said to possess the *buddhagarbha*”<sup>224</sup> as implying that sentient beings do not actually have buddha nature.

It is worth noting here that this view was criticized by Mi bskyod rdo rje who, in a critical review of the Tathāgatagarbha theories of ‘Gos Lo tsā ba and Shākya mchog ldan<sup>225</sup>, takes this passage as explaining *not* that sentient beings do not have buddha nature—which he regards as a serious exegetical error—but rather that characterizations of this buddha nature in terms of cause or result are only metaphorical since buddha nature is equally present and unchanging in buddhas and sentient beings and unaffected by causal processes. Hence, in

<sup>222</sup> *Rab dkar gyi dris lan*, SCsb(C), vol. 23, 452a: *rtog pa’i ngo bo don dam dpyod byed kyi rigs pas ji tsam dpyad kyang | de’i gnas lugs yin ngo shes pa gsal rig gi cha de ni des mi rnyed la | des rnyed pa’i stong nyid med dgag gi cha de ni de’i gnas lugs ma yin te | de’i gnas lug mthong ba’i mngon sum gyi spyod yul du mi rung ba’i phyir | rig shes de yang rtog pa nyid kyis na ’khrul pa’i phyir gnas lugs mthong ba’i blo mi rung ngo || stong nyid med dgag gi cha bde gshegs snying por ’chad pa ni snying por med pa la snying por sgro btags nas de ltar ’chad pa rngog lo tswa ba chen po’i lugs yin gyi | nged phyag rgya pa de ltar mi ’dod do ... ||*

<sup>223</sup> See *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po’i rnam bshad*, SCsb(B), vol. 13, 132–46.

<sup>224</sup> RGVV, 263: *bauddhe gotre tatphalasyopacārād uktāḥ sarve dehino buddhagarbhāḥ* | On different interpretations of this passage, see Mathes 2008, 89–91.

<sup>225</sup> *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po’i rlung sman*). Relevant excerpts are given in Volume II, translation: 105–9 and 112–15, critical editions: 109–11 and 115–17.

his reading of RGV I.27, it is the positing of buddha nature as a result, and not beings' possessing buddha nature per se, that is said to be metaphorically ascribed (*upacāra*) since buddha nature has nothing to do with causal production. As will be seen in our discussion of the Eighth Karma pa's buddha nature views in the third chapter, a key point in his rejection of the view that the existence of buddha nature depends on the removal of adventitious stains is that this deprives buddha nature of any agency (*nus pa*) or autonomy (*rang dbang*) and instead accords these to the stains themselves, since it is the latter's nonexistence or existence which determines whether or not buddha nature exists.

One reason for Shākya mchog ldan's espousal of the view that sentient beings do not have buddha nature is specified in his short text responding to objections about his aforementioned *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad*. In this response, he states that if primal buddha[hood] did exist in sentient beings, then it would be unnecessary to build up stores of merits and wisdom (i.e., the prerequisites of the Buddhist path).<sup>226</sup> In short, were buddha nature fully present and efficacious in all the ways it is traditionally deemed to be, with unlimited powers and other capacities, there should be no need for Buddhist soteriology at all since buddha nature could easily dispel all the superfluous factors that obscure it. This is an important point on which more will be said shortly. Another point he raises in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Dharmadhātustava* is that it is impossible for sentient beings to have buddha nature and yet not see it.<sup>227</sup> In a similar vein, he states in his *Commentary on the Cakrasaṃvara* the following:

[Query:] Who is the one who directly sees the natural purity which is the continuum in the ground phase? [Reply:] [1] It is impossible for ordinary sentient beings in the impure phase to see it. [2] It is seen directly during meditative equipoise of the nobles ones in the partly pure and partly impure phase, which is of the nature of purification from adventitious [stains]. [3] As for the fully perfect [phase of complete purification], there is only the wisdom of buddha.<sup>228</sup>

To put it somewhat differently, from the perspective of aspirants on the Buddhist path, buddha nature is not innate but acquired, and its acquisition occurs precisely at the start of the Path of Seeing when a bodhisattva first beholds ultimate truth or reality. From the perspective of goal-realization, however, buddha nature is innate, it is the natural purity of mind. These

<sup>226</sup> *Dang po'i sangs rgyas grub pa'i gzhung gi brgal lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 13, 143<sub>6-7</sub>.

<sup>227</sup> Komarovski 2011, 105.

<sup>228</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad dpal dang po'i sangs rgyas rab tu* [text: *du*] *grub pa*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 8, 24<sub>1-3</sub>: 'o na gzhi dus kyi rgyud rang bzhin rnam dag de mngon sum du mthong ba po su zhig ce na | ma dag pa so so skye bos ni de mthong mi srid cing | dag la ma dag pa 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhas gis rgyud de mngon sum du mthong la | glo bur rnam dag gi chos nyid dang bcas te | yongs su rdzogs pa ni sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kho na'o |

two perspectives, or levels of understanding and discourse, are mirrored in the author's construal of consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*) as two entirely different ways of seeing and relating to reality; while the former is in the grip of dualistic perception, the latter is nondual and sees things as they are. From the premise that a sentient being's dualistic perception cannot see buddha nature Shākya mchog ldan concludes that sentient beings do not have buddha nature.

This account was vulnerable to the criticism that it confuses the inscrutability of buddha nature with its nonexistence: just because buddha nature is (temporarily) imperceptible does not mean it is not present. For example, the sun does not come into existence when it appears from behind clouds any more than it ceases to exist when clouds obscure it. From the innatist standpoint, buddha nature remains ever-present and *available* when obscured by adventitious factors, even if it is not at this time readily *accessible* to direct perception. This is why Mi bskyod rdo rje in his criticisms of the buddha nature views of 'Gos Lo tsā ba and Shākya mchog ldan goes to such lengths to emphasize that the three phases of sentient beings are the three "states" of buddha nature outlined in RGV I.47—impure, partly pure, and completely pure corresponding to sentient beings, bodhisattvas and buddhas respectively—should be seen as "a classification made with the intention to distinguish the three-fold [gradation of] thick, thin and cleansed on the part of [ordinary] consciousness, i.e., that aspect involving deluded perceptions of phenomena." And conversely, they should *not* be interpreted as "three states of buddha nature [according to how much this] essence is itself adulterated or unadulterated with the influence of the impurities."<sup>229</sup> In short, the three phases should be seen as conventional rubrics used to describe the progressive thinning of the accreted stains, rubrics which remain relevant only until the unchanging buddha nature is fully disclosed, at which point such distinctions are no longer applicable.

We have proposed that one seemingly intractable problem that a strongly innatist understanding of buddha nature—the view that it is present replete with all qualities including the ten powers in every sentient—posed for many scholars, Shākya mchog ldan and 'Gos Lo tsā ba included, is that it had difficulty explaining why the Buddhist path of awakening should be necessary at all. If sentient beings have full-fledged buddha nature replete with all qualities such as the powers from the outset, why aren't they already fully awakened? More to the point, how can a soteriologically omnipotent buddha nature co-exist with superfluous adventitious factors? It is comparable to the impossibility of a base (e.g., alkali) being added to a strong acid (e.g., hydrochloric acid) without being dissolved by it.<sup>230</sup> A standard innatist response to this coexistence problem was to offer an error theory sufficiently robust to account for the capacity of innate or coemergent ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa*) to induce

<sup>229</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1024a. See below, 272.

<sup>230</sup> This useful analogy was proposed by Klaus Dieter-Mathes in personal communication.

the lack of recognition of mind's unborn nature (or buddha nature). The error theory would then account for how this reflexive misrecognition derives from the basic nature itself and can be dispelled by recognizing this nature for what it is.

Stated concisely, it is not enough to say that buddha nature or the nature of mind is the condition of possibility of both the formation and dissolution of adventitious obscurations, just as the sun is the condition of possibility of both the formation and dissolution of clouds. A creditable error theory must also clarify the efficacy of soteriological knowledge in effecting this dissolution and show how this efficacy belongs to the nature of mind itself. Such considerations helped shape the innatist views of mind and buddha nature underlying Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma soteriologies which were grounded in similar boot-strapping models of the self-obscurations and self-disclosure of mind's nature. Such models aimed at clarifying how mind can recognize its own nature precisely by catching itself in the ongoing act of its own self-obscurations self-reification. These models worked with the possibility of a fundamental shift in perspective within the reflexive nature of consciousness itself. The nature of mind is only obscured by adventitious factors from a certain perspective, just as the sun is only obscured by clouds from a certain perspective.

These reflections may help us to understand the distinctive, albeit controversial, differentiation between conventional and ultimate buddha nature that Shākya mchog ldan develops in his later buddha nature treatises such as his text on the *Definitive Meaning of the Uttaratantraśāstra* (*Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don*) and the *Commentary on Cakrasaṃvara* (*Bde mchog gyi rnam bshad*). Operating from the axiom that “the entire range of phenomena are subsumed under the principle of the two truths”, he explains in the former work that the abode (*gnas*)—buddhas and sentient beings—as well as the abider (*gnas pa*)—buddha nature itself—have conventional and ultimate aspects. In the latter work, he expands the range of phenomena which he designates as conventional and ultimate to include *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, as well as a wide range of tantric phenomena such as deities, maṇḍalas and the like. To understand the author's rather baroque application of these categories, which resulted in such oddities as “ultimate *saṃsāra*” and “conventional buddha”, it is important to bear in mind that Shākya mchog ldan followed the lead of certain Madhyamaka authors such as Śāntideva who regarded the two truths as spheres of operation (*gocara*) of the two different types of cognition which make them possible: conventional truth is the sphere of consciousness (*rnam shes*) or intellect (*blo*), whereas ultimate truth is the sphere of wisdom (*ye shes*). Thus, any phenomenon is, in principle, either conventional or ultimate depending on the mode of cognition from which it is perceived. The opening section of his *Definitive Meaning of the Uttaratantraśāstra* gives a lucid synopsis of the basic framework:

Having expressed the invocation and [indicated] the purpose of the composition, one should gain knowledge about the following: [1] What is the main topic of the

*Uttaratantraśāstra*? [2] How and wherein does [buddha nature] abide? and [3] [In what sense are] the entire range of knowable objects subsumed under the principle of the two truths? [1] As for the first: It is the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu* that primordially and innately exists [with] all the qualities such as the powers, etc. [2] Secondly, wherein it resides: in buddhas and in sentient beings. [3] [Thirdly,] both the abode [i.e., sentient beings and buddhas] and the abider [buddha nature] are also of two types: conventional and ultimate. The conventional [buddha] nature is the possessor of newly acquired qualities. The ultimate [buddha] nature is the possessor of primordially existent qualities.<sup>231</sup> Conventional sentient beings are the six types of migrators. Ultimate sentient beings are their mode of being, the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu*.<sup>232</sup>

On the basis of this interpretive scheme, Shākya mchog ldan proclaims that sentient beings do not have buddha nature and are only metaphorically said to possess it. For bodhisattvas, buddha nature is conventional. Their wisdom provides them with the remedy against adventitious stains allowing the buddha qualities to come forth. Buddhas are ultimate buddha nature. Ultimate sentient beings, however, are buddhahood itself and thus identical with ultimate buddhas; in fact they are not sentient beings.<sup>233</sup>

From this perspective, ultimate buddha nature is the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu* which exists primordially and replete with all qualities such as the ten powers in buddhas and sentient beings alike. Conventional buddha nature is the possessor of newly acquired qualities. Likewise, conventional sentient beings are the beings of the six realms whereas ultimate sentient beings consists in their actual mode of abiding, the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu*. Ultimate buddha nature is the state of perfect awakening itself. Ordinary sentient beings merely have the potential (*rigs* : *gotra*), traditionally distinguished into the naturally present (*prakṛtistha*) and unfolded or blossomed (*paripuṣṭa*) spiritual potentials, neither of which qualify as buddha

<sup>231</sup> On this view, it would seem that the question of whether buddha qualities are innate or acquired can be reframed according to the types of cognition that perceive them: while consciousness beholds acquired qualities, wisdom beholds innate qualities.

<sup>232</sup> *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*. SCsb(B) vol. 13, 122<sub>3</sub>–123<sub>2</sub>: *zhes mchod par brjod cing rtsom par dam bca' nas | rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi brjod bya'i gtso bo gang yin pa dang | de 'dra de gnas gang du bzhugs tshul ji ltar yin pa dang | shes bya mtha' dag bden pa gnyis kyi tshul du 'du ba la mkhas par bya'o || dang po ni || stobs sogs yon tan mtha' dag gdod ma nas rang chas su yod pa'i chos dbyings ye shes so || gnyis pa de gang du bzhugs pa ni || sangs rgyas dang sems can mtha' dag go || gnas dang gnas pa gnyis ka la yang kun rdzob dang don dam gnyis gnyis te | kun rdzob pa'i snying po ni gsar du blangs pa'i yon tan can dang | don dam pa'i snying po ni gdod ma nas grub pa'i yon tan can no | kun rdzob pa'i sems can rigs drug po rnams dang | don dam pa'i sems can ni de dag gi gnas tshul du gyur pa'i chos dbyings ye shes so | See also (tr.) Komarovski 2006, 557.*

<sup>233</sup> Komarovski 2006, 531–35.

nature. The potentials are properties of sentient beings not of buddhas.<sup>234</sup> These distinctions pertain only to the conventional domain. From an ultimate perspective, “ultimate” sentient beings are the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu* and are thus not sentient beings, but rather their mode of abiding (*gnas tshul*); this is the ultimate buddha nature, precisely in the sense that ultimate reality is inseparable from buddha qualities and free from all obstructions.

Although this labyrinthine scheme not surprisingly attracted strong criticism, even during the author’s lifetime, a charitable interpreter might find some value in its attempt to ground the ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ lines of buddha nature exegesis in the two different possible modes of cognitive access to buddha nature: consciousness and wisdom. According to the binary hermeneutic outlined in his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary*, the ‘nature’ view is grounded in the perspective of wisdom (*ye shes*) which has access to the natural purity of buddha nature and discovers primordially present buddha-qualities. The ‘nurture’ view is grounded in the perspective of consciousness (*rnam shes*) which has access to buddha nature through the purification of the adventitious and the pursuit of newly acquired buddha-qualities. This distinction would seem to align perfectly with the distinction between the naturally present and unfolded spiritual potentials except that Shākya mchog ldan instead argues, with some justification, that both, being only “potentials” and not the actual buddha nature, are identified as “possessing stains” and hence applicable only to unawakened beings, whereas [buddha] nature is said to be free from stains.<sup>235</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje’s reaction to this scheme was less than charitable. He thinks it involves an erroneous, and potentially determinental, conflation of useful soteriological conventions. The gist of the Eighth Karma pa’s line of criticism is this: Buddhist soteriological distinctions are only linguistic conventions which nonetheless perform the important function of enabling one to distinguish what is to be relinquished from what is to be realized. To blur the boundaries of such distinctions is to commit serious category mistakes which are, in Mi bskyod rdo rje’s words, comparable to confusing medicine and poison. Left unchecked, they unavoidably result in “the collapse of all linguistic conventions” and in profound soteriological confusion.<sup>236</sup> To give one example, he says of Shākya mchog ldan’s idea of ‘ultimate *saṃsāra*’ that “it is a mistake to identify ‘ultimate *saṃsāra*’ with the *saṃsāra* appearing before conventional consciousness. Given that both the apprehended aspect—i.e.,

<sup>234</sup> According to Mathes, this is in direct contradiction to the RGV which explains (see RGV I.49 f. and the corresponding *vyākhyā*) that the buddha element (i.e., buddha-nature) is identical in all states, those of ordinary beings, bodhisattvas and Buddhas (RGV I.51: “Because it is endowed with the state of having adventitious faults, and naturally endowed with qualities, it is of an unchangeable nature—as it was before, so it is after.”). In other words Shākya mchog ldan goes here against the main dictum of Tathāgatagarbha literature, namely that all sentient beings possess buddha nature.

<sup>235</sup> *Rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, SCsb(A) vol. 13, 122<sub>6-7</sub>.

<sup>236</sup> See below, 230.

the outward orientation of consciousness—and the inward-looking self-awareness are adventitious stains, it is untenable to distinguish them in line with the two truths.”<sup>237</sup> Shākya mchog ldan was of course no longer alive when the Eighth Karma pa advanced such criticisms but we can well imagine him defending his liberal use of the qualifiers ‘conventional’ and ‘ultimate’ on the grounds that oppositional categories such as ‘*saṃsāra*’ and ‘*nirvāṇa*’ have no determinate reference anyhow. Hence, the states of affairs to which they refer are wholly determined by the particular mode of cognition—wisdom or consciousness—which takes them in. If precisely because of our predilection for unambiguous clear-cut concepts and categories we fool ourselves into thinking there is something determinate to which such conventions correspond, the road to nonduality will be a long one indeed.

Against the background of this rather extended discussion of Shākya mchog ldan’s intricate interpretations of buddha nature, let us finally specify how they relate to the buddha nature views he presents in line with his Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā exegesis. It is noteworthy that in *Undermining the Haughtiness*, he explains that the three phases of buddha nature of RGV I.47 describe three phases in the successive purification of the adventitious stains which shroud the luminous nature of mind or luminosity which is unchanging like space:

Should one ask what is explained in the *Uttaratantra* [RGV], the answer is that it explains the element of *\*sugatagarbha*, the nature of mind, luminosity, which is unchanging like space, showing [by means of] analogies [its] obscuration by nine types of stains. This, at the time of the ground is in an impure [state], while on the path it is in a partially pure [state], and at the time of fruition it is in an entirely pure [state]. Thus there does not exist any phenomenon which would not be encompassed by these three. Even though the nature of the three [states] is undifferentiated, the subdivision into three phases is made from the perspective of how things appear to the impure worldly mind co-existing [with ignorance and] its latent tendencies for mistaken perception.<sup>238</sup>

Not surprisingly, this account is consistent with Shākya mchog ldan’s aforementioned characterization of the meditative tradition (*sgom lugs*) of *Ratnagotravibhāga* exegesis which defines emptiness and buddha nature in terms of an affirming negation. It is noteworthy that the stance advocated here is precisely that from which Mi bskyod rdo rje criticized the buddha nature theories of ‘Gos Lo tsā ba and Shākya mchog ldan himself. What is striking is the extent to which the interpretation Shākya mchog ldan outlined in his Mahāmudrā texts contrasts with that which he delineated in most of his buddha nature works, namely, that

<sup>237</sup> See Volume II, translation: 113, critical edition: 116.

<sup>238</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17, critical edition: 29.

sentient beings do not possess buddha nature. The fact that at least one text in the author's Mahāmudrā trilogy and his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* belong to the same late period of his life leads us to surmise that he endorsed two quite different buddha nature views in line with two different doctrinal contexts: [1] One was a view reflecting his Sa skya heritage (and the Gsang phu scholastic tradition) which maintains that only buddhas and realized bodhisattvas possess buddha nature. [2] The other was a tantric, third *dharmacakra*, and Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā view which holds that buddha nature, and by extension *mahāmudrā*, is ever-present and unchanging in all beings, and that the only difference between buddhas and sentient beings is whether they recognize it or not. The author's liberal and rather extravagant deployments of the qualifiers 'conventional' and 'ultimate' with respect to buddha nature and related phenomena may perhaps be understood as an attempt to parameterize two otherwise irreconcilable interpretations.

We may recall that in the previously quoted Mahāmudrā text, Shākya mchog ldan equates buddha nature with *mahāmudrā*: “As for the delusion-free wisdom pertaining to this element, since it is mixed inseparably with mind as such which is cultivated through familiarization with it, the element of buddhas (*buddhadhātu*) is *mahāmudrā* as well.”<sup>239</sup> Elsewhere in this text he explicitly states that “the element of *\*sugatagarbha* is that which has been given the name *mahāmudrā*”.<sup>240</sup> It also bears noting that in his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (written in 1474, age 46) Shākya mchog ldan equates buddha nature with the imperishable great bliss (*mahāsukha*) of tantrism—both being descriptors of ultimate truth—and proceeds to list synonyms which include coemergent wisdom (*sahajajñāna*), a key term in Mahāmudrā discourses: “The great imperishable bliss that is totally beyond all elaborations is *\*sugatagarbha* because it is ultimate truth. Synonyms<sup>241</sup> for it are ‘emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ (*rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid : sarvākāravāropeta-sūnyatā*), ‘coemergent wisdom’ (*lhan skyes ye shes : sahajajñāna*), ‘Hevajra nature’, ‘Vajrasattva’ ‘*dharmadhātu* wisdom’, ‘*svābhāvika*’, “imperishable great bliss”, ‘Heruka of definitive meaning’ and ‘buddha nature’.”<sup>242</sup> By noting various synonyms of buddha nature

<sup>239</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 19, critical edition: 30.

<sup>240</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17, critical edition: 29.

<sup>241</sup> The idea of “synonymy” (*ming gi rnam grangs*) employed in Buddhist texts refers rather loosely to a near identity or ‘approximation’ (*paryāya : rnam grangs*) of semantic reference and meaning for two or more terms. In the present case, the terms in question are clearly not ‘absolute synonyms’ in the sense of having a strict identity of semantic reference in all contexts. John Lyons has noted that terms “may be described as **absolutely synonymous** if and only if they have the same distribution and are completely synonymous in all their meanings and in all their contexts of occurrence. It is generally recognized that **complete synonymy** of lexemes [i.e., their having the same descriptive, expressive, and social meaning in a specified range of contexts] is relatively rare in natural languages and that absolute synonymy, as it is here defined, is almost nonexistent.” Lyons 1981, 148.

<sup>242</sup> Rgyud bla'i rnam bshad sngon med nyi ma sogs chos tshan bzhi bzhugs so, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 143<sub>3</sub>: *spros pa kun las<sup>a</sup> rab 'das pa'i || zag med bde ba chen po ni || bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po ste || dam pa'i don gyi bden pa'o || de la ming gi rnam grangs ni || rnam kun mchog ldan stong nyid dang || zung du 'jug pa'i ye shes dang || rang*



drawn from diverse Buddhist discourses, non-tantric as well as tantric, Shākya mchog ldan wishes to draw attention to their shared semantic reference: an implicit invariant mode of being and awareness that is discoverable through soteriological praxis.

We have seen that a centerpiece of Shākya mchog ldan's *tathāgatagarbha* interpretations is his rejection of the view which equates buddha nature with a nonaffirming negation. He elsewhere explicitly states that buddha nature must be understood as that which is empty and inseparable from buddha qualities, a view which matches his depiction of Bka' brgyud buddha nature theory. In his *Replies to Queries of Blo mchog pa*, he attempts to validate this view by means of scripture and reasoning as follows:

When identifying buddha nature, to explain the nature of reality as an instance of a nonaffirming negation is not reasonable because [1] there are no scriptural citations which verify [this] but [2] there is reasoning which invalidates it. [1] As for the first, within the entire range of teachings and treatises which identify buddha nature, these are exclusively identifications from the perspective of [its] inseparability from qualities such as the [ten] powers.<sup>243</sup> But there is not a single

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*bzhin dgyes pa rdo rje dang || rdo rje sems dpa' zhes bya dang || chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes dang || ngo bo nyid kyi sku dang ni || 'gyur med bde ba chen po dang || nges pa'i don gyi he ru ka || sangs rgyas snying po zhes kyang bya ||*<sup>a</sup>text has *la*

<sup>243</sup> See RGV I.155: “The [buddha] element is empty of adventitious [stains], which have the defining characteristic of being separable; but it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities, which have the defining characteristic of not being separable.” RGV I.155, p. 763–4: *śūnya āgantukair dhātuḥ savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ | aśūnyo 'nuttarair dharmair avinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ* || As Asaṅga explains in the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*: “What is taught by that? There is no characteristic sign of any of the defilements (*saṃkleśa*) whatsoever to be removed from this naturally pure buddha element, because it is naturally devoid of adventitious stains. Nor does anything need to be added to it as the characteristic sign (*nimitta*) of purification, because its nature is to have pure properties that are inseparable [from it]. Therefore it is said [in the *Śrīmālādevīsūtra*]: “Buddha nature is empty of the sheath of all defilements, which are separable and recognized as something disconnected. It is not empty[, however,] of inconceivable buddha qualities, which are inseparable [in that it is impossible] to recognize [them] as something disconnected, and which surpass in number the grains of sand of the river Gaṅgā.” One thus perceives that ‘when something that does not exist in that [place],’ then ‘that [place] is empty of that [thing],’ and comprehends that something which remains exists [permanently] there as a real existent.” RGVV, 76.5–7: *kim anena paridīpitam | yato na kiṃcid apaneyam asty ataḥ prakṛtipariśuddhāt tathāgatadhātoḥ saṃkleśanimittam āgantukamalaśūnyatāprakṛtivād asya | nāpy kiṃcid upaneyam asti vyavadānanimittam avinirbhāgaśuddha dharmatāprakṛtīvāt | tata ucyate | śūnyas tathāgatagarbho vinirbhāgair muktajñaiḥ sarvakleśa-kośaiḥ | aśūnyo gaṅgāna-dīvālikāvyativṛttair avinirbhāgair amuktajñair acintyair buddhadharmair iti | evaṃ yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam iti samanupaśyati | yat punar atrāvaśiṣṭaṃ bhavati tat sad ihāstīti yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti* | Tib., D4025: 2267–2274: ‘dis ci bstan zhe na | gang gi phyir rang bzhin gyi yongs su dag pa de bzhin gzhegs pa’i kham *’di las | bsal bar bya ba kun nas nyon mongs pa’i rgyu mtshan ni ‘ga’ yang med de | blo bur ba’i dri ma dang bral ba ni ‘di’i rang bzhin yin pa’i phyir ro || ‘di la rnam par byang ba’i rgyu mtshan bzhag par | bya ba chung zad kyang yod pa ma yin te | rnam par dbye ba med pa’i chos dag pa’i chos nyid ni rang bzhin yin pa’i phyir ro || des na de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po ni rnam par dbye ba yod pa bral shes pa | nyon mongs pa’i sbrus thams cad kyis ni stong pa yin la | rnam par dbye ba med pa bral mi shes pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa’i sangs rgyas kyi chos gang gā’i klung gi bye ma las ‘das pa ni mi stong ngo zhes gsungs so || de ltar na gang zhig gang na med pa de ni des stong ngo zhes yang dag par rjes su mthong la | gang zhig der lhag mar gyur pa de ni de la rtag par yod do zhes*

explanation from the perspective of a nonaffirming negation. In the *Uttaratantra-sāstra* three points are presented by way of reasoning.<sup>244</sup> ... [2] Secondly, as for the invalidation, the aspect of such nonaffirming negating does not go beyond being an abstraction [object universal]<sup>245</sup> and a conceptual exclusion of other. Because it is therefore [merely] imagined, it does not qualify as the perfect [nature]. Inasmuch as it does not qualify as that, it cannot be explained as the actual [buddha] nature. The actual nature is explained as the essence of purity, bliss, permanence, and selfhood.<sup>246</sup>

On this view, the actual buddha nature is nothing but the perfect nature inseparable from buddha qualities; it is the naturally pure *dharmadhātu*. As he explains:

The identification of [buddha] nature may be explained unerringly as follows: That naturally pure sphere which is inseparable from the qualities such as the [ten]

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*yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes so* || The last sentence Asaṅga quotes is found with minor variation in the *Śūnyatānāmamahāsūtra*, D290 (i.e., *Cūḷasuññatasutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* 121), 500<sub>1</sub>: *gang la gang med pa de des stong ngo zhes bya bar yang dag par rjes su mthong yang | de la lhag mar gang yod pa de de la yod do zhes bya bar yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes te* || Though the wording is taken from the *Cūḷasuññatasutta*, Mathes argues (Mathes 2007, 12) that the meaning is different. The *itaretarāśūnyatā* as presented in that sūtra implied that a specific area is empty of elephants without negating elephants per se, whereas the emptiness of adventitious stains negates the existence of them altogether. On Mi bskyod rdo rje's interpretation of the CS passage, see below, 302 f.

<sup>244</sup> See RGV I.28: “Because the *saṃbuddhakāya* embraces, because suchness is undifferentiated and because they have the potential, all beings are always endowed with buddha nature.” *saṃbuddhakāyaspharaṇāt | tathatāvṛyati bhedataḥ | gotra taś ca sadā sarve buddhagarbhāḥ śarīriṇaḥ* || Shākya mchog ldan seems to read the term *buddhagarbhaḥ* in RGV I.28 as the “seed (*garbha*) of a buddha” and not as “buddha nature”.

<sup>245</sup> See Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* ad 1.2, in Hattori 1968, 177 where he identifies direct perception and inference as the two epistemic instruments or means of valid cognition and explains “it is direct perception which has objects which are particulars, whereas it is inference which has objects which are universals.” *rang gi mtshan nyid kyi yul can ni mngon sum yin la spyi'i mtshan nyid kyi yul can ni rjes su dpag pa'o* | Stated concisely, direct perception is a bare nonconceptual apprehension of reality, whereas inference deals with conceptual abstractions (universals) which Dignāga viewed as fictions created through a process of exclusion (*apoha*) that perceives an imputed sameness shared by similar things while disregarding their actual differences. For example, the concept “red” appears to correspond to some real feature of reality which all red things share (blueness) but is only a fiction constructed through excluding all that is not red.

<sup>246</sup> *Blo mchog dris lan*, SCsb(C) vol. 17, 743<sub>1-6</sub> : *sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i ngos 'dzin chos nyid med dgag gi cha la 'chad pa de ni rigs pa ma yin te | sgrub byed kyi lung med pa dang | gnos byed kyi rigs pa yod pa'i phyir | dang po ni | sangs rgyas kyi snying po ngos 'dzin pa'i bka' dang bstan bcos mtha' dag na | stobs sogs yon tan dang dbyer med pa'i cha nas ngos 'dzin pa sha stag tu yod pa yin gyi | med dgag gi cha nas 'chad pa gcig kyang med pa'i phyir | rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos na | don rnam pa gsum rtags su bkod nas | rigs can kun kham bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po dang ldan par bsgrubs pa zhig yod pa ... | gnyis pa gnod byed ni | de lta bu'i med dgag gi cha de | spyi mtshan dang | ldog pa gzhan sel las ma 'das pas kun btags yin pa'i phyir na yongs grub tu mi rung la | der mi rung ba ni snying po dngos su 'chad mi nus te | snying po dngos ni gtsang bde rtag bdag gi ngo bor bshad pa'i phyir |*

powers is called “buddha nature” (*buddhagarbha*). As is stated in the *Uttaratantra* treatise: [Query:] What is the *tathāgatagarbha* explained as a mode of emptiness? [Reply:] “Having the defining characteristic of being separable, the element is empty of the adventitious, but having the characteristic of not being separable, it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities”<sup>247</sup>. Also, that which is inseparable does not exist as something other than complete buddhahood. Thus, according to the same [text]: “The characteristic of liberation is to be inseparable from its qualities—complete, innumerable, inconceivable, and stainless as they are. That liberation is called *tathāgata*”.<sup>248</sup> And “In brief, since the meaning of this uncontaminated sphere is divided into four [aspects], it should be known from the four synonyms for it [such as] *dharmakāya* etc.”<sup>249, 250</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan’s vehement criticism of the “latter-day” theory of buddha nature as a nonaffirming negation was primarily directed at his Dge lugs pa coreligionists, though he also complained in his Mahāmudrā works that most of his Sa skya colleagues had come under the influence of this view. Also, in his *One Hundred and Eight Dharma Topics*, Shākya mchog ldan explicitly states that the reduction of the emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvākāravāropetaśūnyatā*) to a nonaffirming negation is the tradition of Tsong kha pa and his followers and that it stands in contradiction to all scripture, reasoning and the spiritual instructions<sup>251</sup>.

<sup>247</sup> RGV, I.155, p.763-4: *śūnya āgantukair dhātuh savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ | aśūnyo ’nuttarair dharmair avinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ ||*

<sup>248</sup> RGV I.87, p. 568-9: *sarva ākārair asaṃkhyeyair acyntyair amalair guṇaiḥ | abhinna lakṣano mokṣa yo mokṣaḥ sa tathāgata iti ||*

<sup>249</sup> RGV I.85, p.558-9: *dharmakāya ādi paryāyā veditavyāḥ samāsataḥ | catvaro anāsrave dhātau catur artha prabhedaḥ ||* The four aspects are the [1] *dharmakāya* in the sense that the inconceivable qualities of a buddha have never been separated from buddha nature, [2] *tathāgata* in the sense that the innate qualities are perfected, [3] ultimate truth in the sense that the quality of buddha nature is never failing, and [4] absolute *nirvāṇa*, that right from the beginning buddha nature is pure. See Takasaki 1966, 259–60.

<sup>250</sup> *Blo mchog dri lan*, SCsb(C) vol. 17, 7436–7445: *snying po’i ngos ’dzin ma nor bar bshad pa ni | dbyings rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa de nyid stobs sogs yon tan gyi chos rnams dang dbyer med par gyur pa de la sangs rgyas kyi snying po zhes zer ba yin te | ji skad du | rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos las | stong pa nyid kyi tshul la brjod pa’i de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po de gang zhe na | rnam dbyer bcas pa’i mtshan nyid can || glo bur dag gis khams stong gi || rnam dbyer med pa’i mtshan nyid can || bla med chos kyi stong ma yin || zhes gsungs pas so || dbyer med pa de yang rdzogs pa’i sangs rgyas las gzhan la yod pa ma yin te | de nyid las | rnam pa thams cad grangs med pa || bsam med dri med yon tan dang || dbyer med mtshan nyid thar pa ste || thar pa gang de de bzhin gshegs || zhes dang | mdor na zag med dbyings la ni || don gyi rab tu dbye ba bzhis || chos kyi sku la<sup>a</sup> sogs pa yi || rnam grags bzhir ni rig par bya || zhes gsungs shing || <sup>a</sup>text has las*

<sup>251</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb(B) vol. 13, 3345: “Identifying emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects as a nonaffirming negation is the system of the great Tsong kha pa and his followers. [This] contradicts all scripture, reasoning, and the *upadeśas*.” *rnam kun mchog ldan stong pa nyid || med par dgag la ngos ’dzin pa || tsong kha pa chen rjes ’jug lugs || lung rigs man ngag kun dang ’gal ||*

The idea that buddha nature and buddha qualities are inseparable from each other is fundamental to the author's view of the Buddhist path. As a practitioner settles into self-aware wisdom as it is personally realized and accumulates boundless merit, the qualities of buddha nature manifest with the attainment of buddhahood. This understanding of the path as the progressive disclosure of buddha nature and its qualities is clearly articulated in a stanza from his *Profound Thunder*<sup>252</sup> along with the relevant explanation from its auto-commentary, *The Rain of Ambrosia*:

- [1] Having understood that the mere awareness of clarity-emptiness,
- [2] Free from the subject and object, is the abiding mode of all phenomena,
- [3] One unites [this realization] with the boundless collection of merit, [and]
- [4] Spontaneously accomplishes the three *kāyas*, as [taught in] Asaṅga's texts.

The explanation [is as follows]:

- [1] View: to sever superimpositions by the reasoning of Gzhan stong;
- [2] Meditation: to rest in equipoise in personally realized wisdom;
- [3] Conduct: to thereby unite [that realization] with the collection of merit;
- [4] [Fruition:] to thereby spontaneously accomplish the *svābhāvikakāya* replete with all buddha-qualities, and the two form *kāyas* which manifest for others.<sup>253</sup>

Here, Shākya mchog ldan explicitly equates buddha nature with buddha qualities and specifies Gzhan stong as the view allowing the aspirant to pare away the reifications that obscure and distort it in order to reveal it. Once such superimpositions are eliminated root and branch, one settles into the wisdom of equipoise whereby the accumulations of merit are brought fully into play and the goal of the three *kāyas* replete with all qualities (*svābhāvikakāya*) and manifestations for others (*rūpakāya*) are spontaneously realized. This represents the fruition of the Mahāmudrā buddha nature view, a view consisting in the unity of manifestation and emptiness, of buddha nature's natural purity and its inseparable buddha qualities.

<sup>252</sup> Verses from *Nges don rgya mtsho'i sprin gyi 'bru sgra zab mo*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 2, 399<sub>3-4</sub>: *gsal stong gzung 'dzin bral ba'i rig pa tsam || chos rnam kun gyi gnas lugs yin shes nas || mtha' yas bsod nams tshogs dang zung 'brel ba || sku gsum lhun gyis grub pa thogs med gzhung ||*

<sup>253</sup> Commentary and verse from *Nges don rgya mtsho sprin gyi 'brug sgra zab mo'i rgyas 'grel bdud rtsi'i char 'bebs* (*The Rain of Ambrosia*). See Komarovski 2011, 371, n. 93, and *Shing rta chen po'i srol gnyis kyi rnam par dbye ba bshad nas nges don gcig tu bsgrub pa'i bstan bcos kyi rgyas 'grel*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol 2, 626<sub>1-4</sub>: *lta ba gzhan stong gi rigs pas sgro 'dogs bcad cing | sgom pa so sor rang gis rig pa'i ye shes la mnyam par gzhas nas | spyod pa bsod nams kyi tshogs dang zung du sbrel bas 'bras bu ngo bo nyid kyi sku yon tan kun tshang dang | gzhan snang du gzugs kyi sku gnyis lhun gyis grub bo zhes 'chad pa ni | gsal stong gzung 'dzin bral ba'i rig pa tsam || chos rnam kun gyi gnas lugs yin shes nas || mtha' yas bsod nams tshogs dang zung 'brel ba || sku gsum lhun gyis grub pa thogs med gzhung || ces pa'o*. See also tr. Komarovski 2011, 190. (translation is our own). Note that the Tibetan text has the root stanza after the commentary but is reversed in our translation.

## DIRECT PERCEPTION AND NONDUAL WISDOM

For Shākya mchog ldan, access to *mahāmudrā* is possible only through personally realized wisdom which is devoid of the dichotomy of apprehending subject and apprehended object. We may recall his repeated admonitions that *mahāmudrā* is beyond the domain of what is expressible in language and thought (*sgra bsam du brjod pa'i yul*) and can never be an abstraction or object-universal (*don spyi*) deducible by reasoning which investigates the ultimate. Central to Shākya mchog ldan's understanding of soteriological knowledge, the type of knowledge which realizes *mahāmudrā*, is the old Buddhist concept of personally realized wisdom (conveyed by the Tibet term *so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*) which had been in circulation from the time of the Pāli Canon onwards<sup>254</sup> and was widely adopted by Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars of virtually all traditions ever since.<sup>255</sup> The concept encapsulates the long-standing Buddhist conviction that the state of goal-realization (in this case, *jñāna* but elsewhere the *paramārthasatya*, the *pariniṣpanna*<sup>256</sup> etc.) must be 'personally experienced' to be fully understood.<sup>257</sup> On this understanding, wisdom is a matter of direct acquaintance and not discoverable in any other fashion.<sup>258</sup> In Shākya mchog ldan's words: "In particular, in [Sa skya Paṇḍita's] *Treasure of the Science [of Valid Cognition]* it is explained that "nondual wisdom" (*gnyis med ye shes*) is without object. In general, in the Mahāyāna it is explained that the term "personally realized" (*so sor rig pa*) [means that] apart from what arises in one's

<sup>254</sup> See for example Kapstein 2000 (112 f.) where the following passage from *Majjhimanikāya* I 265 (PTS ed.) is quoted: *upanīta kho me tumhe bhikkhave iminā sandiṭṭhikena dhammena akālikena ehipassikena opanayikena paccattaṃ veditabbena viññūhi* "Monks! You have been guided by me by means of this visibly true *dhamma*, that is timeless, ostensible, conducive [to the goal], and *to be personally realized by the wise*." (translation modified for the sake of consistency). Here, *paccattaṃ veditabba* is equivalent to the Sanskrit *pratyāmaveditavya* (°-*vedanīya*) and to Tibetan *so sor rang gis rig par bya ba*.

<sup>255</sup> The compound can be rendered as 'wisdom as it is personally realized' where the *so sor rang rig pa'i*-° (Skt. *pratyāmavid*-°) element of the compound is not intended adjectivally or nominatively but rather as a adverb-verb combination that qualifies the abstract noun *ye shes/jñāna*.

<sup>256</sup> It occurs a few times in Bhāviveka's *Tarkajvālā*, as for example its explanation of *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* V.5 where a Yogācāra opponent takes the perfectly established nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) to be an object of personal realization (*pratyāmavid*) in contrast to the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) which is an object of worldly knowledge.

<sup>257</sup> We can consider, for example, Candrakīrti's characterization of ultimate truth as the nature of things (*svabhāva*) that is to be known by each individual personally: "The ultimate reality of the buddhas is the nature of things itself. Because it is, moreover, non-deceptive, it is the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). It is to be known by each one personally." (*don dam pa'i bden pa*). *sangs rgyas rnams kyi don dam pa ni rang bzhin nyid yin zhing* || *de yang bslu ba med pa nyid kyi don dam pa'i bden pa yin la* || *de ni de rnams kyi so sor rang gis rig par bya ba yin no* || MA 108, 16–19.

<sup>258</sup> Thus when the *vyākhyā* on *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.7 characterizes "self-awareness" using the term *so so rang gis rig par bya ba* (*pratyāmavedanīya*), it is specifying a mode of awareness that must be personally realized to be known. See Mathes 2008, 542 n. 1838.

own cognition there is nothing else to be realized (*rtogs bya*).<sup>259</sup> He also observes that mind's nature is luminous in precisely the sense that it is known through the validity of one's own experience (*rang myong tshad ma*)<sup>260</sup> and that it is therefore a matter of directly perceiving it in oneself, as opposed to inference.<sup>261</sup> The author repeatedly emphasizes the indispensability of this self-validating first-personal attestation in the application of Buddhists teachings.

Shākya mchog ldan identifies this personally realized wisdom as a common thread running through tantric and non-tantric methods of goal-realization. In this regard, he cites the early Sa skya master Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan's (1147–1216)<sup>262</sup> assertion that personally realized wisdom constitutes the common denominator of both the emptiness of the Yogācāra tradition and the coemergent nature (*rang bzhin lhan skyes*) of the Mantra tradition, but adds that a crucial distinction must nevertheless be made between the nondual wisdom realized through studying and thinking, which is only the so-called represented ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*)<sup>263</sup>, and that is realized through the third tantric empowerment which is the nonrepresented ultimate (*rnam grangs pa min pa'i don dam*).<sup>264</sup>

<sup>259</sup> *Zab rgya'i snying po bsdus pa rin chen gter mdzod chos tshan brgyad pa*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 13, 187<sub>5-6</sub>: *khyad par gnyis med ye shes la || yul med rig pa'i gter las bshad || spyir yang theg pa chen po las || so sor rang rig ces bya ba || rang nyid rig par skyes tsam las || rtog bya gzhan med pa la bshad ||* See Komarovski 2011, 245–46 who, however, translates *so sor rig pa* as “individual cognition” and reads the last two lines as referring to a grammatical subject (“mind”) which is not included in the text and therefore misses the point of the definition.

<sup>260</sup> *Zab rgya'i snying po bsdus pa rin chen gter mdzod chos tshan brgyad pa*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 13, 187<sub>1-2</sub>: “Mind's nature is luminous because it is known through the validity of one's experience” *sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba || rang myong tshad mas rig pa'i phyir ||*

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 187<sub>3-4</sub>: “Because that luminous mind is precisely the valid means of direct perception, it does not logically follow that one's own mind remains hidden from [or imperceptible to] itself.” *od gsal ba yi sems de nyid || rang la mngon sum tshad yin phyir || rang blo rang la lkog gyur du || thal bar 'gyur ba ma yin no ||*

<sup>262</sup> One of the Five Venerable Founders (*rje btsun gong ma lnga*) of the Sa skya tradition who all lived during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>263</sup> The term *paryāya* (Tib. *rnam grangs*) as it occurs in the distinction between a represented ultimate (*rnam grangs [dang bcas] pa'i don dam* : [*\*sa*] *paryāyaparamārtha*) has a basic meaning of revolution, repetition, iteration, succession (s.v. MW) and refers, in lexical semantics, to a synonym (*śabdaparyāya*) and, by extension, to the conceptual representation of things. In regard to the two types of ultimate reality, the two senses of an approximation (or Ersatz) of reality and a conceptual representation are combined. Our rendering of these two as representational and nonrepresentational attempts to capture these two senses, namely, that [*\*sa*] *paryāyaparamārtha* is both a conceptualization of the ultimate truth and also a mere approximation or facsimile of it. Standard translations of the pair as conceptual/actual, interpretive/noninterpretive capture only the second sense of *paryāya*. On the meaning of these terms see Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 98, 229–30 and Tauscher 2003.

<sup>264</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 357<sub>2-4</sub>: “The noble Rje btsun Grags pa said that because the emptiness of the Yogācāra and the coemergent nature of the Mantra[yāna] both have a common ground, it is called “personally realized wisdom”. However, the nondual wisdom that is realized through the logic of studying and thinking is the representational ultimate whereas the wisdom that is realized through the third empowerment is the nonrepresentational ultimate.” *rnal 'byor spyod pa'i stong nyid dang || sngags kyi rang bzhin lhan skyes la || gzhi mthun yod phyir gnyis ka la || so sor rang rig ye shes zer || 'on kyang thos bsam rigs pa yis || rtogs pa'i*

The idea that the wisdom which is personally attested is without subject and object rekindles the question of what remains when objectifying and subjectivizing activities have ceased. It is clear from Shākya mchog ldan's criticisms of the nonaffirming negation view of the Dge lugs pas and affirmative metaphysical absolutism of the Jo nang pas that the answer can, strictly speaking, neither be a *something* nor a *nothing*. What remains is only the indivisible moment of cognition devoid of subject-object duality (*gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi shes pa skad cig gi cha med*):

[Query:] If it is the case that there is no duality of apprehended [object] and apprehending [subject], then what is there that remains? [Reply:] All that exists is only the indivisible moment of knowing devoid of the duality of the subject and the object.<sup>265</sup>

Intriguingly, while Shākya mchog ldan identifies this indivisible moment of nondual wisdom as the essence of the *dharmadhātu*<sup>266</sup>, he maintains that being a real existent (*dngos po*), it must be considered impermanent. This idea that nondual wisdom is an impermanent indivisible moment stands in stark contrast to Dol po pa's belief that wisdom lies beyond moments and even beyond time itself.<sup>267</sup>

In his *One Hundred and Eight Dharma Topics*, Shākya mchog ldan distinguishes the emptiness which is accessible to direct perception by way of an affirming negation from the emptiness deductively established by ways of a nonaffirming emptiness which is an abstraction (or object-universal) and therefore inaccessible to direct perception. Here, the former emptiness is provocatively specified by Shākya mchog ldan as a real entity or existent

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*gnyis med ye shes la || rnam grangs pa yi don dam dang || gsum pa'i dbang las rtogs pa yi || ye shes de la rnam grangs pa || min pa'i don dam zhes byar ni || rje btsun grags pa'i zhabs kyis gsungs ||*

<sup>265</sup> *Tshad ma rigs pa't gter gyi rnam bshad pa sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 19, 475–76: *gzung 'dzin gnyis ka med pa de lta na || lhag ma ci zhig yod ce na || gzung 'dzin med kyi shes pa skad cig gi cha med pa cig kho na yod do* | See also (tr.) Komarovski 2011, 231–32. Tsong kha pa had explained that an indivisible moment (*skad cig cha med* : *nirvibhāgaśāṇika*) is characterized as a state of affairs (*dngos po*) which individually lacks previous or later moments, in contrast to its antonym 'continuity' (*rgyun*) which is characterized as a state of affairs which individually comprises a multiplicity of moments (e.g., "a year"). See Alex Wayman, *A Millenium of Buddhist Logic* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1999), 262. The Vaibhāṣika school identified partless particles and partless moments as ultimate truth, a view rejected by Mahāyāna schools.

<sup>266</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje is more specific in identifying *dharmadhātu* as the ultimate object, self-awareness as the ultimate subject, and their integration as nondual wisdom. See his remark in *Rang la nges pa'i tshad ma zhes pa'i 'grel pa gnas lugs bdud rtsi'i nying khu* In: *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad*, vol. 3, 353<sub>6</sub>–354<sub>2</sub>: "The ultimate object is the *dharmadhātu* and the [ultimate] subject is self-awareness. When these become mingled, it is designated as nondual wisdom." *don dam gyi yul ni chos dbyings yin la | yul can ni rang rig yin zhing de 'dres par gyur tshe gnyis med kyi ye shes su ming 'dogs so |*

<sup>267</sup> This and other Jo nang views are examined in chapter four in light of Padma dkar po's criticism of them.

(*dngos po*), adding that this term signifies something efficacious. In other words, emptiness is something capable of performing a function (*don nus byed pa*), specifically the function of engendering buddha qualities. As he explains:

Because emptiness as a nonaffirming negation is nothing more than an abstraction [universal], there will never be a direct perception which cognizes it. Because any emptiness which constitutes a conceptualized object is an imputation, it is insufficient as a basis for [buddha-]qualities and only conventionally true. The emptiness which *is* a basis for qualities is explained in terms of the direct perception of *yogins* and the direct perception of self-awareness which are the cognizers of this [emptiness]. When through familiarization with such direct perception, it culminates in utmost vividness (*gsal ba rab*), the countless *kāyas* and wisdoms unite in this real existent (*dngos po*), emptiness. At that time, the two truths merge into one and this is called the unity of no more learning. There are many such explanations.

Although many declare that it is untenable to [call] emptiness a real existent (*dngos po*), they should not sing the senseless song of those who don't understand the Maitreya teachings or the Mantra doctrinal system. In the Maitreya teachings, the identification of emptiness is explained in the sense that [buddha nature] is empty of adventitious stains and not empty of the qualities such as the [ten] powers. In the Mantra [system], emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects is emphasized. Even this emptiness is the capacity to perform a function [efficacy], there being no explanation other than this. Should one ask what kind of function it performs, it is to engender all qualities on the level of buddhahood. Nothing else is required.<sup>268</sup>

Now, because emptiness construed as a nonaffirming negation cannot function as a basis for engendering qualities, it is nonefficacious, *viz.*, a nonexistent (*dngos por med*), and

<sup>268</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb(B) vol. 13, 429<sub>3</sub>–430<sub>2</sub>; *med par dgag pa'i stong pa nyid* || *spyi mtshan nyid las ma 'das phyir* || *de 'jal byed pa'i mngon sum ni* || *nam yang yod pa ma yin no* || *rtog pa'i yul du gang gyur pa'i* || *stong nyid kun tu btags pa'i phyir* || *yon tan rten du ma rdzogs shing* || *kun rdzob nyid kyi bden pa'o* || *yon tan rten gyur stong pa nyid* || *de 'jal byed po rnal 'byor pa'i* || *mngon sum nyid dang rang rig pa'i* || *mngon sum nyid du bshad pa yin* || *mngon sum gang yin de goms pas* || *gsal ba rab kyi mthar phyin tshe* || *sku dang ye shes bgrangs yas pa* || *stong nyid de'i dngos por gcig* || *de'i tshe na bden pa gnyis* || *gcig tu 'dres par gyur pa dang* || *mi slob pa yi zung 'jug ces* || *mang por 'chad pa de yin no* || *dngos la stong nyid mi rung zhes* || *zer ba mang mod byams chos dang* || *gsang sngags chos lugs ma shes pa'i* || *'chal gtam dbyangs su blang mi bya* || *byams pa'i chos su stong nyid kyi* || *ngos 'dzin blo bur dri ma yis* || *stong dang stobs sogs yon tan gyis* || *mi stong pa la bshad pa yin* || *sngags su rnam kun mchog ldan pa'i* || *stong pa nyid la gtso bor mdzad* || *stong nyid de yang don byed par* || *nus las gzhan la bshad pa med* || *don gang byed par nus zhe na* || *sangs rgyas sa yi yon tan kun* || *bskyed la de las gzhan mi dgos* ||



hence cannot lead to goal-realization, as useful as it might be for eradicating reifications. “Consequently, this nonexistent emptiness is taught in order to dispel superimpositions whereas the existent emptiness is taught in order to dispel deprecations. The emptiness as a real existent is identified as that wisdom which is free from apprehended and apprehender.”<sup>269</sup> Moreover, “although this emptiness is beyond all elaborations on the side of reasoning, it is experienced through personally realized wisdom and is thus ultimate truth as the ground of all qualities.”<sup>270</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan acknowledged that one cannot accept ultimate emptiness and the wisdom which realizes it as a real efficacious existent (*dngos po*) without also accepting its impermanence. This would appear to contradict statements in Buddha nature discourses that nondual wisdom or *dharmadhātu* is permanent, stable and enduring. As the author explains, however, the permanence alluded to in these contexts signifies the permanence of continuity (*rgyun gyi rtag*) which is, in Shākya mchog ldan’s eyes, not inconsistent with the view of indivisible moments (*skad cig cha med*) which disintegrate instantaneously upon arising:

Hence it is necessary to accept that [wisdom] is impermanent, because it is a real existent and must therefore be accepted as instantaneously disintegrating (*skad cig gis ’jig pa*). Nevertheless, this does not contradict its being explained as permanent in other contexts. It is explained that way with the permanence of continuity (*rgyun gyi rtag pa*) in mind.<sup>271</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan’s view of the momentary yet continuously present wisdom is indebted to the view of universal momentariness upheld in the Abhidharma philosophy of the Sarvāstivādin school according to which all phenomena only persist momentarily.<sup>272</sup> This is

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 427<sub>4-5</sub>: *de phyir dngos med stong nyid ni || sgro ’dogs sel ba’i phyir gsungs te || dngos por gyur pa’i stong nyid ni || skur ’debs sel ba’i phyir du’o || de ltar mtha’ gnyis las grol ba’i || stong pa nyid kyi dngos po ni || gzung dang ’dzin pa las grol ba’i || ye shes nyid la ’chad pa yin || ... stong nyid de yang rigs pa’i ngor || spros pa kun las ’das gyur kyang || so so rang rig ye shes kyis || myong phyir yon tan kun gyi bzhi || de nyid don dam pa’i bden pa ||*

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 428<sub>2</sub>: *stong nyid de yang rigs pa’i ngor || spros pa kun las ’das gyur kyang || so so rang rig ye shes kyis || myong phyir yon tan kun gyi bzhi || de nyid don dam pa’i bden pa ||*

<sup>271</sup> *Sdom gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba’i bstan bcos kyi ’bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 6, 498<sub>3-4</sub>: *de’i phyir mi rtag par yang khas len dgos pa yin te || dngos po yin pas skad cig gis ’jig par khas len dgos pa’i phyir | de lta na yang | skabs gzhan du rtag par bshad pa dang mi ’gal te || rgyun gyi rtag pa la bsams nas de ltar ’chad pa’i phyir |* Tr. Komarovski 2011, 231. See also Komarovski 2006, n. 39.

<sup>272</sup> “This view offered a scholastic interpretation of the Buddha’s doctrine that all things in the world of sentient beings were subject to causes and conditions, and therefore impermanent. Buddhists rejected the notion of substances with changing qualities, and affirmed instead that change was logically impossible. One can see how the impossibility of change, coupled with the doctrine of impermanence, served to prove that all things persisted for only a moment. Vasubandhu certainly shared this view, and he drew upon the premises of impermanence and the impossibility of change to establish momentariness in his own works. Yet he added a new twist to the

established both by the fact that all phenomena are impermanent inasmuch as that they are produced by causes and conditions and that change is impossible given that there are no substances with changing qualities (which would contradict the Sarvāstivādin view that an existent must have inalienable properties). For Shākya mchog ldan, an important corollary of this view is the supposition that the present moment of consciousness is alone existent and efficacious, whereas temporal segments—the past and future—are only nominally existent (*prajñaptisat*); they are imputations of the mind.<sup>273</sup>

Viewed according to the standard Abhidharma mereological (part-whole) analysis, just as seemingly partless atoms can be subdivided into smaller units on account of their spatial extension, it would seem to follow that apparently partless moments can be subdivided into smaller segments in terms of their temporal extension being divisible into past, present and future segments. Yet in contrast to spatially extended atoms, there are in fact no adjacent past and future segments co-existing with the present moment in that this latter is instantaneously disintegrating upon arising. The point here is not that past and future are fictional in the sense that the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist, but that they never could exist in the first place since there truly is only the instantaneously arising and disintegrating present moment. And conversely, the logic which tries to analyze this subtle and fleeting present moment of mind is unable to refute it. What withstands critical assessment then is the present moment of awareness without subject and object and devoid of past and future, and nothing besides it is established.<sup>274</sup> Shākya mchog ldan explains in his *One Hundred and Eight Dharma Topics*:

Though the adamant [nature] of mind (*sems kyi rdo rje*) does not exist from the standpoint of analysis by the reasoning based on studying and thinking, it cannot be posited as nonexistent either because it is beyond the domain of language and

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argument. What he added was that things *must* self-destruct, for destruction cannot be caused. And why not? Because a cause and a result are real entities, and the ostensible object of a destruction is a nonexistent. How, he asks, can nonexistence be a result?” See Jonathan Gold, “Vasubandhu”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition, online), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Last accessed Nov. 24, 2015.

<sup>273</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 185<sub>4-7</sub>: “[*Query*:] What is the past and the future? [*Reply*:] The past and the future are nominally existent (*prajñaptisat*). That is clear from the classical texts of the Śrāvaka school. Their tradition claims that the perdurance of a single moment in which temporal segments do not exist is the ultimate and is capable of performing a function. This being so, by deprecating all ‘existents’, isn’t there the flaw of falling into the extreme of nihilism? If one queries whether they are only conventionally existent, the answer is that “conventionally existent and ultimately nonexistent” was taught by the Buddha as a skillful means to distinguish between the two truths.” ’das dang ma ’ongs ci zhe na || ’das dang ma ’ongs btags yod du || nyan thos sde pa’i gzhung na’ang gsal || dus kyi cha shes yod min pa’i || skad cig gcig tu gnas pa ni || don dam don byed nus pa zhes || ’dod pa de yi lugs yin no || de lta yin na dngos kun la || skur pa btab pas chad pa’i mthar || ltung ba’i nyes pa yod min nam || tha snyad bden pa ci zhe na || tha snad du yod dam par med || ces pa bden gnyis rnam ’byed kyi || thabs mkhas sangs rgyas gyis gsungs pa ||

<sup>274</sup> See also Komarovski 2011, 231–38.

concepts. [*Query:*] Then what is the use of emphasizing the reasoning of self-emptiness? [*Reply:*] It is in order to relinquish the clinging to the adamant [nature] mind which is the perfect [nature].<sup>275</sup>

To summarize, by characterizing the temporality of wisdom as both momentary (since past and future cannot exist) and continuous (since it is ever-present as the capacity to function as the basis of qualities), Shākya mchog ldan plies a middle course between extremes of existence and nonexistence. Thus he can affirm, in the context of *Kālacakra* exegesis, that wisdom is the permanence of continuity given that “it is free from the centre and limits of origination and destruction inasmuch as it has no beginning and yet never ends”. But he can at the same time concede that wisdom is also momentary because it does not perdure apart from the streaming present, and in this sense does *not* exist as a real existent (*dngos por med*). Yet, one cannot help but notice that this latter claim explicitly contradicts the author’s thesis that wisdom and ultimate emptiness *is* a real existent because it has the efficacy to engender buddha qualities whereas emptiness as a nonaffirming negation is not because it lacks such efficacy. It would seem that in alternately characterizing wisdom as permanent yet impermanent, continuous yet momentary, and existent yet nonexistent, Shākya mchog ldan has painted himself into a metaphysical corner:

Since this [nondual wisdom] is free from a centre or limit of origination and destruction inasmuch as it has no beginning and yet never ends, it is precisely the permanence of continuity. Yet because it is wisdom itself, it does not perdure for a moment and it therefore does not exist as a real existent (*dngos por med*). There are no objects of knowledge other than *E* and *Vaṃ* and these alone are the cause and basis of the qualities of buddhahood. These alone are ultimate truth. All phenomena from these are conventional. ... Because all conventional realities are empty of their own essences, they do not exist. However, this one ultimate truth is not empty of its own essence. Nonetheless, grasping it as any of the four extremes, obscures it. *E Vaṃ* is free from all concepts and words.<sup>276</sup>

<sup>275</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 187<sub>1-2</sub>: *sems kyi rdo rje’ang thos bsam gyi || rigs pas brtags pa’i ngor med kyang || med par bzhaḡ nus ma yin te || sgra rtog yul las ’das phyir ro || ’o na rang stong rigs pa la rtsal du bton pas ci bya na || yongs grub sems kyi rdo rje la || zhen pa spong pa’i phyir yin no ||* See Komarovski 2011, 233. (translation our own)

<sup>276</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 13, 463<sub>6</sub>–464<sub>3</sub>: *’di la thog ma yod min zhiḡ || nam yang zad pa med pa’i phyir || skye ’jig mtha’ dbus dang bral bas || rgyun gyi rtag pa nyid dang ni || ye shes nyid phyir skad cig tu || mi gnas phyir na dngos por med || e vaṃ gnyis las ma gtogs pa’i || shes bya gang yang yod min ciḡ || ’di nyid kho na sangs rgyas kyi || yon tan rnams kyi rgyu dang rten || de de kho na don dam bden || de las gzhan chos kun rdzob bo || ... kun rdzob bden kun rang rang gi || ngo bo stong phyir yod min mod || don dam bden gcig rang ngo bos || stong pa min mod mtha’ bzhi po || gang du bzung kyang de la sgrib || e vaṃ rtog brjod kun bral ba ||*

By concluding that only conventional truth is empty of own essence, whereas ultimate truth alone is *not* empty of its own essence, Shākya mchog ldan seems to endorse a strong Gzhan stong position. Yet, as we may recall from our assessment of his view of the two truths, he elsewhere maintains that both conventional and ultimate truths are empty of own essence.

The foregoing examination of Shākya mchog ldan's views on soteriological knowledge indicates some of the problems he faced in articulating a view of wisdom that could account for its enduring yet momentary character while avoiding the extremes of existence and nonexistence. In some ways, his accounts of wisdom in the Mahāmudrā works at least have the virtue of circumventing various perplexities about the ontological status of wisdom and instead emphasizing its soteriological value and efficacy. For in the Bka' brgyud he encountered a tradition which accords first-hand experience and direct perception primacy over conceptual analysis and rational inference, a tradition in which the role of personally realized wisdom takes center stage. In a certain sense this wisdom is self-validating—it must be experienced to be known—and questions of its ontological status are secondary to this 'truth' of first-personal attestation. As Shākya mchog ldan states in his *Undermining the Haughtiness*:

As for the way to cultivate deep insight, there is meditative equipoise and post-meditation. In meditative equipoise, when any concepts of existence and quiescence that spring up are looked at by another conceptual analysis (*rtog dpyod*), the former dissolve in the expanse. When that conceptual analysis, the looker, is seen by the third insight, then seer and seen both mingle into the very essence of deep insight. On that occasion, one speaks of “the realization of deep insight which is clear and nonconceptual”. At that time, all unreal conceptualizations cease, not to mention the concepts on the side of the antidotes which must also cease because they are precisely the grasping for [and believing in] discursive signs.<sup>277</sup>

It is from this perspective that Shākya mchog ldan strongly rejects the criticism that settling the mind directly in the mere “experiencing awareness”, the lucid and luminous mind, without prior analysis amounts to a kind of voluntary stupefaction, a stagnant tranquility which lacks the capacity to counteract the afflictions. On the contrary, this settling meditation, if properly applied, elicits the wisdom of first-hand experience which alone has the capacity to eradicate the ‘great delusion’ underlying all afflictions until not a trace of them remains:

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<sup>277</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 21, critical edition: 31.

It is said that settling the mind in the mere experiencing awareness (*myong rig*) without having undertaken prior analysis, is [just] a stagnant (*lteng po*) calm abiding which does not function as a remedy against afflictions. My response to that is if that were the case, then the stages of luminosity of *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Guhya-samāja* would also be just that [state of blankness] because there is no analysis in these contexts [either]. Thus this luminous mind is indeed great wisdom. When the realization of this intensifies, there is no trace of great delusion (*rmongs chen*) which remains.<sup>278</sup>

## THE GREAT SEAL IN SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN'S MAHĀMUDRĀ TRILOGY

We are now in a position to examine in some detail how Shākya mchog ldan articulates and defends the views and practices of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition. More specifically, we shall consider why he came to the conclusion that this tradition represented the culmination of all Buddhist paths and offered the best prospect of resolving two central issues in the interpretation and practice of Buddhism which he repeatedly drew attention to in his philosophical writings: [1] the reconciliation of philosophical analysis and meditative experience in the context of coordinating the diverse teachings and methods delineated in the tantric and non-tantric vehicles of Buddhism; and [2] the realization, within the arena of spiritual praxis, of a unity (*zung 'jug : yuganaddha*) of manifestation and emptiness which transcends the extremes of existence and nonexistence, affirmation and negation. Our assessment of the author's Mahāmudrā exegesis is largely confined to his Mahāmudrā trilogy, though parallel treatments in other works will be considered where they cast additional light on key subjects treated in the trilogy.

## MAHĀMUDRĀ: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā trilogy consists of three independent works which present and defend the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings. Listed by their abbreviated English titles in the sequence they occur in the different editions of the author's collected writings, they are: *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others* (PCdn), *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas* (PCgn) and *The Great Ship of Unity* (PCks).<sup>279</sup> The works were

<sup>278</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan lta ba so so'i ngos 'dzin tshul nges don gnad kyi lde mig*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 103<sub>6</sub>–104<sub>1</sub>: *dpyad pa sngon du ma song bar || myong rig tsam la sems 'jog pa || de ni zhi gnas lteng po ste || nyon mongs gnyen po mi 'gro zer || de la kho bos lan gdab pa || de ltar yin na bde mchog dang || gsang ba 'dus pa'i 'od gsal gyi || rim pa'ang de nyid du 'gyur te | de skab dpyad pa med phyir ro || des na rang sems 'od gsal ba || 'di nyid ye shes chen po ste || 'di yi rtogs pa gong 'phel na || rmongs chen gud du lus pa med ||*

<sup>279</sup> The full titles are: [1] *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others by the Wheel of Brahma: A Treatise Clarifying Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed*) (PCdn), [2] *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas, a Treatise Called Distinguishing Mahāmudrā*,

all written at the behest of disciples whose names are mentioned but whose identities remain largely unknown. Taken collectively, the three works may be regarded as a series of attempts to clarify both what Mahāmudrā is and what it is not. Let us consider each of these points in turn. For the author, *mahāmudrā* is a cover term which, like various other doxographical rubrics such as *prajñāpāramitā*, *madhyamaka*, and *rdzogs chen*, refers not only to a Buddhist tradition of exegesis and practice, but also to an integrated set of soteriological methods, and the state of goal-realization they lead to. As a descriptor of goal-realization, *mahāmudrā* refers to certain deep features of human reality—nonduality, luminous clarity, imperishable great bliss—that are thought to characterize this realization.

In *Undermining the Haughtiness*, Shākya mchog ldan identifies *mahāmudrā* as the all-pervading natural luminosity of mind which is both the definitive meaning of Pāramitāyāna and the doctrinal nucleus of the Mantrayāna. Since the luminous nondual wisdom with which Mahāmudrā is chiefly concerned is the *conditio sine qua non* of sūtras and tantras alike, Shākya mchog ldan argues that this tradition deals directly with one of the key points of both Pāramitāyāna and the Mantrayāna: “When this key point is understood, then regardless which of the distinct paths of means for realization of the definitive meaning as taught in the Pāramitā[yāna] and the Mantra[yāna] are entered, it will be the very best.”<sup>280</sup> In line with these two traditions, “the wisdom of *mahāmudrā* which, untouched by distraction due to all sorts of intellectually contrived elaborations... is explained as [1] the very wisdom free from subject and object which is the definitive meaning of the third *dharmacakra* in the Pāramitā[yāna] and [2] the *E* and *Vaṃ*, and the emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvā-kāraṇaropetaśūnyatā*) of the Unsurpassed [Yoga] tantras and what is identified as the essence in the *Hevajra* and other [tantras]”.<sup>281</sup> In the same text, the author also equates *mahāmudrā* with ultimate *bodhicitta* of Mahāyāna and the adamant mind (*cittavajra*) which he says is identified as a concept of definitive meaning in the *Guhyasamāja* tantra.

We may recall that the author equates *mahāmudrā* with various soteriological ideas endemic to third *dharmacakra* discourses such as the unchanging *\*sugatagarbha*, the nature of mind, and luminosity, especially as these ideas are elucidated in the RGV.<sup>282</sup> We may also

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(Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed ces bya ba'i bstan bcos [or] Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges) (PCgn); [3] *Distinguishing Mahāmudrā or The Great Ship of Unity: A Treatise Dispelling Errors in the Interpretation of Mahāmudrā of Scripture and Reasoning* (Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed [or] Lung rigs gnyis kyi phyag rgya chen po'i bzhed tshul la 'khrul pa sel ba'i bstan bcos zung 'jug gi gru chen) (PCks). For details concerning the dating, literary form, authorship, and copying of these works, see Volume II, 11–13.

<sup>280</sup> See PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 15, critical edition: 27.

<sup>281</sup> Shākya mchog ldan starts for example his *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others* with the following words: “I pay homage to the unwavering *mahāmudrā*, the naturally pure perfect buddha-mind—unadulterated by the host of adventitious stains—which has been ever-present in all for all time”, see PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 14, critical edition: 27.

<sup>282</sup> See PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17 f.

recall that in *Undermining the Haughtiness*, Shākya mchog ldan explained that “the element which is buddha nature (\**sugatagarbha*) has been given the name *mahāmudrā*”<sup>283</sup> because it is the element of both sentient beings and buddhas. In terms of Buddhist tantras, *mahāmudrā* is equated with the continuum (*rgyud*) of ground, path, and fruition and, as he adds elsewhere, with imperishable great bliss (*mi zad pa’i bde ba chen po*) which marks the culmination of the tantric empowerments. More specifically, he explains that Sgam po pa described Mahāmudrā as the Self-sufficient White Remedy (*dkar po gcig thub*) with the understanding that “when one has arrived at the supramundane path, all the qualities of purification such as the [thirty-seven factors conducive to] awakening, loving kindness, compassion etc., which carry the name of “great bliss” are of one taste with the essence of *dharmadhātu* wisdom”.<sup>284</sup>

In establishing family resemblances between the concept of *mahāmudrā* and kindred soteriological ideas from different currents of Buddhist exegesis, we have noted that Shākya mchog ldan equates *mahāmudrā* with: [1] “mind’s luminous nature” as distinguished from ordinary mind in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, [2] the beginningless element (*dhātu*) characterized as the source of all phenomena in the *Abhidharmasūtra*, [3] the purity of mind which is said in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to be the basis of all the unfounded mental engagements stemming from delusion, and [4] mind as such (*sems nyid*) which Saraha’s *Dohākoṣa* declares to be the seed of everything (*saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*) and to be a supreme wish-granting gem since it bestows all the fruits of one’s desires. Indeed, Saraha’s *Dohā Trilogy* and related works are regarded as the *loci classici* of this tradition, while the Maitreya works and tantras are regarded as sharing the same affirmative viewpoint.<sup>285</sup>

To further elucidate the meaning of *mahāmudrā*, Shākya mchog ldan distinguishes between *mahāmudrā* as perceived object and *mahāmudrā* of the perceiving mind.<sup>286</sup> The former comprises luminosity that is the innate nature of mind, known also by the terms natural coemergent wisdom, \**sugatagarbha*, great bliss and natural *dharmakāya*. The latter, which he characterizes as “the wisdom which experiences *mahāmudrā* as [its] object,” comprises [1] a mimetic or counterfeit (*rjes mthun pa*) wisdom that exists even in ordinary people and [2] an authentic one (*mtshan nyid pa*) that is present in noble beings. This unusual distinction is perhaps best viewed in conjunction with Shākya mchog ldan’s view that sentient beings do not have buddha nature (*buddhagarbha*) but only a potential (*rigs*) or nature of sentient beings (*sattvagarbha*). This comparison is supported by a related distinction he draws between two modes of cognition which *mahāmudrā*-wisdom is said to comprise: [1] consciousness (*rnam*

<sup>283</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17, critical edition: 29.

<sup>284</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 52, critical edition: 75.

<sup>285</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 17, 20, 50 etc.

<sup>286</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 50–51, critical edition: 73–74, under the heading 2.1.1.2: What is *mahāmudrā* in terms of the perceived object, and 2.1.1.3. What is *mahāmudrā* in terms of the perceiving mind?

*shes*) which is in the grip of delusion and [2] the wisdom (*ye shes*) of realization which is without delusion.<sup>287</sup>

This distinction enables the author to specify, in line with Rnog Blo ldan shes rab's buddha nature interpretation, how beings in the grip of dualistic perceptions and conceptions have within them the possibility to be liberated from saṃsāric states. Shākya mchog ldan on this basis explains that although *mahāmudrā* “has been drawn into saṃsāric states, it is impossible for it to mix inseparably with saṃsāric phenomena.” Moreover, since it is “therefore present as the very possibility to one day be separated [from these states], *mahāmudrā* is the element of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*) too.” Next, he explains that since the delusion-free wisdom “is mixed inseparably with mind as such which is cultivated through familiarization with it, the element of buddhas (*buddhadhātu*) is *mahāmudrā* as well.”<sup>288</sup> To put it somewhat differently, *mahāmudrā* is *in* the world but not *of* the world; it is the wisdom which is a precondition of, and therefore *available* within, all conscious states, though not readily *accessible* to sentient beings.

Concluding his discussion of immanent buddha nature or *mahāmudrā*-wisdom, the author states: “In this way it is understood both through scripture and reasoning that all sentient beings are sealed by *mahāmudrā*.”<sup>289</sup> At various points in the trilogy he elaborates on the meaning of this ‘sealing’ or ‘marking’. In his *The Great Ship of Unity* he states that “both the subject and object are called Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*), because one does not perceive anything knowable at all that is not marked and sealed by this *mudrā*.”<sup>290</sup> Elsewhere in the trilogy he explains: “There is nothing anywhere that is not sealed with the seal of this [wisdom]. Consequently, in designating this with the name ‘Great Seal’, the proper name (*dnag os ming*) has both an explanation and application. There is no contradiction in it being [both] a metonymic term [based on its association with a seal] and a proper name [based on the actual nature of reality denoted].”<sup>291</sup> Stated simply, *mahāmudrā* refers both to the *mahāmudrā* experience itself and the comprehensive and enduring impression it is said to make upon the person who has had it.<sup>292</sup>

<sup>287</sup> PCdn, see Vol II, translation: 18, critical edition: 29 “The wisdom of *mahāmudrā* is [both] the consciousness which is seized by delusion and the wisdom of realization which is without delusion.”

<sup>288</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 19, critical edition: 30.

<sup>289</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 20, critical edition: 30.

<sup>290</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 51, critical edition: 73.

<sup>291</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 20, critical edition: 30.

<sup>292</sup> This invites comparison with Heidegger's statement in *On Time and Being*: “Being, by which all beings as such are marked, is presencing,” where he understands presencing to refer to the disclosure or letting-be present which is Being itself. See Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 5.



Shākya mchog ldan regards *mahāmudrā* and the many synonyms of it gathered from the sūtras and tantras as being of definitive meaning (*nges don*), and not of merely provisional meaning (*drang don*), and as referring to ultimate reality not the conventional. On this view, *mahāmudrā*, luminosity, buddha nature, and the nature of mind are precisely the goal which the practitioner discovers by way of first-hand experience once the reifications that obscure it are dispelled. Such concepts refer not to superimposed conventional epiphenomena that are eliminated in the realization of nonaffirming emptiness, but rather to deep features of reality which withstand such elimination and with which the aspirant becomes directly acquainted in meditation. They are, to borrow a distinction of N.S.C. Northrop, concepts by intuition rather than concepts by postulation<sup>293</sup> in that their sense derives from phenomena that are immediately apprehended rather than from postulates in a deductively formulated theory.

Defining *mahāmudrā* as nothing less than ultimate truth, Shākya mchog ldan takes pains to distinguish it from a variety of misinterpretations he attributes to his coreligionists. In his *Ascertaining the Intent*, the author specifies five mistaken identifications and indicates why each should be rejected: [1] The first is the identification of *mahāmudrā* with meditation on emptiness by means of analysis employing \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka reasonings which is rejected on the grounds that it takes *mahāmudrā* as a nonaffirming emptiness, a mere conceptual abstraction or other-exclusion (*gzhan sel*), where it is actually primordial wisdom free from extremes. [2] The second is the Buddhist tantric identification of *mahāmudrā* with the unity of bliss and emptiness attained by filling the *cakras* via the stages of ‘blessing from within’ (*svādiṣṭhāna*) which is rejected on the grounds that tantric means were not primarily emphasized by Sgam po pa. [3] The third is the identification of *mahāmudrā* with “seeing naked mind free from all thoughts” found among certain proponents of the three Great Ones (Madhyamaka, Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen)<sup>294</sup> which is rejected on the basis of Sgam po pa’s contention that the three “are not uncontrived because they are understood only through extraneous conditions, whereas the self-sufficient [white remedy], the self-occurring wisdom is...not something newly contrived.” [4] The fourth is the identification of *mahāmudrā* with meditation in which “the seeing mind is not found by searching for it” advocated in the Zhi byed (Pacification) system which he rejects on the grounds that it has its own separate line of transmission (from Dwags po Mahāmudrā) and tends to reify naked awareness along the lines of the Sāṃkhya absolute Consciousness-Spirit. Finally, [5] The fifth is the identification of

<sup>293</sup> According to Northrop, a concept by postulation is one the meaning of which in whole or in part is designated by the postulates of the deductive theory in which it occurs. An example is the concept “blue” when taken in the sense of the frequency or wavelength in electromagnetic theory. A concept by intuition is one which denotes, and the complete meaning of which is given by, something which is immediately apprehended. An example is the concept “blue” in the sense of the perceived colour. See Northrop 1947, 82–83.

<sup>294</sup> On the three Great Ones (*chen po gsum*), see 115, n. 299.

*mahāmudrā* with the all-ground (*kun gzhi*) construed as the “creator of all” (*kun byed*)<sup>295</sup> in the Rdzogs chen Mind series (*sems sde*) tradition which he rejects on the grounds that a *mahāmudrā* equated with the *ālayavijñāna* which classical texts regard as “unreal conceptualizing” ends up being “the laughing-stock of all scholars”.

Some of these mistaken identifications are especially noteworthy. The first one reflects the author’s persistent worry about the encroachment of the nonaffirming emptiness view into the Mahāmudrā hermeneutics of his time. It is by now clear that he considered this to be one of the most widespread and pernicious intellectual trends of his age. At different points in his Mahāmudrā trilogy, he objects to the growing acceptance of this position not only among his fellow Dge lugs pa and Sa skya pa colleagues at Gsang phu, but also among the so-called latter-day Bka’ brgyud pa adherents. In the closing remarks of his *Great Ship of Unity*, he says of latter-day Sa skya interpreters that “although there have been many eloquent expositions by the author [Sa paṇ] himself as well as his bright followers, they became saturated with the stains of exegetical fallacies imputed by many people with inferior intelligence”. He goes on to state that these people assert that “the object of the view of Mahāmudrā of unity is nothing but self-emptiness, a nonaffirming negation. [Yet] to claim that great bliss taken as an object of a nonaffirming negation is a [mere] concept is not the doctrine of [Sa paṇ].”<sup>296</sup>

When Shākya mchog ldan later turns his attention to how latter-day Bka’ brgyud adherents had misrepresented their own tradition, the first targets of his criticism are those who think emptiness as the object of the Mahāmudrā view should be taken as a nonaffirming negation in line with the Rang stong tradition and that such realization should be preceded by logical analysis according to Niḥsvabhāvacāra Madhyamaka canons of reasoning. This, he argues, is completely at odds with Saraha’s *dohās* which far from emphatically negating self-aware wisdom after the fashion of Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti emphatically affirm it:

[*Assertions:*] Some of the latter-day Dwags po pa Bka’ rgyud tradition-holders think that the identification of emptiness, the object of this Mahāmudrā view, is explained as the aspect of a nonaffirming negation in accordance with the Rang stong Madhyamaka tradition. And they think that as an adjunct to giving rise to the view which realizes that, it must be preceded by the logical reasonings of the Niḥsvabhāvacāra [Mādhyamikas]. Others still appear to be of the opinion that although the object of the view must be characterized as coemergent wisdom, as an adjunct to realizing this, it must be preceded by the analysis through the

<sup>295</sup> See Volume II, translation: 35, critical edition: 44.

<sup>296</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 69, critical edition: 84.

reasoning that at first there is no object, and subsequently that, since there is no object, there must also be no subject, and so on.

[*Refutations*:] It is not tenable to [construe] emptiness which is the object of the view presented in the *dohās* as a nonaffirming negation because while the claim that this Madhyamaka view is self-aware wisdom was emphatically negated by the teachers Bhāviveka and Candra[kīrti], it was emphatically affirmed in these [*dohās*]. Neither do [the *dohās*] conform with Rang stong vis-à-vis the method of negating the object of negation because in this Rang stong system, even coemergent wisdom when analyzed by reasoning about one and many turns out to be nonexistent, along with [its] aspects of mere bliss and clarity, whereas in the [*dohās*], “mind as such alone” is not negated and a statement [stanza 20ab] from [Saraha’s] *Dohā in Forty [Stanzas]* outlined the grave drawbacks of ascertaining self-luminous self-awareness in terms of self-emptiness:

By analyzing mind in terms of one and many,  
Abandoning luminosity, one goes into worldly existence.<sup>297</sup>

Were it necessary that this view be preceded by logical reasoning, this would contradict the statement that “since the three Great Ones are views that are intellectually fabricated, we do not maintain them here.”<sup>298</sup>

It is worth recalling that the author attributed the assertion that “Mahāmudrā is not touched by the three Great Ones (*chen po gsum*)” to Sgam po pa himself.<sup>299</sup> In his *Undermining the Haughtiness*, the author provides a short explanation of this statement:

<sup>297</sup> *Caryādohākoṣagītikā* (*Spyod pa’i do ha mdzod kyi glu*) D2263, verse 20a–b, p.27b<sub>6-7</sub>. *gcig dang du ma sems la dpyad pa yis || gsal ba spangs nas srid pa dag tu ’gro ||*

<sup>298</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 67, critical edition: 82–83.

<sup>299</sup> Shākya mchog ldan summarizes the “three Great Ones”, Madhyamaka (*dbu chen*), Mahāmudrā (*phyag chen*), and Rdzogs chen in his *Sdom gsum rab dbye’i le’u gsum pa rig ’dzin sdom pa’i skabs kyi ’bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 6, 85<sub>4-6</sub>: “This Mahāmudrā view cannot be touched by the three Great Ones: [1] It is not touched by Great Madhyamaka which is the pinnacle of the Vehicles of Characteristics. [2] It is also not touched by Rdzogs chen which is called “Atiyoga,” [representing] the culmination the Ancient Ones (*rnying ma*) from among the Ancient and New Secret Mantra [traditions]. [3] And it is also not touched by the Mahāmudrā, the signless Completion Stage (*mtshan med kyi rdzogs rim*) which [represents] the culmination of the New [Secret Mantra tradition]. The three Great Ones can be evaluated by the intellect and expressed in words, whereas the realization of mind as such (*sems nyid*) of our [tradition] is beyond the domain of the intellect.” *phyag rgya chen po’i lta ba ’di la | chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa bya ba yin te | de yang mtshan nyid theg pa’i yang rtser ’gyur pa | dbu ma chen pos ma reg | gsang sngags la gsar rnying<sup>a</sup> gnyis las | rnying<sup>b</sup> ma’i mthar thug ni | a ti yo ga zhes bya ba rdzogs pa chen po yin la | des kyang ’di la ma reg | gsar ma’i mthar thug ni | mtshan med kyi rdzogs rim phyag rgya chen po yin la | des kyang ’di la ma reg ste | chen po gsum ni | blos gzhal | tshig gis brjod pa yin la | nged kyi sems nyid rtogs pa ’di ni blo’i yul las ’das pa’i phyir | zhes gsung ngo |* <sup>a</sup>text has *snying*; <sup>b</sup>text has *snying* See also D. Jackson 1994, 35 and Karmay 1988, 197 where the statement that *mahāmudrā* is superior to the three “great ones” attributed to Sgam po pa is examined based on the *Dgongs gcig* commentary of Rdo rje shes rab (pp. 403–4) which Karmay attributes to Shes rab ’byung gnas. The *Dgongs pa*

It is said that the Mahāmudrā of this tradition is not touched by the “three Great Ones”<sup>300</sup> of Buddhists and is therefore superior to them. In that regard, some say that what is thought to be untouched by the “three Great Ones” would make it *ipso facto* inferior. This qualm requires [careful] consideration. [1] [Great Madhyamaka:] Taking a space-like nonaffirming emptiness analytically deduced as an object by means of reasoning does not qualify [as *mahāmudrā*] because it is not beyond words and concepts. [2] [Great Seal:] Because the realization of *mahāmudrā* elucidated in this [Dwags po tradition] does not *necessarily* depend upon the path of Mantra[yāna], it is not explained here as the wisdom of the Mantra[yāna]. [3] [Great Perfection:] The wisdom of the Great Perfection is also not taught here because its actualization is accomplished by means of many preparations and ritual arrangements.<sup>301</sup>

In a certain sense, this interpretation of Sgam po pa’s claim that Mahāmudrā is not touched by the three Great Ones summarizes three broad trends of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist thought that Sgam po pa and his successors, not least of all Shākya mchog ldan himself, considered to be at odds with Mahāmudrā aims and principles: [1] taking nonaffirming emptiness analytically deduced through Madhyamaka reasoning as the object of Mahāmudrā meditation; [2] taking Mantrayāna aims and procedures as prerequisites of Mahāmudrā realization; and [3] taking ritualistic methods—via ritual preparations and paraphernalia—as necessary means of Mahāmudrā realization.

#### MADHYAMAKA, MANTRAYĀNA AND MAHĀMUDRĀ

It remains for us to offer some preliminary conjectures why a leading scholar of the Sa skya tradition came to hold the Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā system in such high regard and defend it against no less an authority than Sa skya Paṇḍita. To provide doctrinal background for Shākya mchog ldan’s view that this system represents the summit of Indo-Tibetan traditions, it may be helpful to look at an overview of central Tibetan soteriological systems the author sketches in a work entitled *Replies to Queries of the Great Meditator Ye shes bzang*

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*gcig pa* (2009, 233) of ’Jig rten sum mgon (1143–1217) who was a direct student of Sgam po pa contains the following line regarding the “the great ones” which seems to be the earliest extant occurrence of *chen po gsum*: “Not being touched by the three Great Ones is the highest realization.” *chen po gsum gyis ma reg rtogs pa’i mchog* |

<sup>300</sup> See also Volume II, translation: 36.

<sup>301</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 16, critical edition: 28.

po.<sup>302</sup> There he identifies three principal “views dedicated to dispelling the great darkness of delusion” by means of “understanding which realizes selflessness”. These are the views of Madhyamaka, tantras and pith-instructions (*upadeśa*). Although he reasons that all three traditions share the goal of realizing selflessness, he draws attention to crucial differences in how they understand the nature of this selflessness or emptiness and the means to its realization. Shākya mchog ldan subdivides the Madhyamaka tradition into the Yogācāra and the Niḥsvabhāvavāda. Of these two, the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka explains the intent of Prajñāpāramitā according to the third *dharmacakra* and emphasizes Maitreya’s works and Nāgārjuna’s hymnic corpus.<sup>303</sup>

Summarizing the Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka tradition, he again stresses its espousal of the view of emptiness as a nonaffirming negation ascertained through reasoning and its rejection of personally-realized wisdom. The type of knowledge which this tradition *does* attribute to buddhas is an omniscience which possesses the power to predict future events and other supernatural faculties. The tradition’s goal of sheer emptiness is realized through studying, thinking and a type of “familiarization through dedicated mental engagement” which Shākya mchog ldan refrains from calling “meditation”.

The views of both Bhavya and Candrakīrti are ultimately in accord. Because even the emptiness to be experienced is not explained as other than what is ascertained through reasoning, it is only a nonaffirming negation. ... Because it is nothing more than a nonaffirming negation, they do not accept self-aware wisdom. In this case, they acquiesce with whatever conventional appearances are commonly known. From accumulating the stores [of merits and knowledge], the two bodies which manifest for others are spontaneously present at the time of fruition. As for the wisdom of perfect buddhahood, it does not arise in conventional personal perception (*rang snang*). However, because by knowing the abiding mode of everything, there is the capacity for prediction, there is omniscience. The method

<sup>302</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan lta ba so so'i ngos 'dzin tshul nges don gnad kyi lde mig*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 99–104. Written in 1491 at the age of 63.

<sup>303</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 99<sub>4–6</sub>: “All [Tibetan masters] agree that the great darkness of delusion is to be dispelled by means of understanding that realizes selflessness. Selflessness, the means of realizing it, and the identification of realizing selflessness [have] three subdivisions: the Madhyamaka exegetical tradition, the tantras, and pith-instructions. The first, which comments on the intent of the middle *dharmacakra*, has two subdivisions: the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka and the Niḥsvabhāva-Madhyamaka. The first explains the intent of the *Prajñāpāramitā* according to the third *dharmacakra* and emphasizes the texts of Maitreya and the hymnic corpus of Nāgārjuna.” *kun kyang bdag med rtogs blo yis || rmongs pa'i mun chen sel bar mthun || bdag med pa dang de rtogs pa'i || thabs dang bdag med rtogs pa yi || ngos 'dzin dbu ma'i gzhung lugs dang || rgyud dang man ngag dbye bas gsum || dang po 'khor lo bar pa yi || dgongs 'grel dbye bas rnam gnyis te || rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma dang || ngo bo nyid med smra ba'o || dang po 'khor lo gsum pa yis || sher phyin dgongs pa bkral ba dang || byams pa'i gzhung dang klu sgrub kyi || stod pa'i tshogs kyi dbang du byas ||*

of realizing the space-like nonaffirming negation is studying, thinking and familiarization through dedicated mental engagement. Thereby the wisdom of the Path of Seeing arises. In that instance, it is explained as the view which intellectually understands emptiness directly, but because the object-possessor [i.e., subject] mingles with emptiness, it is described as ‘seeing yet not seeing’.<sup>304</sup>

Turning to the Mantrayāna tradition, Shākya mchog ldan explains how its account of emptiness and the means of realization are superior to sūtric paths in general, but fully compatible with view of third *dharmacakra* scriptures which likewise emphasize wisdom. What differentiates both these strands from the Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka view is that their object of meditation is not the emptiness arrived at through analysis, but is rather the nondual adamantine wisdom, or what the tantras call the causal continuum (*rgyu'i rgyud*).

Secondly, the experience of emptiness explained in the tantric scriptures of the Mantra [tradition] should here be explained as being in accord with the scriptures of the Maitreya doctrine (*byams chos*) and [those of] his followers. In these, the emptiness of analysis by means of reasoning is not taught as the object of meditation. Rather, by familiarizing oneself with emptiness which is precisely the adamantine wisdom (*ye shes rdo rje*), conceptualizing of subject and object is dispelled. The primordial knowing (*gdod ma'i shes pa*) which is free from the subject-object duality is the causal continuum...<sup>305</sup>

The author goes on to explain that the Mantrayāna path proceeds through the Generation Stage (*b skyed rim*) which realizes a simulated wisdom (*dpe'i ye shes*) which recognizes the unity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and culminates in the Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) which realizes innate or coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*) through the

<sup>304</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 100<sub>2-7</sub>: **legs ldan zla ba grags pa** ste || gnyis po'i lta ba mthar thug mthun || nyams su myong bya'i stong nyid kyang || rigs pas gtan la gang phab pa || de las gzhan du ma bshad phyir || med par dgag pa kho na'o || ... med par dgag las ma 'das phyir || rang rig ye shes khas mi len || de lta na yang kun rdzob kyi || snang ba ji lta grags pa bzhin || tshogs bsags pa las 'bras dus su || gzhan snang sku gnyis lhun grub bo || rdzogs sangs rgyas kyi ye shes la || rang snang kun rdzob mi 'char yang || kun gyi gnas tshul mkhyen nas ni || lung ston nus phyir thams cad mkhyen || med dgag nam mkha' lta bu de || rtogs pa'i thabs ni thos bsam dang || mos pa yid byed kyi goms pa || de las mthong lam ye shes 'byung || de tshe stong nyid mngon sum du || rtogs blo lta bar 'chad mod kyang || yul can stong nyid du 'dres pas || ma mthong ba la mthong zhes brjod ||

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 101<sub>1-2</sub>: gnyis pa sngags kyi rgyud gzhung nas || bshad pa'i nyams myong stong pa nyid || byams chos rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i || gzhung dang mthun par 'dir bshad bya || 'di la rigs pas dpyad pa yi || stong nyid sgom byar ma bshad de || stong nyid ye shes rdo rje nyid || goms pas gzung 'dzin rtog pa sel || gzung 'dzin gnyis dang bral ba yi || gdod ma'i shes pa rgyu yi rgyud ||

blessing from within (*rang gi byin rlabs*), a distinguishing feature of Mantrayāna which non-tantric traditions do not possess.<sup>306</sup>

The author finally turns his attention to the various traditions of pith-instructions (*upadeśa*) that flourished in Tibet and identifies Mahāmudrā as supreme among these. That said, he maintains that the view of Zhi byed, Rdzogs chen, and Mahāmudrā have as their common frame of reference one's own mind in its luminous clarity which is primordially uncontaminated by adventitious stains, and which accords with the sūtras and tantras. The pith-instruction traditions also stand united in maintaining that the means of realization is personally-realized wisdom:

Thirdly, there appeared many renowned pith-instruction traditions in the Snowy Land such as Rdzogs chen, Mahāmudrā, Zhi byed, Lam 'bras, the Five Stages (*Pañcakrama*), and the Six-limbed [Yoga] (*Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) and so on... As for the view of Mahāmudrā, since it is untouched by the three Great Ones, it is superior to all. The means of realizing it is devotion to the teacher.<sup>307</sup> ... The object of the view of Zhi [byed], Rdzogs [chen], and Mahāmudrā is ascertained to be the same. It is declared to be one's own mind alone, luminosity, which is uncontaminated by adventitious stains from the very beginning. This is in accordance with all sūtras and tantras. The insight which realizes it is the view which is explained in the sūtras and tantras as "wisdom which is personally realized" and "that which is endowed with the excellence of all aspects".<sup>308</sup>

Shākya mchog goes on to explain that the goal of coemergent wisdom may be approached via the Pāramitā system which requires preliminary reasoning through studying and thinking or the Mantra system which requires preliminary empowerments and other ritual preparations. He concludes that if neither is followed, the student may succumb to a fool's

<sup>306</sup> See *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 101<sub>5-6</sub>.

<sup>307</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 102<sub>2-4</sub>: *gsum pa gangs can 'dir grags pa'i || man ngag lugs mang snang gyur pa || rdzogs dang phyag rgya che zhi byed || lam 'bras rim lnga sbyor drug sogs || ... phyag rgya chen po lta ba la || chen po gsum gyis ma reg pas || kun las khyad 'phags de rtogs pa'i || thabs ni bla ma'i mos gus so ||*

<sup>308</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 103<sub>1-2</sub>: *zhi phyag rdzogs pa rnam gsum gyi || lta ba'i yul ni gcig tu nges || gcig bu rang sems 'od gsal ba || gdod ma nyid nas blo bur gyi || dri mas gos pa med der 'chang || 'di ni mdo rgyud kun dang mthun || de rtogs pa yi shes rab ni || lta ba yin te mdo rgyud las || so sor rang rig ye shes dang || rnam kun mchog ldan nyid du bshad || rtogs byed thabs la sa skya pas || dpyad pa 'ga' zhi gmdzad pa dang || gzhan gyis kyang ni dpyod pa'o || dang po lhan skyes ye shes de || rtogs byed pha rol phyin pa dang || gsang sngags gang gi lugs su byed || gnyis ka min na blun po yi || zhi phyag rdzogs gsum bsgom par song || pha rol phyin pa'i lugs byed na || thos bsam rigs pa sngon 'gro dgos || gsang sngags yin na dbang bskur dang || rjes su 'brel ba dgos shes gsungs ||*

meditation of Zhi byed, Rdzogs chen or Mahāmudrā.<sup>309</sup> In the Mahāmudrā trilogy, however, he explicitly states that the Mahāmudrā view elicited through tantric means does not in all cases need to be preceded by analysis of discriminating insight. In the *Great Ship of Unity*, he contends that the tantric preparation is superior because “it discovers in an instant the nonpoisonous view [resulting from] the three means [i.e., the teacher’s blessing, invitation of wisdom beings, and empowerments] and because the former tradition’s discovery through discriminating insight remains bound up with conceptualization.”<sup>310</sup>

Elsewhere in the same text Shākya mchog ldan goes so far as to say that ideal recipients of Mahāmudrā teachings—simultaneists (*cig char ba*) who have gained maturation through familiarization in past lives—“do not need to rely on the ruse (*mgo skor*) of preliminary practices and so forth in this life” and can be shown the main practice (*dngos gzhi*) right from the start.<sup>311</sup> Regarding the method of teaching Mahāmudrā to a suitable recipient, Shākya mchog ldan has this to say:

Not only are there no explanations that [these] require the preliminary analysis by means of discerning insight, but more [significantly] there are many explicit statements that if there is such analysis, *mahāmudrā* becomes intellectually fabricated. These [instructions] do not explain the necessity of the preliminary conferral of empowerments to introduce one to the ground of the clearing process and the clearing process [itself]. Not only is that explanation not given, but they also do not consider [Mahāmudrā] to be the sort of view that derives from empowerment. Rather, during the main practice phase, at the moment when there appears nothing other than simply resting in the state of nongrasping called “not thinking of or pondering on anything”, such an individual who is generally [thought to be] of dull capacity—[i.e.,] one who has neither gone through the purification of studying and thinking about the view of the Pāramitāyāna nor experienced even the preparations for embarking on the path of the Vajrayāna—is then shown this Mahāmudrā view by the teacher. When this [view] has indubitably arisen, then to such a student whom it is not appropriate to categorize as “stupid”, the teacher without imparting any of the sequence of trainings [according to different] capacities shows [him], in the preliminary phase of preparation, [how] to let the triad of body, speech, and mind rest naturally in their uncontrived state.<sup>312</sup>

<sup>309</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb(A) vol. 23, 103<sub>3-4</sub>.

<sup>310</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 51, critical edition: 74.

<sup>311</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 51, critical edition: 75.

<sup>312</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 59, critical edition: 78.



Noteworthy in the above passage is the author's explicit endorsement, in the case of the simultaneist candidate, of a relatively unmediated pedagogical method and learning style which circumvents Pāramitāyāna intellectualistic preparations as well as Vajrayāna ritualistic preparations. With this he takes a clear stand against Sa skya Paṇḍita's central claim that tantric empowerments are a necessary condition of *mahāmudrā* realization. In the Bka' brgyud tradition, such preparations may be sufficient but they are not necessary. That said, the author does at this point sound a warning that "if by that [absence of thought] alone one has become immersed in a state of nongrasping such that it appears to be something called 'the real Mahāmudrā,' then that which has the character of a mental factor in a phase of "not pondering and not thinking anything" belonging to the mind stream of a stupid person is [just plain] ignorance because it is a mental factor which is diametrically opposed to the wisdom of awareness."<sup>313</sup>

Returning to Shākya mchog ldan's concluding remarks concerning the traditions of pith-instructions, he cautions that if one looks at the pith-instruction traditions through the lens of general treatises, one can easily form the mistaken impression that one is dealing here with a Cittamātra doctrinal system. It is therefore imperative to look at the pith-instruction traditions as a *sui generis* category emphasizing the unity of clarity and emptiness and not as an offshoot of the traditional Buddhist philosophical systems:

When all the pith-instruction systems are explained according to the ordinary classical scriptures, they [seem to be] nothing more than the Cittamātra tradition. [However] when they are explained here in accordance with the pith-instruction traditions [themselves], it is stated that the luminous mind in the ground phase consists in illusory appearances and is described as "luminosity". [Yet] however things appear, their nonexistence is described as "empty". These are precisely what [is known as] unity.<sup>314</sup>

#### MAHĀMUDRĀ AND WHAT REMAINS (*LHAG MA : AVAŚIṢṬA*)

At the start of this chapter, we drew attention to a distinction Shākya mchog ldan makes between [1] traditions such as the Nihsvabhāvavāda which negate the existence, even conventionally, of any kind of any mode of cognition or wisdom that withstands critical

<sup>313</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 59, critical edition: 78.

<sup>314</sup> *Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 23, 104<sub>1-4</sub>: *man ngag pa kun mthun mong kyi || gzhung bzhin 'chad na sems tsam pa'i || lugs las gong du 'das pa med || man ngag lugs bzhin 'dir bshad na || gzhi dus 'od gsal ba yi sems || sgyu ma'i snang bar bshad pa la || gsal ba zhes ni brjod pa yin || ji ltar snang ba der med pa || de la stong pa zhes su brjod || zung du 'jug la'ang de nyid de ||*

assessment or remains (*lhag ma*) upon realizing buddhahood, and [2] traditions such as the Alīkākāravāda and Siddha Mahāmudrā traditions which not only emphatically affirm this remnant transcendent awareness but also explicitly identify it with buddhahood itself. Let us now consider how Shākya mchog ldan evaluates this remainder in relation to Buddhist philosophies and the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā in particular.

We have seen that Shākya mchog ldan found the idea of the remainder fruitful for differentiating between affirmative (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) strains of Buddhist thought. At the same time it provided him and many other Tibetan exegetes with a powerful hermeneutical instrument for addressing a set of overlapping issues concerning the nature and character of goal-realization: what, if anything, remains upon realizing emptiness and what this remainder is like? Among these were the problems of [1] whether phenomena are best deemed to be empty of own [nature] (*rang stong*) or empty of other (*gzhan stong*), [2] whether a buddha can be said to have any cognition or wisdom at all, [3] what happens during states of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), particularly the cessation of mind (*cittanirodha*), and [4] whether realization is ineffable and in what sense.<sup>315</sup> In a text entitled *Elucidating the Definitive Meaning of the Five Maitreya Teachings*, Shākya mchog ldan distinguishes Rang stong and Gzhan stong according to their views of the remainder:

There are two ways of explaining the Middle Way of the Great Vehicle: by means of self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and by means of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*). As for the first, the nonexistence of any remainder whatsoever of any real existent (*dgnos po*) called a “middle one” that is left over when all extremes of discursive elaboration have been negated is simply designated as “middle” on account of the impossibility of there being any object that is not empty of intrinsic essence. As for the second, subject and object do not exist but nondual wisdom does exist because it is that existent real entity which is left over following the elimination of the two extremes of superimposition and deprecation of such [wisdom]. It is [also] called a “middle”.<sup>316</sup>

<sup>315</sup> See the third chapter on Mi bskyod rdo rje where these points are examined against the background of traditional Indian Buddhist views on the remainder which have their inception in the *Cūḷasuññatasutta* (*The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness*) of the Pāli Canon.

<sup>316</sup> *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba*, SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 11, 15–16: *theg pa chen po'i dbu ma 'chad tshul la gnyis te | rang stong gi sgo nas dang | gzhan stong gi sgo nas 'chad tshul lo || dang po ni | spros pa'i mtha' thams cad bkag pa'i shul na dbus ma zhes bya ba'i dngos po ci yang lus pa med pa zhig la dbu ma zhes bya ba'i tha snyad btags pa tsam yin te | rang gi ngo bos mi stong pa'i shes bya mi srid pa'i phyir | gnyis pa ni | gzung 'dzin gnyis med pa dang | gnyis med kyi ye shes yod pa ste de lta bu'i sgro skur gyi mtha' gnyis bsal ba'i shul na yod pa'i dngos po zhig la ni dbu ma zhes bya |* Tr. by Komarovski 2011, 216, with minor changes just for the sake of consistency in terminology.

The distinction could scarcely be drawn more sharply: the Rang stong Madhyamaka tradition rejects any remainder at all, any middle left over when the extremes are negated, whereas the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka accepts a remainder, nondual wisdom, as a real entity, a “middle”, that is left over following the elimination of extremes of superimposition and deprecation. It is evident by now that Shākya mchog not only favours the pro-remainder position over the contra-remainder position but that he regarded the latter as a powerful paradigm for understanding the Mahāmudrā view.

Shākya mchog ldan maintains that the Mahāmudrā system, like the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka system, offers a fruitful avenue for discovering and affirming the remainder, which is *mahāmudrā* itself. In *Undermining the Haughtiness*, he explains that *mahāmudrā* is precisely the remainder left over when consciousness fails to find anything at all with which to identify itself. “When the searching consciousness has not found anything by means of reasoning, the wisdom that is left behind as the remainder is identified as *mahāmudrā*. Having understood this properly, it should be realized.”<sup>317</sup> In proceeding to identify this remainder with Saraha’s description of mind alone as the seed of everything which grants all the fruits of one’s desires, it is evident that the remainder, mind as such, is the fertile *fons et origo* of all realizations. Far from being a sheer emptiness devoid of anything whatsoever, the remainder is characterized, paradoxically, as an emptiness of fullness and fecundity which is deemed to be of definitive meaning.

This idea that what remains in the wake of Madhyamaka reasoning or the Mahāmudrā investigation of consciousness is a fecund emptiness, an “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” (*sarvākāravaropetaśūnyatā*), is clarified in the author’s *Undermining the Haughtiness*:

When one experiences that definitive meaning which constitutes the remainder left behind in the wake of such analysis according to that [reasoning corpus], then that is also designated accordingly.<sup>318</sup> To illustrate with an example, [the Buddha]—after explaining in the middle *dharmacakra* that all phenomena are simply empty of own-nature—taught in the third *dharmacakra* that the unchanging perfect nature which is empty of that [self-emptiness] is the definitive meaning. Likewise, one doesn’t find any core of a banana plant when one searches for it, yet in the middle of the unfolded leaves [bananas] nonetheless ripen as sweet fruits<sup>319 320</sup>.

<sup>317</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 26, critical edition: 34.

<sup>318</sup> In other words, one experiences what remains, wisdom, which is of definitive meaning, and then designates it accordingly, i.e., as being of definitive meaning.

<sup>319</sup> The example is found in the *Dharmadhātustava*, D1118, verse 14, 64a.

<sup>320</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 21, critical edition: 31.

We can conclude this brief assessment of Shākya mchog ldan's view of Mahāmudrā and the remainder by reiterating that, for him, what the ascertainment of the ultimate reveals is better described in terms of sheer presence than sheer absence, and this presence *simpliciter* is precisely what is known as *mahāmudrā*.

#### THE PROBLEM OF CESSATION

The Great Seal meditation of the ignorant,  
It is taught, usually becomes a cause of animal birth.  
If not that, then they are born in the formless realm,  
Or else they fall into the śrāvakas' cessation.<sup>321</sup>

Sa skya Paṇḍita, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*

An important soteriological implication of the thesis that nondual wisdom is left as a remainder following the ascertainment of the ultimate is that the cessation of mind (*cittanirodha*)<sup>322</sup> and its associated mental factors comes to be seen not as a condition of cognitive oblivion but rather as a condition of cognitive disclosure since it allows an unconditioned state of lucid awareness undistorted by subjectifying and objectifying activities to reveal itself. This is a point which has long been emphasized and defended by Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma thinkers.<sup>323</sup> The idea that there is a structurally primary mode of awareness that comes to light precisely in the absence of reifying activities allowed Shākya mchog ldan and other scholars to view the state of cessation as a precondition of goal-realization. This he clarifies in *Undermining the Haughtiness* where, in response to the query "isn't it impossible to end such [dualistic] appearances without employing analysis by means of reasoning?," he answers that it is indeed possible: "For example, when deep insight is realized in the state of cessation (*nirodasamāpatti*), there is no opportunity for the eightfold [consciousness to operate]."<sup>324</sup> To put it simply, nondual wisdom kicks in the very moment that mind and mental factors, or the eightfold consciousness, shut down.

<sup>321</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.161: *blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs || min na gzugs med kham su skye || yang na nyan thos 'gog par ltung ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (tib.); 117 (Eng.).

<sup>322</sup> For a most interesting study of cessation of mind (*cittanirodha*) theories in Indian Buddhism with particular attention to Abhidharma and Yogācāra meditative systems, see Griffiths 1991. There has not yet been a study of such doctrines in Madhyamaka, tantric or indigenous Tibetan contemplative systems though such a study would be of considerable interest.

<sup>323</sup> Some Rnying ma arguments are discussed in Higgins 2013, chapter three.

<sup>324</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 22, critical edition: 31.

Arguing along these lines, Shākya mchog ldan can offer a cogent reply to Sa paṇ's claim that Mahāmudrā meditation may cause its practitioners to “fall into the śrāvakas' cessation.”<sup>325</sup> “this refers *not* to the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) and the *nirvāṇa* without remainder (*nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*)<sup>326</sup>, but to a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation or to the state of nonideation (*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*).”<sup>327</sup> In his *Great Ship of Unity*, however, he says that “in the statement that through meditating on *mahāmudrā* one falls into cessation, what cessation does that pertain to? Does it pertain to the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) and the *nirvāṇa* which is without remainder? In any case, since actualizing these requires a path of transcendence, the view would be pure.”<sup>328</sup> Here the author distinguishes the transcendent state of cessation or “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” in which only dualistic thoughts and superfluous afflictions cease, allowing the underlying nondual wisdom to manifest, from the annihilating state of cessation alluded to by Sa paṇ which suggests a more comprehensive termination of mental activity, akin to turning off a main breaker switch so that “all the lights go out”. While this latter state is seen as a kind of voluntary state of oblivion which leaves habitual tendencies dormant and ready to be reactivated once suitably stimulated following the return to consciousness, the former is equated with spiritual awakening in which all dualistic thoughts and tendencies are shut down once and for all.

Interestingly, the author goes on in *Undermining the Haughtiness* to suggest that the annihilationist version of cessation which is “not linked with the two stages of Mantra[yāna] has to be the Madhyamaka view.” As he explains:

If [this view] is not linked with accumulating merits for incalculable eons, then it is termed “śrāvakas' cessation” which means passing into a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation. This is because whatever deficiencies (*nyes dmigs*) remain [intact] in attaining the limit of reality (*bhūtaḥkoṭi*) insofar as one has not engaged in the triad of perfecting, maturing, and purifying are [still] present in that [*nirvāṇa* of annihilation]. It is also because it is explained that even [bodhisattvas] when they have

<sup>325</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161d: *yang na nyan thos 'gog par ltung* || See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.). This again continues from the preceding quotation.

<sup>326</sup> To account for the gap between the buddha's attainment of *nirvāṇa* at age thirty-five and his final *parinirvāṇa* upon his death some forty-five years later, the Early Buddhist scholastic tradition distinguished between a “*nirvāṇa* with remainder” (*sopadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*) or “*nirvāṇa* associated with afflictions,” a state achieved prior to death where “the remainder” refers to the mind and body of this final existence, and a “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” (*anupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*) which is attained at the time of death when the causes of all future existence have been extinguished, ending once and for all the chain of causation of both physical form and of consciousness and leaving nothing to be reborn.

<sup>327</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 61, critical edition: 79.

<sup>328</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 50, critical edition: 73.

for a long time stagnated in the equipoise of emptiness on the eighth level, not to mention beginners, need to be aroused from that [state] by the victors [buddhas].<sup>329</sup>

To put it concisely, a state of cessation unsupported by the means of familiarization with nondual wisdom leads to a state of self-induced cognitive annihilation.

Finally, on the basis of this distinction between liberating and annihilating states of cessation, Shākya mchog ldan is able to repudiate the charge that not thinking and mental nonengagement will invariably result in the type of mental and moral quietism that Tibetans had long associated with the Sino-Tibetan Chan meditative teachings of Heshang Moheyan. In his reply to a question whether the allegedly nonconceptual character of *mahāmudrā* is not also itself a concept about directly perceiving the innate (*sahaja*), the author states:

Not exclusively. Because [*mahāmudrā*] is free from all unreal conceptualizing, it is comparable to the transworldly direct perception. For example, during the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), since the seven groupings of consciousness along with their associated factors cease, there is mental nonengagement and freedom from all grasping of characteristics. The meditation of Heshang is not like that. In this regard, some proclaim that the state of cessation in the Cittamātra tradition is wisdom in the Madhyamaka. [The response is:] the state of cessation of the Niḥsvabhāva is a nonaffirming negation, [whereas] because there is wisdom in the state of cessation of the Alīkāravāda Madhyamaka, this is called the “state of cessation of concomitant [mental factors]”. This is taken as something rotten by the latter-day people.<sup>330</sup>

Notable here is the contrast the author draws between the Niḥsvabhāva-Madhyamaka interpretation of the state of cessation as a nonaffirming negation and the (in his eyes) much-maligned Alīkāravāda Madhyamaka interpretation which regards it only as a “cessation of concomitant mental factors” which allows wisdom to surface. The author has here turned the table on \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka-based critics of *amanasikāra* by showing that it is precisely the Niḥsvabhāva version of “cessation of mind” that leads to Heshang-like oblivion. By contrast, the Alīkāravāda version of cessation clears the way for the recovery of transworldly direct perception and nondual wisdom.

<sup>329</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 61, critical edition: 79.

<sup>330</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 39–40, critical edition: 46.

## CONTESTED METHODS OF REALIZATION

As the pedagogical methods of Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition came increasingly under fire during the classical period of Tibetan Buddhist exegesis, a primary target was Sgam po pa's endorsement of siddha-based nongradual means of direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to the nature of mind which seemed to call into question the indispensability of various tantric or non-tantric preliminaries. It may be recalled that Shākya mchog ldan entertained the possibility that certain suitable recipients of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings, the so-called simultaneist (*gcig char ba*) type, may directly realize the nature of mind, *mahāmudrā* without recourse to tantric or non-tantric preliminaries. For others, however, preliminaries of either the outer Pāramitāyāna or inner Mantrayāna were considered indispensable. In his *Great Ship of Unity*, he explains that “there are two types of learned persons: those who trained their mind-stream through the Perfections Vehicle and those who fully matured through the authentic bestowal of empowerments. Where this Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā is taught by a *bla ma* known as the “teacher” to either of these two, not only is there not the slightest fault [in it], but individuals who are worthy vessels are directly introduced to profound suchness.”<sup>331</sup>

Elsewhere in this text, Shākya mchog ldan provides a more detailed analysis of these two preliminary methods. He begins by distinguishing the Vehicle of Perfections or Characteristics into the Self-emptiness (*rang stong*) system of the Niḥsvabhāvavāda and Other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) system of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka. As he explains in his *Great Ship of Unity*:

Although there exist no phenomena that are not sealed by this *mahāmudrā*, there are nonetheless two methods that serve as preliminaries to it: [1] the tradition of the outer Vehicle of Characteristics (*lakṣaṇayāna*) and [2] the tradition of the inner *yogins*. [1] The first, [i.e., the outer Vehicle of Characteristics] consists in ascertainment by reasoning involving studying and thinking. On the basis of such ascertainment, there are also two different methods of recognizing this *mahāmudrā* which is the mode of abiding that one experiences through knowledge based on meditation: [A] The Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Madhyamaka which maintains it is a space-like nonaffirming negation and the [B] Yogācāra-Madhyamaka which claims that it is coemergent wisdom. Regarding these two assertions, there are also two different methods of ascertainment through reasoning based on studying and thinking: [the former] by means of self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and [the latter] by means of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*). Although that which is experienced based on the first system [i.e., self-emptiness] is not in accord with the root texts of Mahāmudrā,

<sup>331</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 62, critical edition: 79.

it is nonetheless acceptable to ascribe the “ascertainment of freedom from extremes leading to assimilation as unity” explained in that [system] to this Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition.<sup>332</sup>

Although the author argues that what is experienced by the Rang stong system (i.e., a nonaffirming emptiness) is not in accord with Mahāmudrā texts, he does consider it justifiable to correlate this tradition’s “ascertainment of freedom from extremes leading to assimilation as unity” with the Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition. It is worth bearing in mind that the author considered that the *mahāmudrā* realized through the skillful means of the Mantra tradition—namely, the teacher’s blessing, invitation of wisdom beings, and empowerments—does not require preliminary analysis by means of discriminating insight and is in fact superior because it can instantaneously discover the nonpoisoned view, whereas the Lakṣaṇayāna’s discovery through analysis is conceptually fabricated.<sup>333</sup>

The author next turns his attention from the experienter’s view to the experienced object and concludes that the Mantra system, as well as Maitreya works such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* deal with the ultimate (*don dam*) coemergent wisdom which is of definitive meaning, whereas the Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Mādhyamikas of the Lakṣaṇayāna deal with conventional (*kun rdzob*) objects which are postulates and nonexistent and thus of merely provisional meaning:

Not only is there a difference in terms of the view of the experienter but the latter [system] is also superior in terms of the definitive meaning of the experienced object because the emptiness as a nonaffirming negation of the former tradition, [i.e., the Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Mādhyamikas of the Lakṣaṇayāna] is explained as conventional truth since it is nothing other than nonexistence and abstraction. Hence it does not qualify as being of definitive meaning and does not go beyond the conceptualizing mind of the subject (*yul can*). On the other hand, when the mode of abiding of coemergent wisdom is explained as *mahāmudrā* as object—as it is claimed in the works of Maitreya such as the *Uttaratantra* [RGV]—this is no different from the Mantra system.<sup>334</sup>

The author concludes that although “there is a qualitative gradation in the subject-oriented wisdom of self-awareness that stems from the qualitative gradation in the means of actualizing it, all these [types of] wisdom of self-awareness which are actualized by these outer and inner

<sup>332</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 51.

<sup>333</sup> Volume II, translation: 21.

<sup>334</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 51, critical edition: 73.



skillful means are alike in being the wisdom of *mahāmudrā* because they consist in the wisdom of the union of bliss and emptiness.”<sup>335</sup>

In his *Ascertaining the Intent*, Shākya mchog ldan objects to equating the Nīḥsvabhāvavāda-Madhyamaka with Mahāmudrā: the Madhyamaka of the reasoning corpus takes emptiness as a nonaffirming negation and the nature of things (*dharmatā*) as a mental-istic-linguistic object and thus as a conceptual universal or “other-exclusion” (*gzhan sel*). By contrast, the Mahāmudrā tradition understands emptiness in terms of primordial wisdom free from extremes and specifies the nature of things as an object of direct perception, a particular which is accessible to wisdom. “Moreover,” he concludes, “regarding the respective means to realize them, the emptiness known in the Madhyamaka is comprehended through reasoning which validates one’s own scriptures and castigates those of others. The emptiness of *mahāmudrā* is attained through devotion to the *bla ma*, blessings, karmic connection and the accumulation of merit.”<sup>336</sup> In *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others*, the author sheds further light on the means of realizing *mahāmudrā*, indicating the necessary and sufficient conditions:

[*Query*:] Then by what means is it to be realized? [*Reply*:] Unmediated direct [perception] which stems from [1] karmic connection from previous [lives] which is the dominant condition, [2] devotion to the *bla ma* which is the objective condition, and [3] prior reception of knowledge and awareness. It is for this reason that in this [tradition] we do not make the distinction between “studying and thinking on the path of accumulation and seeing a mere conceptual abstraction”<sup>337</sup> on the path of application”. As for the noble path of direct seeing, having in mind that there are no subdivisions, it was stated that there is no divisions into levels and paths. However, this does not deprecate the methods.<sup>338</sup>

When the appropriate conditions are in place, *mahāmudrā* realization is said to occur easily and with little need for intellectual or ritual preliminaries. This is because unmediated access to *mahāmudrā* is a matter of direct acquaintance, not inference, and does not depend on scripture and reasoning. In Shākya mchog ldan words, “coemergence (*sahaja*) which is

<sup>335</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 52, critical edition: 74.

<sup>336</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 35, critical edition: 43.

<sup>337</sup> Literally an object-universal (*don spyi* : *arthasāmānya*), one of two types of universals distinguished by Dignāga, the other being the word-universal (*sgra spyi* : *śabdhasāmānya*). The term *don spyi* is frequently used in Tibetan works in the more general sense of conceptual representation or abstraction, the general idea we have of something as opposed to the thing itself.

<sup>338</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 15, critical edition: 27.

experienced by personal knowledge and not taken as an object of words and concepts does not require recourse to scripture and reasoning”.

Thus, being abundant in meaning yet succinct in words, [Mahāmudrā] is easy to practice for those with a karmic connection. If one realizes what is easy to realize, the two [types of] belief in self along with their seeds are easily destroyed. This coemergence which is experienced by personal knowledge and not taken as an object of words and concepts does not require recourse to scripture and reasoning. It also does not depend on honoring the teacher with set observances<sup>339</sup>. However, being the Mahāyāna, encompassing everyone and comprising the definitive actuality of everything, it is without contradiction during the phase of the main practice. Although in the phase of preparation for its realization, various methods of accomplishment are not necessary, during the main practice phase, the aim to be accomplished is seen to be in accord with all sūtras and tantras.<sup>340</sup>

What is seen at the time of *mahāmudrā* realization is primordially present wisdom which is not something newly established. This marks the culmination of Sgam po pa’s Four Yogas comprising one-pointedness (*rtse gcig*), freedom from elaborations (*spros bral*), one-flavour (*ro gcig*), and no-meditation (*sgom med*), which unfold naturally as the unity of meditation and post-meditation.

What is to be seen (*mthong bya*) is primordially present wisdom which is not newly established. Being similar to a wish fulfilling gem, if for the time being one can settle evenly in [this state] which is free from drowsiness and agitation, this is termed “one-pointedness”. When there is freedom from grasping either phenomena or persons, it is termed “freedom from elaborations”. As for the enhancement in the post-meditation of that unity of calm abiding and deep insight of the main practice, when there is no [more] grasping whatever personal and phenomenal appearances arise as “this” or “that”, then even if, on the side of consciousness, the dualism of subject and object have not ceased, on the side of wisdom, both “selves” [personal and phenomenal] are naturally taken over [by] wisdom which

<sup>339</sup> Compare with *Hevajratantra* I.viii.36b which states “Coemergence that is not expressed by others is also not found elsewhere. It is revealed by honouring (*upasevayā* : *bsten pa yis*) the Guru with set observances (*parva* : *dus thabs*) and from one’s own merit”. See Skt. *nānyena kathyate sahajaṃ na kasmīn api labhyate | ātamanā jñāyate puṇyād guruparvopasevayā ||* Tib. *gzhan gyis brjod min lhan cig skyes || gang du yang ni mi rnyed de || bla ma’i dus thabs bsten pa yis || bdag gis bsod nams las shes bya ||*

<sup>340</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 38, critical edition: 45.

is free from grasping anything at all. At that time, the entire phenomenal world becomes “one taste” with *mahāmudrā*. Once this manifests effortlessly, one senses that it is what has been given the name “no-meditation”.<sup>341</sup>

The foregoing overview of Shākya mchog ldan’s views on Mahāmudrā pedagogical methods has confirmed his endorsement of Sgam po pa’s siddha-based nongradual methods for those who are deemed suitable recipients, that is, those having the simultaneist potential. At the same time, we have seen that he considered it a mistake to view such methods as appropriate for all or as precluding the practice of skillful means. Even for the ideal recipient, skillful means are not abandoned but neither are they a matter of willful exertion; rather, they unfold effortlessly within the direct realization of the luminous and empty nature of mind as the unity of means and insight. It may be recalled that those who have not gained a stable realization are said to require familiarization with the methods of eliminating discursive elaborations according to the methods of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga. Shākya mchog ldan adds, however, that diligent persons having the “inclination to leave behind such methods which [they already] understood previously may correctly familiarize themselves [with mind’s true nature in meditation] and familiarize themselves with the state of not grasping by means of concepts the appearances of manifold dependent arising in post-meditation. That is said to be the main point of this teaching.”<sup>342</sup>

## RESPONSES TO SA SKYA PAṆḌITA’S CRITICISM OF BKA’ BRGYUD MAHĀMUDRĀ

### A PHILOSOPHICAL DEFENSE AND JUSTIFICATION OF MAHĀMUDRĀ

Shākya mchog ldan’s defence of Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings and practices proceeds from a systematic reconsideration of Sa skya Paṇḍita’s wide-ranging criticisms of certain views and practices espoused by some of his Dwags po Bka’ brgyud contemporaries. David Jackson has identified three views that were the principle targets of Sa paṇ’s criticisms: “1. That a single method or factor (even insight into Emptiness presented as the Great Seal) could suffice soteriologically, 2. That the Gnosis (*ye shes: jñāna*) of the Great Seal could arise through an exclusively nonconceptual meditative method 3. That the Great Seal could ever be taught outside of the Mantrayāna.”<sup>343</sup> It may be noted that specific doctrines were associated with each of these positions: [1.] Sgam po pa’s Self-sufficient White Remedy (*dkar po gcig thub*), [2.] Maitrīpa’s Mental Nonengagement (*vid la mi byed pa : amanasikāra*) doctrine, and [3.] the Simultaneist or All-at-once (*gcig char ba*) ideal. Even in the parts of his Mahāmudrā

<sup>341</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 38, critical edition: 45.

<sup>342</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 16, critical edition: 28.

<sup>343</sup> Jackson 1994, 72.

trilogy which are most charitable to Sa skya Paṇḍita, Shākya mchog ldan claims that all three points and their associated doctrines are defensible by reasoning and also that they are well-attested in sūtras and tantras.

While the simultaneist ideal has been treated in some detail already, we will devote the remaining pages of this chapter to an examination of Shākya mchog ldan's defence of the first two doctrines, the Self-sufficient White Remedy and Amanasikāra. Before turning to these, it will be helpful to take a broader view of the author's repudiation of Sa paṇ's general claim that "this present-day Mahāmudrā is largely a Chinese religious system"<sup>344</sup> on the grounds that both advocate mental and ethical quietism. Shākya mchog ldan rejects this criticism with the rejoinder that Sgam po pa's doctrinal system, which blended Bka' gdams scholasticism and tantric Mahāmudrā teachings of the siddhas, included extensive teachings on the perfection of insight. Thus he observes in his *Great Ship of Unity* that "the view of Heshang and the view of the master Sgam po pa are not the same because in the *Ornament of Liberation of the Supreme Path* composed by the master Sgam po pa he taught in detail the preliminary methods of analysis through discriminating insight in the context of the Prajñāpāramitā view."<sup>345</sup> Elsewhere in the text, he indicates that Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā followers accord the utmost importance to Mahāyāna teachings on "loving kindness, compassion, the first five perfections and the cultivation of *bodhicitta*" which need not conflict, however, with their adherence to the traditionally-accepted innatist view that "the six perfections are all subsumed under the perfection of insight."<sup>346</sup>

In his *Golden Lancet*, Shākya mchog ldan draws a clear line between the types of conduct (*spyod pa*) advocated in the systems of Heshang and Sgam po pa, despite certain apparent similarities in view (*lta ba*). In this regard, he underscores Sgam po pa's well-attested emphasis on karmic causes and effects, as well as on the three ethical disciplines.<sup>347</sup> Finally, in *Ascertaining the Intent*, he contends that, unlike the Bka' brgyud masters, "the Chinese abbot did not make the distinction between conventional and ultimate and likewise did not distinguish, within their respective contexts, view and application; wisdom and conscious-

<sup>344</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.175cd: *da lta'i phyag rgya chen po ni || phal cher rgya nag chos lugs yin ||* See Rhoton 2002, 305 (tib.); 119 (Eng.).

<sup>345</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 50, critical edition: 72.

<sup>346</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 49, critical edition: 72.

<sup>347</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i le'u gsum pa rig 'dzin sdom pa'i skabs kyi 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb vol. 6<sub>(B)</sub>, 863-4: "Although there does not appear to be a qualitative difference in view between this Bka' brgyud and the Chinese Abbot, there are differences in conduct in the following ways: This is because followers of this [Bka' brgyud] system emphasize very emphatically the karmic causes and results and the three ethical disciplines, which becomes abundantly clear when one looks at their authoritative scriptures." 'on kyang bka' [b]rgyud 'di pa | rgya nag mkhan po dang lta ba la bzang ngan mi snang yang | spyod pa la khyad par yod pa'i tshul ni | lugs 'di pas ni | las rgyu 'bras dang tshul khrims gsum gyi bslab bya la shin tu nan tan du mdzad par | de dag gi gsung rab la bltas pas shin tu gsal ba'i phyir |

ness; study, thinking and meditation; and provisional and definitive meaning. He said that simply not engaging the mind in anything at all is the essence.”<sup>348</sup>

A key to understanding Shākya mchog ldan’s justification of the Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā system is his claim that although there is no single prescription for approaching goal-realization given the plurality of possible avenues delineated in the Buddhist teachings, the actual view realized is alone sufficient for relinquishing afflictions. Thus while he maintains that “the different ways of awakening in line with individual capacities are not unequivocally determined,”<sup>349</sup> he at the same time defends the view that Mahāmudrā realization offers a comprehensive remedy for the myriad afflictions. It is appropriate to think of Shākya mchog ldan as a soteriological pluralist in the sense that he allows for considerable latitude in the types of teachings, pedagogical methods, and modes of application that may be deemed appropriate to the needs, abilities and inclinations of a given student. This view brought him into direct conflict with a major platform in Sa skya Paṇḍita’s diatribe against Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā: the contention that realization of *mahāmudrā* is impossible without the tantric preliminaries of empowerments, the Generation and Completion Stage practices, and the first three seals. In his *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, Sa paṇ had declared that a meditation “not endowed with the empowerments and two stages is not a Vajrayāna teaching.”<sup>350</sup> Further, a so-called “*mahāmudrā*” attained without the previous seals does not warrant the name:

The Mahāmudrā of Nāro and Maitrīpa is held to consist precisely  
In that which is taught in the secret mantra tantras.  
In his *Caturmudrā*[*nvaya*], noble Nāgārjuna said this:  
If, through not having known the *karmamudrā*,  
One remains ignorant of the *dharmamudrā*,  
It is impossible for one to understand  
Even the name *mahāmudrā*.<sup>351</sup>

<sup>348</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 39, critical edition: 45.

<sup>349</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 24, critical edition: 33.

<sup>350</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, (III.134) *dbang dang rim gnyis mi ldan pas || rdo rje theg pa’i bstan pa min ||* See Rhoton 2002, 302 (tib.); 113 (English).

<sup>351</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, (III.176–78) *na ro dang ni me tri ba’i || phyag rgya chen po gang yin pa || de ni las dang chos dang ni || dam tshig dang ni phyag rgya che || gsang sngags rgyud nas ji skad du || gsungs pa de nyid khong bzhed do || ’phags pa klu sgrub nyid kyis kyang || phyag rgya bzhi par ’di skad gsung || las kyi phyag rgya rna shes pas || chos kyi phyag rgya’ ang mi shes na || phyag rgya chen po’i ming tsam yang || rtogs pa nyid ni mi srid gsung ||* See Rhoton 2002, 305 (tib.); 119 (English).

As will be clarified in chapter four, Padma dkar po would later demonstrate in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*<sup>352</sup> that the above passage finds no support in the *Caturmudrānvaya* which instead claims that only the uncontrived *dharmamudrā* (identified with the coemergent nature), and not the contrived sexual union with a *karmamudrā* (a tantric consort), can be the cause of *mahāmudrā*, in the same way that it is only from a cause of a specific kind (e.g. a rice grain) that a result (fruit) of this same kind (e.g. a rice sprout) can arise. Put simply, something contrived cannot be the cause of something uncontrived, so sexual union with a contrived *karmamudrā* or tantric consort cannot be a direct cause of *mahāmudrā*, whereas the uncontrived *dharmamudrā* can.<sup>353</sup> For his part, Shākya mchog ldan makes a more general observation that the *Caturmudrānvaya* was actually not written by Nāgārjuna as Sa skya Paṇḍita had claimed.<sup>354</sup> He adds that in Tibet it was quite common to employ the term *mahāmudrā* for a wide range of Buddhist views independent of the Vajrayāna context. Not only was the Madhyamaka view itself at times identified as Mahāmudrā, but the following had been as well: [1] the realization that all appearances are mind, [2] the realization of self-luminous self-aware wisdom devoid of both subject and object, and [3] the realization that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic essence.<sup>355</sup> In Shākya mchog ldan's eyes, to confine a term as rich in its range of applicability as *mahāmudrā* to only one doxographical context is unnecessarily restrictive. He also adds, not uncontroversially, that it is incorrect to say that the term *mahāmudrā* does not appear in the Perfections Vehicle. He defers to Maitrīpa's use of the term *mahāmudrā* in the context of the Perfections Vehicle and notes its occurrence in the *samādhi* which is called the “Jewel-seal” (*ratnamudrā*).<sup>356</sup>

<sup>352</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, 61.8–66.10.

<sup>353</sup> See below, 364–65 as well as Mathes 2013 who gives a detailed account of this controversy based on a revised interpretation of the *Caturmudrānvaya* passage in a Sanskrit edition of the text which accords with Padma dkar po's revision.

<sup>354</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i le'u gsum pa rig 'dzin sdom pa'i skabs kyi 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 6, 82<sub>6</sub>–83<sub>1</sub>: “The śāstra *Caturmudrānvaya* which is considered to have been written by Nāgārjuna was not written by Nāgārjuna.” *klu sgrub kyis mdzad par grags pa'i bstan bcos phyag rgya bzhi pa de klu sgrub kyis ma mdzad do*. See Mathes 2015 where the problem of authorship is discussed.

<sup>355</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i le'u gsum pa rig 'dzin sdom pa'i skabs kyi 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 6, 84<sub>4–6</sub>: “In Tibet, those known as Mudrā adherents take the view of Madhyamaka as Mahāmudrā. Among those, some take the realization that appearances are mind as Mahāmudrā. Some others take the realization of self-luminous self-aware wisdom devoid of both subject and object as the Mahāmudrā view. Others yet take the realization that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic essence as the Mahāmudrā view.” *bod du phyag rgya bar grags pa rnam kyis | dbu ma'i lta ba la phyag rgya chen por mdzad pa yin la | de la yang | 'ga' zhig gis ni | snang ba sems su rtogs pa la phyag rgya chen por mdzad | 'ga' zhig gis ni | gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi ye shes rang rig rang gsal bar rtogs pa la phyag rgya chen po'i lta bar mdzad | yang 'ga' zhig gis ni | chos thams cad rang gi ngo bos stong par rtogs par la phyag rgya chen po'i lta bar mdzad |*

<sup>356</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i le'u gsum pa rig 'dzin sdom pa'i skabs kyi 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 6, 84<sub>6</sub>–85<sub>1</sub>: “Moreover, it is not the case that the term *mahāmudrā* does not exist in the Pāramitāyāna. The occurrence of the term *mahāmudrā* in the Pāramitāyāna was explained by Maitrīpa and taught in the so-called *Ratnamudrā nāma samādhi*.” *de yang phar phyin gyi theg pa na | phyag rgya chen po'i tha snyad*

We may now turn our attention to Shākya mchog ldan's attempts to justify the doctrines of the Self-sufficient White Remedy and mental nonengagement, two principal targets of Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā.

## DEFENDING MAHĀMUDRĀ VIEWS

### THE SELF-SUFFICIENT WHITE REMEDY (*DKAR PO GCIG THUB*)

No substantial difference exists between the present-day Great Seal  
And the Great Perfection of the Chinese tradition,  
Other than a change in names from 'descent from above'  
And 'ascent from below' to 'simultaneist' and 'gradualist'.<sup>357</sup>

Sa skya Paṇḍita, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*

At several points in the Mahāmudrā trilogy, Shākya mchog ldan takes pains to defend Sgam po pa's controversial characterization of Mahāmudrā as a Self-sufficient White Remedy<sup>358</sup> from its detractors. Although this clearly put him on the other side of the fence from Sa skya Paṇḍita (the earliest and most influential critic of the idea<sup>359</sup>), we may also observe the extent to which Shākya mchog ldan attempts, especially in the last and longest work in his trilogy, to shift the target of accusation away from Sa paṇ and onto his latter-day Sa skya supporters who are charged with misinterpreting not only Sgam po pa's doctrine but also Sa paṇ's criticisms of it. This effort to save Sa paṇ from his followers in the third work bears comparison with the more sweepingly critical rejoinders in the other two. We have noted that Shākya mchog ldan rejected the idea that there is any single prescription for goal-realization since it is open to a plurality of individual approaches. Yet we also hinted at his acceptance of the view that the actual realization of *mahāmudrā* cures all afflictions, rendering individual treatments for their myriad causes and symptoms superfluous.

Let us begin by considering how Shākya mchog ldan characterizes the import of Sgam po pa's doctrine. In his *Great Ship of Unity*, he states that the realization of *mahāmudrā* "is such that when one has arrived at the supramundane path, then the entire spectrum of qualities

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*med pa ma yin te | par phyin theg pa nas phyag rgya chen po'i tha snyad 'byung bar mai trīpas bshad pa dang | rin chen phyag rgya zhes bya ba'i ting nge 'dzin gsungs pa...* This of course raises the pertinent question of whether it is illegitimate, and even anachronistic, to speak of a "sūtra Mahāmudrā".

<sup>357</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.167: *da lta'i phyag rgya chen po dang || rgya nag lugs kyi rdzogs chen la || yas 'bab dang ni mas 'dzegs gnyis || rim gyis pa dang cig char bar || ming 'dogs bsgyur ba rna gtogs pa || don la khyad par dbye ba med ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (tib.); 118 (Eng.).

<sup>358</sup> See Jackson 1994.

<sup>359</sup> For Sa skya Paṇḍita's critiques, see *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, verses III.171, 347–49, 447, 610, 638–39.

conducive to purification such as the [thirty-seven factors] of awakening, loving kindness, compassion and the rest, which are termed ‘great bliss’ are of one taste with the essence of the *dharmadhātu* wisdom. In that instance, this was definitely asserted in the statement that ‘[Mahāmudrā] is similar to a Self-sufficient White Remedy’.”<sup>360</sup> In his *Golden Lancet* Shākya mchog ldan explains that Sgam po pa did not use the term self-sufficient remedy in the sense of “a view of emptiness divorced from skillful means”<sup>361</sup> as the equation with Heshang’s alleged ethical quietism had suggested, but simply as an analogy (*dpe*)—as in the statement “this, my realization of the nature of mind, is like the Self-sufficient White medicine”<sup>362</sup>. The analogy here implies that the Mahāmudrā view offers a potent broad-spectrum cure against afflictions since it eliminates their root cause, delusion. Hence, in his *Undermining the Haughtiness*, Shākya mchog ldan explains that “the expression “Self-sufficient White Remedy” (*dkar po gcig thub*) refers exclusively to the ‘view’ but is not a term which denigrates the accumulation of merits. Rather, its precise meaning is that one does not need to strive for different antidotes to each of the emotional afflictions and discursive thoughts as *mahāmudrā* alone is sufficient [as a remedy].”<sup>363</sup>

On this understanding, Shākya mchog ldan can argue in his *Great Ship of Unity* that if this “view of *mahāmudrā* as ‘Self-sufficient White Remedy’ is inadmissible, then this contradicts the [standard] explanation that the six perfections are all subsumed under the perfection of insight.” In other words, the controversial depiction of Mahāmudrā as a self-sufficient remedy turns on the age-old Buddhist controversy over whether the perfection of insight contains within itself the other perfections<sup>364</sup> and can therefore be considered as a comprehensive soteriological method.

Elsewhere in the *Great Ship of Unity*, Shākya mchog ldan formulates Sa skya Paṇḍita’s position as a chain of arguments before offering his own response to the main points of controversy. Sa paṇ’s view turns on the assumption that Sgam po pa’s “Self-sufficient White

<sup>360</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 52, critical edition: 75.

<sup>361</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye’i le’u gsum pa rig ’dzin sdom pa’i skabs kyi ’bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, SCsb(B) vol. 6, 1814: “The meaning of the self-sufficient remedy refers to the view of emptiness that is divorced from skillful means.” *dkar po gcig thub kyi don ni | thabs dang bral ba’i stong nyid kyi lta ba la zer ba yin la |*

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 86<sub>1-2</sub>: *rjes sgam po pas | sman la dper mdzad nas | nga’i sems nyid rtogs pa ’di sman dkar po gcig thub dang ’dra |*

<sup>363</sup> PCdn, see Volume II, translation: 25, critical edition: 33.

<sup>364</sup> See Gombrich 2011 (chapter 4) which discusses the somewhat different controversy in Pāli canonical and post-canonical sources over whether intellectual insight (*paññā*)—correct discernment of the true situation—without meditation is sufficient for attaining awakening. See also Gethin 1998 (262) on the early Buddhist debate over whether “at the time of awakening, the four noble truths are seen gradually (as the Sarvāstivādins argued) or in a single instant (as the Theravādins, amongst others, argued): ultimate truth is not something one can see part of; one either sees it complete, or not at all.”



Remedy” constitutes a view of emptiness divorced from skillful means, which he identifies as a Neo-Mahāmudrā (*da lta'i phyag rgya chen po*) based on a quasi-Chinese Rdzogs chen system comparable to the latter’s “descent from above” view. Sa skya Paṇḍita’s arguments are framed as follows:

Does your “descent from above” view require training in the conduct of the six perfections or not? If it is not required, then [this view] has become [equivalent to] the religious tradition of the Chinese abbot. If it is required, then does one train gradually or simultaneously? In the first case, how would there be any difference from the “conduct that ascends from below”? And if it simultaneous, would there be a distinction between the practices of view and conduct or would conduct be included within the view? In the first case, this view would contradict it being a Self-sufficient White Remedy. In the second case, is this tradition of inseparability of view and conduct practiced according to the Mantra-tradition or according to the Pāramitā tradition? In the first case, it is in contradiction with [the Mantra system] in not taking empowerments and the two stages [of Generation and Completion] as being of crucial importance. In the second case, it is not admissible to have a teaching which [allows] beginners to awaken within a single lifetime.

The thrust of Sa paṇ’s reconstructed arguments is that if Sgam po pa’s “descent from above” view does not require the perfections, then it must be akin to Heshang’s teaching. If it does require them and is gradual, it cannot be considered different from the so-called “conduct that ascends from below”; but if it is simultaneous, then the question of whether conduct is independent of view or subsumed under it must be answered. The first possibility contradicts it being a self-sufficient remedy, whereas the second, the inclusion of conduct in view, will either end up contradicting the Mantra system’s prerequisite empowerments and two stages of Generation and Completion or the Pāramitā system’s exclusion of any teaching enabling beginners to awaken within a single lifetime.

Shākya mchog ldan’s first line of response to these arguments is to state that “there are those who in this life did not previously go through the two stages, but who have faith in this teaching and have had the blessing of the teacher enter their mind-streams. Since they have already gone through the purification by the empowerments and the two stages in previous lives, they are ‘those who have the simultaneist potential’ (*cig car ba'i rigs can*).”<sup>365</sup> He then defers to his earlier rebuttal (summarized above) where he had argued that the rejection of the view of the self-sufficiency of Mahāmudrā contradicts the widely-accepted view that the perfection of insight (*prajñāpāramitā*) comprises the other five perfections which are the

<sup>365</sup> PCks, see Volume II, translation: 58, critical edition: 77.

skillful means. Shākya mchog ldan emphasizes that the primacy of *mahāmudrā* or *prajñāpāramitā* should not be confused with a denial or disregard of the skillful means: “Were there no difference between the ‘descent from above’ (*yas ’bab*) view of Mahāmudrā and the ‘simultaneist’ (*cig car ba*) path of Heshang, it would follow that Mahāmudrā followers would not accept loving kindness, compassion, the [first] five perfections and the cultivation of the mind of a bodhisattva and so on as the path. If this is claimed, it would contradict the elaborate explanations by these Mahāmudrā followers of the utmost importance of these aspects of skillful means.”<sup>366</sup>

According to Shākya mchog ldan, not only are skillful means not forsaken by the Mahāmudrā view, but they are said to unfold naturally upon its realization as uncontrived spontaneous activities: “In the words of others yet, it is said that the practice of the simultaneists is what is called ‘descent from above view’ and that the view of the gradualists is the ‘ascent from below conduct’. [But] when the view is realized, the conduct is spontaneously present, even without striving for it.”<sup>367</sup> To underscore the point that Mahāmudrā teachings are grounded in the unity of insight and skillful means, Shākya mchog ldan reminds his interlocutor that Sgam po pa’s Stages of the Path (*lam rim*) summary *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* extensively outlined the “preliminary methods of analysis through discriminating insight in the context of the Prajñāpāramitā view”.<sup>368</sup>

Intriguingly, Shākya mchog ldan was of the opinion that many of his Sa skya colleagues had misunderstood the import of Sa paṇ’s criticism when they reinterpreted the Self-sufficient White Remedy as a license to accept the conventional—delusory phenomena—just as it is. In a section of his *Great Ship of Unity* devoted to presenting and refuting modern-day Sa skya misrepresentations of the early Sa skya masters, he states:

Those [Sa skya pas] who do not correctly understand the point of [Sa paṇ’s] refutation of the Self-sufficient White Remedy think that the whole collection of practices [that make up its] conduct must be practiced by leaving the conventional, however things appear, just as it is without negating it. Thus, when everything is determined to be emptiness, they absurdly conclude that this is the Self-sufficient White Remedy. Having this in mind, they promote this version of the dharma. They do not differentiate between the categories of the two vehicles. In the case of the Pāramitāyāna, the following words [from Jñānagarbha’s *Satyadvayavibhaṅga* 21ab] apply just as [they] stated: “Because [the conventional] corresponds to

<sup>366</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 49, critical edition: 72.

<sup>367</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 53, critical edition: 75.

<sup>368</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 50, critical edition: 72.

appearances, don't subject it to analysis."<sup>369</sup> However, in the Mantra[yāna], all ways of conduct, whether one is in meditative equipoise or not, must be practiced from within the state of emptiness.<sup>370</sup>

In other words, far from acquiescing to conventional appearances, Mantrayāna adepts deal with a world transfigured, one seen from within the continuous state of emptiness. With this point we have come full circle to Shākya mchog ldan's explanation of Self-sufficient White Remedy as a metaphor for the view which comprehensively ascertains emptiness, a view which offers a broad-spectrum and long-lasting cure for the afflictions which give rise to delusory phenomena.

#### MENTAL NONENGAGEMENT (*AMANASIKĀRA*) AND THE FIRE OF WISDOM

Shākya mchog ldan critically reappraises several of Sa skya Paṇḍita's condemnations of Dwags po Bka' brgyud contemplation practices that were advanced in writings including the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* and *Skye bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge*.<sup>371</sup> In such works, Sa paṇ had identified *amanasikāra* as a doctrine of the Chinese Heshang Moheyan (late 8<sup>th</sup> c.) advocating the suspension of all thoughts and activities in order to attack, by way of analogy, certain non-tantric "Neo-Mahāmudrā" (*da lta'i phyag rgya chen po*) practices which he deemed to be of Chinese provenance and therefore heretical or non-Buddhist (*chos min*). Sa paṇ's critique was primarily directed at certain nongradual Mahāmudrā teachings associated with Sgam po pa endorsing a direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to the nature of mind by means of unmediated perception. Such teachings were criticized on the grounds that [1] they were being taught independently of the Tantric system of four *mudrās* elaborated by Nāropa and transmitted in Tibet by his disciple Mar pa, that [2] they represented newly introduced doctrinal innovations (*rang bzo*) of questionable (i.e., non-Indian) provenance and that [3] they advocated an erroneous nonconceptual, nongradual approach to goal-realization.<sup>372</sup>

In general, Bka' brgyud defences of Mahāmudrā *amanasikāra* teachings countered these allegations with arguments to the effect that the *amanasikāra* of their tradition [1] is a valid Buddhist doctrine and soteriological aim backed by extensive scriptural support in both the sūtras and tantras, [2] forms the doctrinal nucleus of Maitrīpa's authoritative cycle of

<sup>369</sup> *Satyadvayavibhaṅga* 21ab. See Eckel 1987, 89 and clarification of Lindtner 1990, 256–57.

<sup>370</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 64, critical edition: 80.

<sup>371</sup> The relevant sections are translated in Jackson 1994, 159 ff.

<sup>372</sup> Jackson 1994, 72 f. Sa skya Paṇḍita's source appears to have been the *Sba bzhed* since he refers to a *Dpa' bzhed*, *Dbā' bzhed*, or *'Ba' bzhed* in his discussions of Heshang's doctrines.

*Amanasikāra* teachings (*yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor*), [3] consists not in a perpetual and total suspension of thought activity, but rather in the stilling of conditioned dualistic thoughts (in specific soteriological contexts such as calm abiding and goal-realization) in order to allow nondual wisdom to arise, and thus [4] has nothing in common, either historically or doctrinally, with the type of *amanasikāra* practices attributed to Heshang Moheyan. Although Shākya mchog ldan's Mahāmudrā trilogy does not treat the topic of *amanasikāra* in nearly as much detail as other post-classical masters such as Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po<sup>373</sup>, and does not even mention the Maitrīpa tradition, he does make a number of illuminating observations regarding its role in Buddhist meditation and goal-realization. In general he considered it a mistake to confuse the Bka' brgyud *amanasikāra* with the practice of auto-stupefaction attributed to Heshang Moheyan. But it would appear that he was also critical of those who associated Mahāmudrā only with the *amanasikāra* taught in the Tathāgatagarbha texts since he says in his *Ascertaining the Intent* that "some others confuse [Mahāmudrā] with explanations of mental nonengagement in [Tathāgata]garbha texts. With their prattle about devoting themselves assiduously to the mere emptiness as a nonaffirming negation, they disparage the wisdom of those having realization."<sup>374</sup>

In the *Great Ship of Unity*, Shākya mchog ldan specifies certain conditions when mental nonengagement and not thinking anything may be considered hallmarks of goal-realization. In this regard, he describes a type of Madhyamaka direct introduction<sup>375</sup> to profound suchness given to those whose minds have previously been suitably prepared either through the Pāramitāyāna reasoning and/or tantric empowerments. The Madhyamaka view of profound suchness is precisely mental nonengagement, the uncontrived spontaneous state in which one does not think of anything at all and even discriminating insight must cease, as in the famous example of the flame that arises from rubbing two sticks together<sup>376</sup>:

<sup>373</sup> Their views are given detailed treatment below in chapters three and four below.

<sup>374</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 42, critical edition: 47.

<sup>375</sup> An example of a Madhyamaka *upadeśa* on *amanasikāra* is found in Bhavya II's *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* on which see below, 409–10.

<sup>376</sup> This analogy from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* was famously cited in Kamalaśīla's *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭīkā* (NPDhṭ), Peking Kanjur no. 5501, 157b<sub>5-6</sub> to describe how conceptual discernment is burned away at the time of nonconceptual realization and thereby establish the connection between the discernment of reality and mental nonengagement: "The characteristic of discerning reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣā*) is here [in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (NPDh)] considered to be mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*). That [discernment] has the nature of being conceptual, but it is burned away by the fire of genuine wisdom arising from it, just as a fire kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood burns these very pieces." *yang dag par so sor rtog pa'i mtshan ma ni 'dir yid la mi byed par dgongs so || de ni nram par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin mod kyi | 'on kyang de nyid las byung ba yang dag pa'i ye shes kyi mes de bsregs par 'gyur te | shing gnyis drud las byung ba'i mes shing de gnyis sreg par byed pa bzhin no ||*

[It follows] because, at the time of teaching the Madhyamaka view, when the time is ripe to show learned people who have previously trained in studying and thinking the view of the main practice, this is nothing other than settling spontaneously into the uncontrived state—not thinking anything, not mentally engaging in anything (*gang du yang yid la mi byed*). It is also because, in this context, it has been explained that even discriminating insight itself must cease, as in the example of the flame that arises from rubbing two sticks together.<sup>377</sup>

The author goes on to state that Atiśa was a chief proponent of this line of Madhyamaka pith-instructions which he himself had traced to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.<sup>378</sup> Based on these pith-instructions, Atiśa is credited with composing “the treatise entitled *Madhyamakopadeśa*<sup>379</sup> wherein the main practice—the way of settling into meditative equipoise—was set forth exactly in the way it was presented in the written instructions on that [topic] by the Mahāmudrā proponents.”<sup>380</sup> In his *Great Ship of Unity*, the author dismisses the belief that “the main practice of the Bka’ gdams view is conceptual comprehension (*zhen pa’i blo*) because it is a mode of apprehension which opposes the view of self (*ātma-drṣṭi*)” by noting that “the glorious Atiśa taught not thinking, not pondering, and not being mentally engaged as the main practice of the view.”<sup>381</sup> That said, Shākya mchog ldan elsewhere expresses reservations about simply equating Atiśa’s Madhyamaka *amanasikāra* pith-instructions with those favoured in Dwags po Mahāmudrā texts. In *Ascertaining the Intent* he remarks that “some who are mistaken regarding [Sgam po pa’s] talk about ‘uniting the two streams of Bka’ [gdams pa] and [Mahā]mudrā,’ devote themselves assiduously to the *Madhyamakopadeśa* by Atiśa [even though] the Madhyamaka of that [work] is [largely a matter of] conceptual [knowledge] and not a domain of nonconceptual knowledge.”<sup>382</sup> This comment strikes the reader as rather atypical given the author’s usual strategy of underscoring commonalities between the Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā strands of *amanasikāra*. It does, however, reflect his general reservations about the tendency amongst Tibetan to take an analytical mode of Madhyamaka investigation and meditation as a soteriological end in itself. He traces such an interpretation to Po to ba Rin chen gsal (1027–1105). Consider, for example, the following remark from his *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad pa*:

<sup>377</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 62, critical edition: 79.

<sup>378</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 62, critical edition: 79.

<sup>379</sup> D3829.

<sup>380</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 62, critical edition: 79.

<sup>381</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 70, critical edition: 84.

<sup>382</sup> PCgn, see Volume II, translation: 42, critical edition: 47.

Po to ba has explained the intent of the *Madhyamakopadeśa* scripture as follows. When adherents of pith-instructions have searched by means of another insight which inquires ‘wherein lies the very essence of all mind-states of subject and object?,’ it is said that settling evenly in a state wherein one does not find anything apart from luminosity is known as the “unity of calm abiding and deep insight”. According to the sequence of these systems [of meditation] Tibetans referred to them as analytical and settling meditation. Both are reasonable, but it was [considered] necessary to take analytical [meditation] as the preliminary. Even so, in the main practice phase, there is never any distinction between analytical and settling meditation. In terms of that reasoning, one makes the distinction between reasoning [by] self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) and the distinction between the nonaffirming or affirming negation [regarding] the object of meditative equipoise.<sup>383</sup>

The author offers a more targeted and detailed criticism of Sa paṇ’s equation between the *amanasikāra* advocated by the Bka’ brgyud and the meditative teachings of the Chinese abbot<sup>384</sup> in his *Reply to the Rin spungs sde pa Shākya rgyal mtshan*. After attributing the above equation to both Sa skya Paṇḍita and Gro lung pa blo gros ’byung gnas (b. 11<sup>th</sup> cent.), Shākya mchog ldan proceeds to underscore the central role of mental nonengagement and nonconceptuality in traditional Buddhist meditation practices and to argue, against Sa paṇ, that *amanasikāra* functions as an antidote to self-grasping, no less than the direct yogic perception or buddha’s wisdom which both involve the stilling of dualistic thoughts:

First, if mental nonengagement does not work as an antidote to self-grasping, and if deep insight necessarily entails discriminating insight, then direct yogic perception in general and a buddha’s wisdom of things as they are in particular would not be an antidote to self-grasping, nor would it be deep insight. This is because when it comes to settling into direct yogic perception, it is definitely necessary to be free from concepts, not to mention in the case of the meditation of noble ones. Yet, even in the meditation of ordinary persons, as in the case of the Mahāyāna

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<sup>383</sup> *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad pa, Dbu ma’i lta khri*, vol. 13, 214<sub>1</sub>–215<sub>3</sub>: *dbu ma’i man ngag gzhung gi ni* || *dgongs par pu to ba yis bshad* || *man ngag pa rnams gzung ’dzin gyi* || *sems rnams kun gyi ngo bo de* || *gang du gnas zhes tshol byed kyi* || *shes rab gzhan gyis btsal ba na* || *’od gsal ba las gang du yang* || *ma rnyed ngang du mnyam ’jog pa* || *zhi lhag zung ’jug yin zhes gsungs* || *lugs ’di dag la go rim bzhin* || *bod rnams dpyad dang ’jog sgom zer* || *gnyis ka la yang rigs pa yi* || *dpyad pa sngon du song dgos kyang* || *dngos gzhi’i dus su dpyad ’jog gi* || *dbye ba nam yang yod ma yin* || *rigs pa de yang rang stong dang* || *gzhan stong rigs pas phye ba dang* || *mnyam par bzhag yul ma yin dang* || *med par dgag pa’i dbye bas phye* ||

<sup>384</sup> From among Sa skya Paṇḍita’s criticism in the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, the verses III.161, 161, 167 and 175 address this issue.

Path of Application, it is necessary to remain free from the clinging of mental engagements. [This is] clearly taught in the works of the noble Maitreya comprising the Two Ornaments and the Two Distinguishers<sup>385 386</sup>.

Shākya mchog ldan proceeds to argue that neither the deep insight (*lhag mthong*) which is equated with discriminating insight born of thinking nor the abiding calm (*zhi gnas*) which is equated with nine methods of settling the mind represent the union (*yoga*) born of meditation which alone realizes the unity (*yuganaddha*) of calm abiding and deep insight.

Consequently, the discriminating insight (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) which many scriptures equate with deep insight (*lhag mthong*) is insight stemming from thinking, but not the actual union (*rnal 'byor*) stemming from meditation. Likewise, the nine methods of resting the mind<sup>387</sup> which many scriptures equate with calm abiding, are preparations for engaging in meditation but are not the actual union stemming from meditation. Regarding these two, it is [only] the phase wherein the two so-called “deep insight without having attained calm abiding, and calm abiding without having attained deep insight” are inseparably united that is called “union born of meditation”.<sup>388</sup>

<sup>385</sup> The two ornaments (*ālambkāra*) are the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (AA) and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (MSA). The two distinguishers (*vibhāga*) are the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MV) and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (DhDhV).

<sup>386</sup> *Sa chen skyong mdzad rin spungs sde pa shākya rgyal mtshan gyi zhus lan*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 640<sub>1-3</sub>: *dang po yid byed dang bral ba bdag 'dzin gyi gnyen por mi 'gro ba dang | lhag mthong la sor rtog shes rab kyi khyab na | spyir rnal 'byor mngon sum dang | bye brag sangs rgyas kyi ye shes ji snyed pa bdag 'dzin gyi gnyen po dang | lhag mthong ma yin par 'gyur te | rnal 'byor mngon sum du 'jog pa la rtog pa dang bral ba zhig nges par dgos pa'i phyir ro | de bas na 'phags pa'i sgom lta ci smos | theg chen gyi sbyor lam lta bu so so skye bo'i sgom yang yid byed zhen pa dang bral bar bzhas dgos pa rje btsun byams pa'i gzhung rgyan gnyis dang 'byed gnyis las gsal bar gsungs so ||*

<sup>387</sup> These nine methods were taught in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, D4049, 99a<sub>4-5</sub>: “What is calm abiding? It is like that: [1] to settle the mind inwardly, [2] to settle [the mind] continuously, [3] to settle [the mind] firmly, [4] to settle [the mind] intensely, [5] to tame [the mind], [6] to pacify [the mind], [7] to pacify [the mind] completely, [8] to [stabilize the mind] in a one-pointed [state], and [9] to settle [the mind] in equanimity.” *zhi gnas gang zhe na | 'di lta ste | nang nyid la sems 'jog pa dang | rgyun tu 'jog pa dang | blan te 'jog pa dang | nye bar 'jog pa dang | 'dul bar byed pa dang | zhi bar byed pa dang | rnam par zhi bar byed pa dang | rtse gcig tu byed pa dang | mnyam par 'jog pa'o |*

<sup>388</sup> *Sa chen skyong mdzad rin spungs sde pa shākya rgyal mtshan gyi zhus lan*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 640<sub>3-6</sub>: *de lta yin pa de'i phyir lung mang po lhag mthong du bshad pa'i so sor rtog pa'i shes rab de ni bsam byung gi shes rab yin gyi sgom byung gi rnal 'byor dngos ma yin | de bzhin du lung mang po zhi gnas su bshad pa'i sems gnas pa'i thabs dgu yang sgom la 'jug pa'i sbyor ba yin gyi | sgom byung gi rnal 'byor dngos ma yin | gnyis po de la zhi gnas ma thob pa'i lhag mthong dang | lhag mthong ma thob pa'i zhi gnas zhes bya | gnyis po zung du 'jug pa'i gnas skabs de la sgom byung gi rnal 'byor dngos zhes bya |*

Coming to the main practice phase of meditation, Shākya mchog ldan is in a position to argue that positive mental engagements such as mindfulness and vigilance, important as they are for dispelling flaws in meditation are not the actual meditation. The analogy of the fire of wisdom which burns away the conceptual resources used to kindle it is again used to support his claim that *amanasikāra* forms a central place in the main practice (*ngos gzhi*) phase of Buddhist meditation:

Now, during the main practice of meditation, the sentinel of mindfulness (*dran pa*) and vigilance (*shes bzhin*) are indeed necessary. [Mental engagements] such as these may dispel flaws in the meditation<sup>389</sup>, but they are not the actual meditation. During the main practice of meditation, by the example of the fire generated by rubbing two sticks that consumes these very [sticks] and [thus] itself, it is explained that this discriminating insight must be burned away by the fire of wisdom. If that calm abiding which is free from mental engagements has the lethargic [character] known as “stagnant” (*ltengs po*), then why wouldn’t it absurdly follow that the discriminating insight has the [character of] restlessness or hysteria?<sup>390</sup>

As much as Shākya mchog ldan endorses *amanasikāra* as a valid system of meditation, he also emphasizes that nonconceptuality unsupported by wisdom may turn into its opposite, the mental factor of ignorance. We may recall his statement in his *Great Ship of Unity* (see above, p. 121) that immersing one’s mind in a blank mental state characterized by not thinking anything at all, although at times mistaken for the “real Mahāmudrā”, is only the mental factor of ignorance which is diametrically opposed to the wisdom of awareness.” Elsewhere in this work he adds that “the [state of] not thinking or pondering anything at all by an ignorant person in these phases is subsumed under the ignorance at the time of the ground. Among the two types of ignorance—afflicted (*nyon mongs pa can*) and nonafflicted—it is the latter and [characterized as] a disorientation regarding suchness.”<sup>391</sup> Shākya mchog ldan adds that it was the actions motivated by the afflictive type of ignorance which Sa paṇ had in mind when he

<sup>389</sup> See for example also the *Jñānālokāṃkāra*: “The [mental] factors involved in becoming mentally disengaged are beneficial. Those involved in becoming mentally engaged are not beneficial.” As translated in Mathes 2013, 279.

<sup>390</sup> *Sa chen skyong mdzad rin spungs sde pa shākya rgyal mtshan gyi zhus lan*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 640<sub>6</sub>–641<sub>2</sub>: *sgom ngos gzhi’i dus su dran pa dang shes bzhin gyi mel tshe ba dgos mod | de ’dra de sgom skyon sel byed yin gyi | sgom ngos ma yin | sgom ngos gzhi’i dus su ni | shing gnyis drud pa las byung ba’i mes shing de nyid kyang bsreg pa’i dpes | so sor rtog pa’i shes rab nyid kyang ye shes kyi mes sreg dgos par bshad pa yin | yid byed dang bral ba’i zhi gnas de ltengs po zhes bya ba’i bying rmugs can ’gyur na | so sor rtog pa’i shes rab de yang g.yer po’am rgod bag can du ci’i phyir mi thal |*

<sup>391</sup> PCKs, see Volume II, translation: 59, critical edition: 77–78.



said that “the Great Seal meditation of the ignorant, it is taught, usually becomes a cause of animal birth” based on the traditional explanation that “individual actions associated with each of the three poisons are actions that establish the three lower destinies”.

For Shākya mchog ldan, it is imperative that one distinguishes the luminous *amanasikāra* of wisdom typical of the Madhyamaka or Mahāmudrā meditator who settles in a state of nonconceptual equipoise, lucidly not pursuing thoughts, from the lethargic *amanasikāra* of ignorance characteristic of the benighted meditator who languishes in a state of stagnant tranquility. While the mental nonengagement of wisdom is equated with nonconceptual realization and *mahāmudrā* itself, the mental nonengagement of ignorance is regarded as a deviation that stands in the way of such realization.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Shākya mchog ldan’s productive engagements with the Dwags po Mahāmudrā teachings which evolved during the last half of his life culminated in a trilogy of works articulating and defending this tradition’s leading views and practices. In these and related Mahāmudrā treatments, the author sought to show that these teachings were commensurate with the definitive meaning of the sūtras and tantras and thus marked the denouement of Buddhist soteriological objectives. In terms of view, Mahāmudrā philosophy reflects the unity of manifestation and emptiness (*snang stong zung ‘jug*) beyond extremes of existence and nonexistence which is generally regarded as the goal of Buddhist thought and meditation. This unity is also discernable in the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud view of buddha nature as the unity of natural purity and its inseparable buddha qualities discovered as the *dharmakāya* of realization. Finally, it is also conspicuous in its view of meditation as the unity of appearances and non-apprehension (*’dzin med*), or of thoughts and their unborn nature.

Although biographical sources confirm that Shākya mchog ldan lectured and wrote extensively on the Madhyamaka tradition of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, his philosophical writings reveal deep and lasting reservations about the tendency among many of his Dge lugs, Sa skya and Bka’ brgyud contemporaries to take its method of ascertaining emptiness as a nonaffirming negation through reasoning as an end in itself. In Shākya mchog ldan’s view, this nonaffirming emptiness can be nothing more than a mere conceptual abstraction (*don spyi*) or other-exclusion (*gzhan sel*). To confuse its elimination of imputations with goal-realization itself is, in his words, comparable to mistaking a mother for a barren woman inasmuch as it fatally overlooks the fecundity and efficacy of what is to be discovered. The fecundity of emptiness, buddha nature, and nature of mind, is captured in the formulation “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” (*sarvākāravāropetaśūnyatā*), a term attested both in tantras and sūtras. As Shākya mchog ldan explains, the identification of this *sarvākāravāropetaśūnyatā* as a nonaffirming negation, as was done in the system of Tsong

kha pa and his followers, contradicts all scripture, reasoning, and the *upadeśas*. Properly understood, this locution reflects the inseparability of luminosity and emptiness, of the natural purity and soteriological efficacy of buddha nature.

In terms of praxis, it is striking that Shākya mchog ldan characterizes Mahāmudrā as the *yogin*'s system of first-hand experience (*nyams su myong ba'i lugs*) which he considers superior to the dialectician's (*mtshan nyid pa*) two systems of severing superimpositions (*sgro 'dogs bcad pa'i lugs*) – the negating Self-emptiness and affirming Other-emptiness systems. These latter two systems were regarded as useful preliminary measures for clearing away discursive superimpositions to allow for the direct perception of the nature of mind and reality. They were nonetheless described as “poisoned” (*dug can*) or conceptually fabricated and thus distinct from unconditioned personally realized wisdom.

In this regard, the Other-emptiness tradition was considered a major step beyond the Self-emptiness system since it emphatically affirms, rather than denies, the presence of nondual wisdom as what remains (*lhag ma*) in the wake of eliminating discursive elaborations. This affirmative stance is precisely what distinguishes third *dharmacakra* discourses of definitive meaning from second *dharmacakra* discourses on emptiness and selflessness which are thought to be of merely provisional meaning, in need of further interpretation. Hence, to accept that there is something important to be discovered by Buddhist soteriological activities is to accept the core hermeneutical standpoint of the scriptures of the third *dharmacakra*, the tantras and the *dohās* of the mahāsiddhas. This affirmative, cataphatic approach is therefore thought to bring the Gzhan stong adept much closer to the goal of unity than his or her Rang stong counterpart. We may in this regard recall Shākya mchog ldan's comment that the very idea of “unity” has its inception in works he broadly classifies as Gzhan stong and Alīkākāra-vāda Madhyamaka, but is not attested in the classical texts of the Rang stong tradition. That said, it would be wrong to call Shākya mchog ldan's support for the Gzhan stong tradition unequivocal. For, as much as he criticized the Rang stong tendency toward a nihilistic interpretation of emptiness, buddha nature, and ultimate truth in terms of a nonaffirming negation, he also criticized the Gzhan stong tendency toward an eternalist interpretation, associated with the Dol po pa's Jo nang tradition, which defines emptiness, buddha nature, and ultimate truth as a permanent absolute lying beyond time and dependent arising. While Dol po pa describes a perfect nature which is empty of the dependent and imagined natures, Shākya mchog ldan interprets the perfect nature as the dependent nature which is empty of the imagined nature. Self-luminous self-awareness, the personally realized nondual wisdom, which is cultivated through direct yogic perception, actualizes this true nature of mind in the immediacy of the present moment (which alone is real), whereas Dol po pa maintains that the perfect nature is a permanent, unconditioned entity that lies beyond time and matter.

It is intriguing that while Shākya mchog ldan's works generally reflect his endorsement of Gzhan stong views and methods, his Mahāmudrā works reflect a more ambivalent

view which frames Self-emptiness and Other-emptiness as oppositional positions within a dialect of reciprocal determination. It is clear that he saw Mahāmudrā as the best way to break out of this dialectic. After all, the primary focus of Mahāmudrā views and practices is to gain first-hand experience of mind's abiding nature in meditation in order to undermine dualistic perceptions and beliefs and to thereby discover the unity of appearances and emptiness in post-meditation. In short, by restoring the primacy of knowledge grounded in first-hand experience over the type of inferential-representational knowledge favoured in Buddhist philosophical traditions, the Mahāmudrā tradition reawakened the possibility of making Buddhist soteriology a matter of direct acquaintance rather than abstract positive or negative determinations.

It will be seen that Karma phrin las pa, one of Shākya mchog ldan's foremost students, shared with him the view that Mahāmudrā and buddha nature are best understood in terms of the unity of emptiness and manifestation, or natural purity and buddha qualities. He also agreed that a Gzhan stong path of affirming negation offers the best prospect of realizing this unity since it acknowledges the importance of what is to be discovered. It will hopefully become clear to the reader that philosophical differences between Shākya mchog ldan and many of his post-classical Bka' brgyud coreligionists, including the three masters examined in the chapters to follow, had more to do with doxographical affiliations than central aims and viewpoints. Compared with Shākya mchog ldan, Karma phrin las pa's extant writings give little attention to the Alīkākāra (Nonrepresentationalist) tradition, while Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po's works emphatically reject it, along with Shākya mchog ldan's claim that it can be considered Madhyamaka tradition.

Still, the doxographical divide separating Shākya mchog ldan from many of his Bka' brgyud counterparts had far-reaching philosophical ramifications. Unlike Shākya mchog ldan, Karma phrin las, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po were all proponents and defenders of the so-called Nonfoundationalist (*apraṭiṣṭhāna*) Mantrayāna-Madhyamka tradition of Maitrīpa and his colleagues which claimed to transcend the mentalistic presuppositions of all strands of Cittamātra thought (Representationalist and Nonrepresentationalist alike). Karma phrin las for his part considered this Apratiṣṭhāna tradition to be the Great Madhyamaka that supersedes not only the Cittamātra schools but also the Madhyamaka schools designated in Tibetan Buddhist doxographies as Svātantrika and \*Prāsaṅgika. He and the other two masters considered in the chapters to follow take this Nonfoundationalist Madhyamaka as the basic philosophical paradigm for approaching Mahāmudrā views and meditation, a paradigm which underscores the unity of manifestation and emptiness but leaves no room in it for the Cittamātra construal of consciousness as a real entity having real properties.

**KARMA PHRIN LAS**

## OVERVIEW

It is surprising that a scholar as erudite as Karma phrin las pa (1456–1539), when looking back on his academic career in the later part of his life, took a rather self-deprecatory view of the many scholarly accomplishments of his younger years. He confides in one of his spiritual songs that all his studies of countless sūtric and tantric scriptures made him attain only superficial assumptions<sup>392</sup> but not the confidence of ascertaining luminous emptiness.<sup>393</sup> As he muses in another stanza, unless the subtle divisions of philosophical tenets are fully penetrated, in which case they are, in fact, assimilated into *mahāmudrā*, they remain only the confused prattle of a lunatic who loses himself in endless verbosity.<sup>394</sup> *Mahāmudrā* is for him the ultimate essence of all the sūtras and tantras<sup>395</sup> or, more simply, the reality that is one's own mind.<sup>396</sup> Stated concisely, “the essence of self-awareness is *mahāmudrā*”<sup>397</sup>. In other words, *mahāmudrā* is discovered not in conceptual analysis but in momentary self-awareness, self-luminosity, and freedom from the impurity of clinging to concepts, which together constitute the realization of the *dharmakāya*.<sup>398</sup> As Karma phrin las explains, when settling in the uncontrived, natural essence, this ground (*gzhi*) having nothing to remove and nothing to add is the *dharmakāya*. The path (*lam*) of *Mahāmudrā* is a matter of internalizing the great

<sup>392</sup> *Chos kyi rje Karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las rdo rje mgur kyi 'phreng ba rnams*, [hereafter KPdg] (*ga* 1–86), 72–3: “In the past I attended many teachers [and] looked over countless scriptures of the sūtras and the tantras, but even though [I] advanced many refutations and verifications in the context of scripture and reasoning, [they] resulted only in a path of outward assumptions.” *ngas sngon chad bla ma mang du bsten || mdo rgyud kyi glegs bam dpag med mthong || lung rigs la dgag sgrub mang byas kyang || phyi yid dpyod kyi lam du lus nas thal ||* Karma phrin las pa contrasts the path of outward assumptions with “cutting reifications from within” (Ibid., 73–4: *sgro 'dogs nang nas chod*) through the process of meditation.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 55: “Previously, cutting and cutting through the elaborations of dualistic beliefs, I did not attain the confidence of ascertaining luminous empti[ness]. Now, as self-liberation naturally dawns [I] have taken hold of the wisdom of nonduality.” *sngar gzung 'dzin spros pa gcod gcod nas || stong gsal la nges pa'i gdeng ma thob || da rang grol ngang gis shar ba na || gnyis med kyi ye shes lag rtser lon ||*

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 74–5: “Verbal expressions are endless. Yet the moment all the subtle hair-splitting divisions of philosophical tenets are deeply understood, they are included within *Mahāmudrā*. When not understood, they are [but] the confused prattle of lunatics.” *tha snyad kyi tshig la zad pa med || grub mtha' yi spu ris thams cad kyang || rtogs tsa na phyag rgya chen por 'dus || ma rtogs na smyon pa'i slab chol yin ||*

<sup>395</sup> *Chos kyi rje Karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las thun mong ba'i dri lan gyi phreng ba rnams*, [hereafter KPdl] (*ca* 87–223), 136: “The treatises and *upadeśas* of *Mahāmudrā* are the ultimate essence of all the sūtras and tantras.” *phyag rgya chen po'i gzhung dang gdams ngag rnams || mdo rgyud kun gyi snying po'i mthar thug yin ||*

<sup>396</sup> KPdg, 83: “The expression ‘*Mahāmudrā* teaching’ – its meaning [and reality] is said to be one's own mind.” *chos phyag rgya chen po skad pa de | don rang gi sems la zer ba yin ||*

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 85: *rang rig pa'i ngo bo phyag rgya che*.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 77–81: “Without the impurity of clinging to concepts, this momentary naturally luminous self-awareness is realized as the *dharmakāya* of self-liberated great bliss.” *rnam rtog la zhen pa'i sel med pa || skad cig ma rang rig rang gsal 'di || rang grol bde chen gyi chos skur rtogs ||*

unity through which the fruition, the perfection of the twofold aims of oneself and others, is accomplished.<sup>399</sup>

In Karma phrin las pa's Mahāmudrā works we encounter an author who combines a brilliant philosophical mind with the experiential orientation of a dedicated *yogin*. This fits with his view of himself as a practice-focused *kusulu-yogin*<sup>400</sup> of the Karma Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā lineage who was also conversant with the Sa skya Lam 'bras tradition.<sup>401</sup> In his eyes, both traditions transmitted the same essential meaning, i.e., the indistinguishability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the unity of appearance and emptiness<sup>402</sup> or, in terminology specific to the Dwags po Bka' brgyud system, the unity of thoughts and *dharmakāya*. Reflecting upon his own experience, Karma phrin las reports that he was able to eliminate superimpositions from within, and not through recourse to the outer path of philosophical speculation. In this way he realized the ground—mind's true nature—as unborn, this nonarisen nature as *dharmakāya*, and the *dharmakāya* as transcending all verbal expression. As divisive thoughts were liberated in the dimension of self-awareness, dualistic perceptions simply evaporated in the expanse of nonorigination.<sup>403</sup>

<sup>399</sup> KPdg, 85<sub>2-3</sub>: “Settle in the uncontrived natural essence; the ground [where there] is nothing to remove and nothing to add is the *dharmakāya*. Practice the path as the great unity and you will accomplish the fruition which is the perfection of the twofold benefit.” *ma bcos rang babs kyi ngang la zhog || gzhi bsal gzhas bral ba chos kyi sku || lam zung 'jug chen por nyams su long || don gnyis mthar phyin gyi 'bras bu bsgrubs ||*

<sup>400</sup> *Kusulu* is an alternative term for *kusāli*, a term of unknown origin which is virtually synonymous with *rnal 'byor pa* (*yogin*). See *Chos kyi rje Karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las rdo rje mgur kyi 'phreng ba rnams*, (ga 1–86), 80<sub>5</sub>: “He who is a master of discursive conventions takes the four qualities of view, meditation, conduct, and fruition separately. For me, the *kusulu*, they are undifferentiated. This is the mode of abiding wherein ground and fruition are the same. In the case of propounding *mahāmudrā* meditation, were Lord Buddha to appear in person, it is impossible that [he would] proclaim any meaning other than this. Considering this to be true, put it into practice!” *chos lta sgom spyod pa 'bras bu bzhi || khong tha snyad mkhan po so sor 'dod || nged ku su lu la khyad par med || 'di gzhi 'bras gcig pa'i gnas lugs yin || khyed phyag rgya chen po sgom bzhed na || rje sangs rgyas dngos su byon gyur kyang || don 'di las gzhan pa gsung mi srid || 'di bden par dgongs la nyams su long ||*

<sup>401</sup> See Reingans 2004, 70.

<sup>402</sup> KPdl, 207<sub>1-3</sub>: “Since the two, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, are an inseparable unity, the key point of the view of this Bka' [brgyud] is known in the saying ‘thoughts are *dharmakāya*’. The nature of *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*. Thus Saraha said to the ignorant ones in the *Dohā*[*koṣa*<sup>a</sup>] that this is to be understood. The key point of the view of the glorious Sa skya pas which claims that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable is identical to the key-point that thoughts are *dharmakāya*.” *'khor 'das gnyis po dbyer med gcig yin pas || bka' brgyud rin chen 'di yi lta ba'i gnad || rnam rtog chos sku zhes byar grags pa yin || 'khor ba'i rang bzhin mya ngan 'das pa zhes || rmongs pa rnams la mda' bsnun gyis smras pa || tse ne shes par gyis shes do har gsungs || dpal ldan sa skya pa rnams lta ba'i gnad || 'khor 'das dbyer med nyid du bzhed pa dang || rnam rtog chos skur bzhed pa gnad gcig pas ||* <sup>a</sup>This remark pertains to the *People Dohā*, verse 102, *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 109<sub>8-9</sub>: “[For] one who ascertains that this *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*, they are not thought of as different. Since they are of one nature, one gives up distinguishing [them]. Thus have I realized the stainless [reality].” *gang zhig 'khor ba de ni mya ngan 'das par nges || dbye ba gzhan du sems pa ma yin te || rang bzhin gcig gis dbye ba rnam par spangs || dri ma med pa nga yis rab tu rtogs ||*

<sup>403</sup> KPdg, 7<sub>3-4</sub>: “Now I have cut reifications from within. I have realized the ground, mind's nature to be unborn. I have seen the unborn as the *dharmakāya*. I have understood the *dharmakāya* to be beyond words and

To be sure, Karma phrin las pa does not deny the importance of cultivating a correct view through conceptually scrutinizing reality, mind, and its nature. However, he emphasizes that attachment and aversion to philosophical tenets must be avoided. It is for this very reason that the polemicism so prominent in the other scholars considered in this study play a lesser role in the extant works of Karma phrin las pa. Giving scant consideration to the critical appraisal of specific rival views, he continually emphasizes the need to abandon attachments to views altogether and to integrate an unbiased view with the practice of meditation. “Views based on philosophical hair-splitting, when discussed, may seem eloquent, but they are just plain conceitedness.”<sup>404</sup> In any case, he says, clinging to philosophical tenets is what should be relinquished through the path of vision, for such clinging was said by the Buddha to constitute the obscuration of conceptual imputation.

Clearly, for Karma phrin las pa, there is only one path to buddhahood<sup>405</sup> and the understanding that all Buddhist teachings are without contradiction constitutes a special feature of the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud tradition. Because the intent of the Buddha is the same throughout all his seemingly diverse teachings, their underlying unity can and should be appreciated by means of an impartial pure perception.<sup>406</sup> It is from this standpoint that Karma phrin las pa maintains that self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) do not contradict each other, citing as his principle authority his root teacher, the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506). On this view, Self-emptiness—in the sense that all phenomena are empty of an own self-essence—implies the wisdom of nonduality. He thus presents Rang stong not in terms of a nonaffirming negation but in line with the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*.<sup>407</sup>

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expressions. Thoughts are freed in the dimension of self-awareness. Subject and object have evaporated in the expanse of nonarising.” *dus da res sgro ’dogs nang nas chod || gzhi sems nyid skye ba med par rtogs || skye med de chos kyi sku ru mthong || chos sku smra [b]rjod las ’das par go || rnam rtog rang rig gi ngang du grol || gzung ’dzin skye med kyi dbyings su yal ||*

<sup>404</sup> KPdg, 12<sub>2-3</sub>: *grub mtha’i spu ris ’byed pa’i lta ba de || smra tshe legs legs ’dra yang pho tshod tsam ||*

<sup>405</sup> KPdl, 157<sub>5</sub>: *mthar thug sangs rgyas lam du gcig yin |*

<sup>406</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yig kyi mun sel*, 88<sub>4</sub>–89<sub>5</sub>: “All attachments and aversions [in the context of] clinging to philosophical tenets are to be given up through the [path of] vision. The victor taught that they are obscurations of conceptual imputations.... The so-called “greatness of realizing that the diversity of teachings do not contradict each other” is renowned in this tradition.... Even though there appear to be distinctions in views and tenets, the intent of the Buddha is all the same. All being in accord, they should all be held equally. It is crucial to cultivate an unbiased pure perception.” *grub mtha’ la zhen pa’i || chags sdang mtha’ dag mthong bas spang bya ste || kun tu brtags pa’i sgrib par rgyal bas gsungs || ... bstan pa mtha’ dag ’gal ba med rtogs pa’i || che ba zhes bya brgyud pa ’di la grags || ... lta grub so sor dbye ba ltar snang yang || rgyal ba’i dgongs pa gang yin thams cad gcig || ... thams cad mthun rnam thams cad bzhin du gzung || phyogs ris med pa’i dag snang bsgom pa gces || ...* See also Volume II, translation: 88, critical edition: 92.

<sup>407</sup> *Śatasāhasrikāpañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitābṛhaṭṭīkā* (= *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*), D3808, 206a<sub>5-6</sub>: “Empty [means] being devoid of what is other, such as a vase being called ‘empty’, because it is devoid of water. Likewise, phenomena are thought to be ‘empty’, because they are devoid of a nature such as specific characteristics.” *stong pa ni gzhan bral ba ste | dper na chu dang bral ba’i phyir bum pa stong pa zhes bya ba lta*

His view of Other-emptiness is that mind's nature is empty of what is different from it, i.e., adventitious obscurations, whereas not being aware of mind's true nature is the source of the dichotomy between the apprehended and the apprehender. In the state of an ordinary sentient being, the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation<sup>408</sup>, though inherent to mind's nature, remain obscured by the adventitious stains, of which mind's nature nonetheless remains intrinsically empty. When these obscurations are finally done away with, buddhahood endowed with these sixty-four qualities manifests. Properly considered, Gzhan stong encapsulates the innatist view that when mind as such is recognized as it really is—empty of adventitious obscurations—inherent buddha qualities blossom naturally. Gzhan stong does not establish a permanent, enduring, ultimate entity, but draws attention to ultimate truth which is simply natural luminosity, the inseparability of expanse and awareness. This is also called natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*)<sup>409</sup>, a key term in the terminology of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā which indicates a momentary awareness aware of its own true nature.

Karma phrin las pa attributed this way of understanding Rang stong and Gzhan stong to Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje and he also pointed out its conformity with the view of Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho. He considered this reconciliatory approach to be superior to the kinds of Rang stong and Gzhan stong predominantly known in Tibet.<sup>410</sup> With this remark he appears to make a veiled reference to both the Rang stong views of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his followers who emphasized a nonaffirming negation and the Jo nang Gzhan stong views of Dol po pa (1292–1361) and his followers who emphasized an unchanging absolute

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*bu'o | de bzhin du rang gi mtshan nyid la sogs pa'i ngo bo nyid dang bral ba'i phyir chos de dag nyid la stong pa zhes kun tu rtog go |* On the question of authorship of the *Bṛhaṭṭikā*, see Brunnhölzl 2011b, 9–12

<sup>408</sup> The sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation are the qualities of buddhahood. They comprise the thirty-two qualities of the *dharmakāya* and the thirty-two qualities of the form *kāyas* respectively. See for example Brunnhölzl 2009, 218–23.

<sup>409</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yig kyi mun sel*, 917–923: “The thirty-two qualities of dissociation from all obscurations and the thirty-two of maturation that unfold as enlightened activity, are special qualities exclusive to perfect buddhahood. They are not asserted to be present at the time of the ground. The sixty-four qualities present in the ground are veiled by obscurations. When these stains are vanquished, [one] becomes an immaculate victor. Thus, the ground of emptiness of *gzhan stong* is *\*sugatagarbha*, mind as such, this very natural luminosity. [This], i.e., natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, the natural awareness itself, is the profound view of Gzhan stong.” *sgrib kun bral ba'i yon tan so gnyis dang || phrin las rgyas pa'i rnam smin sum bcu gnyis || rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kho na'i khyad chos te || 'di ni gzhi la bzhugs par mi 'dod do || gzhi la bzhugs pa'i yon tan drug bcu bzhi || sgrib pas bsgrigs shing dri ma de bcom pas || dri med rgyal bar 'gyur phyir gzhan stong gi || stong gzhi bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po ni || sems nyid rang bzhin 'od gsal 'di nyid yin || ... rang bzhin 'od gsal zung 'jug lhan cig skyes || dbyings rig dbyer med tha mal shes pa nyid || gzhan stong zab mo'i lta ba yin zhes gsung ||* See also volume II, translation: 91, critical edition: 93–94.

<sup>410</sup> KPdl, 1603: “Both the *gzhan stong* and *rang stong* as asserted by Rang byung rdo rje are superior to the *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* as they are mostly known here in Tibet. His and the intent of the mighty victor [i.e., the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho] are one and the same.” *rang byung rdo rje bzhed pa'i gzhan stong dang || rang stong gnyis ka bod 'dir grags che ba'i || rang stong gzhan stong las ni khyad par 'phags || de dang rgyal ba'i dbang po dgongs pa gcig ||*



beyond dependent arising. Charting a course between such extremes of radical negation and affirmation, his Mahāmudrā philosophy follows the Great Middle Way of Nonfoundational Unity (*zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas [pa'i] dbu ma chen po*). His unequivocal commitment to a view which reconciles negative and affirmative orientations through the meditative realization of freedom from all eternalist and nihilist metaphysical views made Karma phrin las pa a leading paragon of the postclassical Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā of the Middle Way.

Nondual wisdom which he equates with mind as such (*sems nyid*)—natural luminosity, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, or natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*)<sup>411</sup>—is the ground, the inseparability of appearance and emptiness, which gives rise to both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. On this view, *saṃsāra*, the world of appearances—the perception of which confines sentient beings to the framework of their delusions, their impure minds—is nothing but adventitious defilement. It is through this understanding and the relinquishment of obscurations that the inseparability of appearance and emptiness is realized. As for the question of how to bring about this realization, he declares that the unity of compassion and insight, or merit and wisdom, is indispensable to the path of awakening. While compassion devoid of a genuine understanding of emptiness does not bring about liberation from cyclic existence, emptiness devoid of compassion represents an inferior ideal which falls far short of the Mahāyāna altruistic ethos.<sup>412</sup>

As for the method, although Karma phrin las pa favours the tantric path which he holds to be more expedient than the sūtric, he sees no substantial difference between these two when it comes to the view. According to him, there is a general agreement among scholars the likes of Sa skya Paṇḍita, Rang byung rdo rje and others that the *pāramitāyāna* and the *mantrayāna*

<sup>411</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yig kyi mun sel*, 92<sub>2-3</sub>: “Ultimate truth is nothing but the nature of mind that is free from the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender. [This], i.e., natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, natural awareness itself, is the profound view of Gzhan stong.” Thus, my teacher explained that “even the so-called Rang stong and Gzhan stong are not contradictory.” *gzung 'dzin rnam rtog dang bral ba'i || sems nyid kho na don dam bden pa ste || rang bzhin 'od gsal zung 'jug lhan cig skyes || dbyings rig dbyer med tha mal shes pa nyid || gzhan stong zab mo'i lta ba yin zhes gsung || des na rang stong gzhan stong zhes pa yang || 'gal ba min zhes bdag gi bla ma bzhed ||* KPdl, see also Volume II, translation: 90, critical edition: 93.

<sup>412</sup> *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 21<sub>14</sub>–22<sub>4</sub>: “One who takes up the path of emptiness alone divorced from the method of great compassion will not discover the supreme path of the Great Vehicle. [Query:] Then is freedom attained if one cultivates only compassion divorced from emptiness? [Reply:] In that case, one will dwell here in *saṃsāra* but will not attain liberation [from it]. Because compassion alone which involves [sentimental] attachment is markedly inferior, it is not a cause of liberation. In short, it is inappropriate to cultivate emptiness alone divorced from compassion... [But] one will not become free through compassion alone divorced from emptiness.” *thabs snying rje chen po dang bral ba'i stong pa nyid rkyang pa'i lam du zhugs pa gang yin pa des ni theg pa chen po'i lam mchog rnyed pa ma yin no || ... stong pa dang bral ba'i snying rje 'ba' zhig bsgoms na grol ba thob bam zhe na | de yang 'khor ba 'dir gnas par 'gyur gyi | thar pa thob par mi 'gyur te | 'dzin pa dang bcas pa'i snying rje rkyang pa ni shin du dman pa'i phyir thar pa'i rgyu ma yin no || mdor na snying rje dang bral ba'i stong rkyang bsgom du mi rung ste | ... stong pa bral ba'i snying rje rkyang pas grol bar mi 'gyur te | ...*

convey the same meaning in terms of the view.<sup>413</sup> How this tantric method relates to the traditions of Maitrīpa and Sgam po pa who deliberately taught a Mahāmudrā approach that is not purely tantric is not specified, but he does affirm that “the treatises and *upadeśas* of Mahāmudrā represent the culminating essence of all sūtras and tantras”<sup>414</sup>. To be sure, Karma phrin las pa emphasizes that ultimately, compassion is to be understood as great nonreferential compassion which is indivisible from emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvākāravāropetaśūnyatā*).<sup>415</sup> He also calls it the unity which is emptiness endowed with the

<sup>413</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan drang ba dang nges pa'i don gyi snang byed ces bya ba ngo gro bla ma'i dris lan* (ca 108–139), 132<sub>3-5</sub>: “Although Madhyamaka, Rdzogs chen, and Mahāmudrā are without difference in terms of the object of the view, with respect to the aspect of the method, the Mantra paths are superior. The learned and realized masters such as Sa skya Pañchen and Rang byung rdo rje and others say that the view of the Pāramitāyāna and of the Vajrayāna is the same. The scholars agree that the object of the view and the moment [this view] is realized are the same. But when it comes to the means of realizing this view, the Secret Mantra is supreme. When it is made manifest in realization, the Secret Mantra is distinctly superior when it comes to the methods to realize the view.” *dbu ma rdzogs chen phyag rgya chen po rnam || lta ba'i yul la khyad par med na yang || thabs kyi cha nas sngags lam khyad par 'phags || sa skya pañ chen rang byung rdo rje sogs || mkhas grub du mas pha rol phyin pa dang || rdo rje theg pa lta ba gcig par ni || gsungs pa de yang lta ba'i yul dang ni || rtogs pa mngon du gyur tshe gcig pa'i don || yin gyi lta ba rtogs pa'i thabs la ni || gsang sngags khyad par 'phags shes mkhas rnam mthun ||*

<sup>414</sup> KPdl, *ibid.*, 136<sub>3</sub>: *phyag rgya chen po'i gzhung dang gdams ngag rnam || mdo rgyud kun gyi snying po'i mthar thug yin ||*

<sup>415</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In Rang byung rdo rje'i *gsung 'bum*, [thereafter RDSb] vol. 14, 8<sub>2</sub>: “The method consists in the nonduality of nonreferential compassion and insight, i.e., emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects.” *thabs dmigs pa med pa'i snying rje chen po dang shes rab rnam pa kun gyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong pa nyid gnyis su med pa ... ||* On the meaning of “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects,” in the general tantric context where the excellence of all aspects pertain to the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation, see *ibid.*, vol. 14, 329<sub>4-6</sub>: “The assertion of my *bla ma*, the mighty victor [Seventh Karma pa] is that emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects and *\*sugatagarbha* are of one meaning. Therefore, it is maintained that *\*sugatagarbha* being actually endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation means ‘endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ and that these are not established as [something] identifiable and as characteristics [means] emptiness. Thus, integrating these, i.e., the very cultivation of nonconceptual lucidity, is asserted to be the meditation of *mahāmudrā*.” *bdag gi bla ma rgyal ba'i dbang po'i bzhed pa la | rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyi dang bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po don gcig pas | bde snying la bral rnam smin gyi yon tan drug bcu rtas bzhi dngos su ldan pa ni rnam kun mchog ldan dang | de yang ngos bzung dang mtshan mar ma grub pa ni stong nyid kyi don du bzhed pas de'i nyams len gsal la mi rtog pa bsgom pa nyid phyag rgya chen po'i sgom du bzhed do |* For further explanations on the term “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” see also for example Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas in *The Treasury of Knowledge*, book 8, part 4: “In general, the conventional designation of the term *mahāmudrā* (*phyag rgya chen po*, Great Seal) is used only in the Mantra [Vehicle]. The meaning is that the unity is ‘Seal’ (*phyag rgya*). Since all phenomena are pervaded by the nature of that seal, it is ‘Great’ (*chen po*) in the sense that no phenomena go beyond it. In this case, the full range of outer appearances is the unity of appearance and emptiness; the full range of inner awareness is the unity of awareness and emptiness, and the full range of feelings when awareness and emptiness meet is the unity of bliss and emptiness. Of these, the first two are called ‘emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ (*rnam kun mchog dang ldan gyi stong nyid*) and the last is called ‘supreme and unchanging great bliss’ (*mchog tu mi 'gyur ba'i bde ba chen po*). ... The comprehensive meaning is this: emptiness endowed with all aspects is the object to be known. When the knowledge of this emptiness in its entirety as unchanging great bliss is the knowing subject, then both object and subject are said to blend into one.” *Shes bya kun khyab, smad cha*, 379<sub>12</sub>–380<sub>2</sub>: *spyir phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba'i tshig gi tha snyad ni sngags kho nar gsungs shing don ni zung du 'jug pa la phyag rgya de'i rang bzhin gyis chos thams*

nature of compassion or compassion endowed with the nature of emptiness.<sup>416</sup> It cultivation leads to fruition consisting in the indivisibility of the two *kāyas*, the ultimate aspect being the *dharmakāya* and the conventional appearance for the benefit of others being the two form *kāyas*. The *dharmakāya* and the form *kāyas* are not distinct from each other just as the sun is not separate from its rays.<sup>417</sup>

All this raises the question of how the aspirant is to succeed in shifting from conceptual knowing to nondual awareness. A remark in one of his *vajra*-songs<sup>418</sup> echoes the Dwags po Bka' brgyud maxim that a devoted disciple may be able to swiftly recognize his or her own innate abiding nature upon encountering an authentic spiritual guide thanks to latent tendencies inculcated through having become familiar with this nature at an earlier stage in the present life or during past lives. However, in documenting the answers to questions raised by a Dpal Ngag gi dbang po to the contemporary 'Brug pa kun legs (1455–1529) in *Questions and Answers: the Mirror of White Silver*, Karma phrin las pa takes up the well-known Bka' brgyud distinction between three successive stages in realization as an adept's awareness gets successively more and more refined: intellectual understanding (*go ba*), experiencing (*nyams pa*), and realizing (*rtogs pa*). The author explains that in order to progress from intellectual comprehension to experiential understanding and direct realization, unremitting perseverance in meditation (*rdo rus gtugs nas bsgom pa*) is required. In the context of the path of direct perception of *mahāmudrā*, intellectual knowing may at first involve forming an abstraction or a mental image of emptiness and clarity. As the practitioner subsequently applies himself to analytical and settling meditation, all kinds of experiences may crop up in the meditator's mind, just as all sorts of plants may crop up in a summer meadow. The point is that the meditator's capacity to deal with these experiences with the support of the teacher's blessing, indications, methods and the practitioner's own virtue allows the experiences to ripen into a

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*cad la khyab pas chen po ste chos thams cad de las mi 'da' ba'o || de'i tshe phyi'i snang ba mtha' dag snang stong zung 'jug | nang gi rig pa mtha' dag rig stong zung 'jug | snang rig phrad pa'i tshor ba mtha' dag bde stong zung 'jug yin pa las dang po gnyis la rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong nyid ces bya | phyi ma la mchog tu mi 'gyur ba'i bde ba chen po zhes gsungs shing | ... don yongs rdzogs ni rnam pa kun ldan gyi stong pa nyid de yul shes par byas | de mtha' dag 'gyur med kyi bde ba chen por shes pa de yul can shes par byas nas yul yul can de gnyis 'dres shing gcig tu gyur pa zhig la brjod de |*

<sup>416</sup> Rgyal po dohā'i tīkā 'bring po 207<sub>23</sub>–208<sub>1</sub>: *de lta bu'i zung 'jug de la stong nyid snying rje'i snying po can nam | snying rje stong nyid kyi snying po can zhes kyang bya ste |*

<sup>417</sup> Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po. In RDSb, vol. 14, 84–5: “The indestructible ultimate *dharmakāya* and the pure conventional form *kāyas* which manifest for others are inseparable like the sun and its rays, [all of them] pertaining to the mind as such.” *gzhom du med pa'i don dam chos kyi sku dang | gzhan snang kun rdzob pa gzugs kyi sku dag nyi ma dang 'od kyi tshul ... du mi phyed pa ... sems nyid de la'o ...*

<sup>418</sup> KPdg, 85–6: “Through your skillful means and compassion and [my] tendencies due to familiarization in previous lives, or familiarizing myself with it in this life, I realized the innate abiding nature in this way.” *khyed kyi thabs mkhas thugs rje dang || sngon nas 'dris pa'i bag chags sam || tshe 'dir goms pa'i nyer len gyis || gnyug ma'i gnas lugs 'di ltar rtogs ||*

direct and decisive realization of the unchanging abiding condition which Maitreya describes in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*<sup>419, 420</sup>.

This Mahāmudrā path of direct realization is a touchstone of the author’s available writings to which he repeatedly returns. In one of his *vajra*-songs describing his own realization, he declares that by simply knowing the true face of emptiness in the absence of adventitious stains, emptiness is recognized as being imbued with unsurpassable qualities.<sup>421</sup> This invites comparison with ’Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal’s endorsement of a Mahāmudrā path which employs direct perception right from the beginning without analysis.<sup>422</sup>

## LIFE, WRITINGS AND INFLUENCES

Karma phrin las pa, also known as Dpal phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba’i lha, was an outstanding master who trained intensively in both the Bka’ brgyud and Sa skya schools and studied under many teachers representing a wide range of Tibetan Buddhist

<sup>419</sup> RGV 41<sub>21</sub>, I.51cd: *yathā pūrvam tathā paścād avikāritvadharmatā* || “It (i.e., the *dhātu*) is of an unchangeable nature—as it is before so it is later.”

<sup>420</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan dngul dkar me long*, (ca 198–210), 199<sub>3-7</sub>: “Of the three factors termed understanding, experiencing, and realizing, ‘earlier’ is inferior and ‘later’ is supreme. They are widely known in this precious Bka’ brgyud [tradition]. Propounders of the exegetical tradition of epistemology state that understanding and realizing are synonymns. Experiencing exists in all who have minds. This statement is due to habituation to the Pāramitā[yāna]. When it comes to taking direct perception as the path via Mahāmudrā, the meaning of understanding is to initially [grasp phenomena] as mere abstractions [or object universals]. By internalizing [them], there is nothing at all in the shimmering and effervescent visionary experiences that does not arise. Therefore it is as well-known as the wind that just as there is nothing amidst the variegated greenery that does not grow on a summer meadow, so too there is nothing that does not arise in a *yogin*’s experiences. By integrating these experiences in the analytical and settling meditation through the power of interdependent factors such as the teacher’s blessing and one’s own merit, and through symbols, methods, examples, and diligence, the mode of abiding will be seen by the eye of direct perception. At that time, experiences are enhanced and become realizations. The saying by Maitreya “It (i.e., the *dhātu*) is of an unchangeable nature—as it is before so it is later”, is a statement that truly puts its finger on that unchanging realization. Blo gros seng ge who also perfected wisdom repeatedly said that realization is nothing produced.” *go ba nyams dang rtogs pa zhes bya gsum* || *snga ma dman zhing phyi ma mchog yin zhes* || *bka’i brgyud rin chen ’di la yongs su grags* || *tshad ma’i gzhung lugs ’chad rnam go ba dang* || *rtogs pa rnam grangs sgra yin nyams zhes pa* || *nyams myong yin na sems yod kun la yod* | *gsung ’di pha rol phyin la zhen pas yin* || *phyag chen mngon sum lam du byed pas na* || *thog mar don spyi tsam du go ba’i don* || *nyams su blang pas nyams kyi snang ba la* | *ban bun lang long mi ’char ci yang med* || *de phyir dbyar pa’i sa la sna tshogs sngo* || *mi skye med pa bzhin du rnal ’byor pa’i* || *nyams la mi ’char med ces rlung ltar grags* || *nyams de bla ma dam pa’i byin rlabs dang* || *rang gi bsod nams la sogs rten ’brel gyi* || *mthu dang brda thabs dpe dang brtson ’grus kyis* || *dpyad dang ’jog sgom nyid du nyams blangs pas* || *gnas lugs mngon sum mig gis mthong bar ’gyur* || *de tshe nyams rnam rtogs par bogs thon pas* || ***byams pas*** | *ji ltar sngar bzhin phyi de bzhin* || *’gyur ba med pa’i chos nyid ces gsungs pa* || *’pho ’gyur med pa’i rtogs pa de la ni* || *dngos su phyag mdzub btsugs pa’i gsung yin la* || *shes rab mthar phyin blo gros seng ges kyang* || *rtogs pa skyed med pa shes yang yang gsung* ||

<sup>421</sup> KPdg, *Yin lug sgrog pa lta ba’i mgur* stanza 15, see Volume II, translation: 96, critical edition: 98.

<sup>422</sup> See Mathes 2008, 397.

traditions.<sup>423</sup> His name was at times abbreviated as Phyogs las nam rgyal or even just Phyogs las pa. In appreciation of his erudition and in reference to his birth place, he was sometimes called Dwags po Paṇ chen gsum pa.<sup>424</sup> Karma phrin las pa was born in Gtsang in 1456 in the Dgyer family in the area of Dwags po as the son to an official of the local governor.<sup>425</sup> The first meditation teachings Karma phrin las pa received, on Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen, were from one of his uncles, Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475), a famous physician and author of commentaries on the “four Tantras of Medicine”. Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje’s main teacher was the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524)<sup>426</sup>, a teacher of Karma phrin las as well, who had advocated *mahāmudrā* in the sense of an affirming negation: “I do not categorically make the criticism ‘this nonaffirming negation is totally untenable’. Yet for those who wish to realize the reality of this *mahāmudrā* via an affirming negation, that [nonaffirming negation] is precisely what has to be given up.”<sup>427</sup> From Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje Karma phrin las also received Rnying ma instructions on the “male gcod” (*pho gcod*) tradition that can be traced back to the 11th century Indian saint Pha dam pa sangs rgyas. He also studied Tibetan medicine with him.

At age seventeen, Karma phrin las received novice ordination from the master Lhun grub bzang po in Gnyal. The full monastic ordination was given to him by the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes<sup>428</sup>. According to biographical sources, after his novice ordination, Karma phrin las first travelled in the region of Gtsang to study with various masters of the Sa skya tradition where he received a comprehensive philosophical education based on classical Buddhist scriptures on Vinaya, Abhidharma, Prajñāpāramitā, and Madhyamaka. This course of studies was largely undertaken in the monastery of ’Bras yul skyed tshal. According to the *Mkhas pa’i dga’ ston*, his teacher during this period was Byams chen rab ’byams Sangs rgyas ’phel (1412–1485), the founder of this monastery and student of both Ngor chen Kun dga’ bzang po (1382–1456) and Rong ston Shes bya kun rigs (1367–1449). Karma phrin las also studied with the students of Sangs rgyas ’phel, ’Jam dbyangs Kun dga’ chos bzang (1433–

<sup>423</sup> See Rheingans 2004, 56.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 187. In the colophon of his *Zab mo nang don* commentary, he is called, *shar dwags po’i paṇḍita gsum pa dpal phyogs thams cad las nam par rgyal ba’i lha | ming gzhan karma phrin las pa*. The text was available in form of a blockprint in *dbu can* in the possession of Gene Smith, TBRC. It was newly published in the Collected Works of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (vol. 14, *tran*) in Zi ling in 2006. The other two Dwags po Paṇ chens likely refer to his uncles Dwags po Rab ’byams chos rgyal bstan pa (1449–1524) and Dwags po Bkra shis nam rgyal (1511–1587).

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>427</sup> See *Phyag rgya chen po drug bcu pa*, verse 12, *Zhwa dmar bzhi pa spyang snga chos kyi grags pa’i gsung ’bum*, vol. 6, 320<sub>21</sub>–321<sub>1</sub>. *med dgag ’di ni kun tu mi rung zhes || gcig tu bdag ni smod par mi byed kyang || phyag rgya chen po ma yin dgag ’di’i don || rtogs par ’dod pas spang bar bya ba nyid ||*

<sup>428</sup> See Rheingans 2004, 68.

1503) and Paṇ chen 'Bum phrag gsum pa (1433–1504). It is with the latter that he studied the works of Maitreya. Another of his Sa skya teachers was Gong dkar Rdo rje pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal (1432–1496), founder of the Gong dkar rdo rje gdan monastery south of Lhasa in Central Tibet. Karma phrin las pa received the Sa skya Path as Result (*lam 'bras*) transmission from Mus chen Sangs rgyas rin chen (1450–1524), abbot of the Ngor monastery, as well as from Steng dkar chos rje blo gros rnam rgyal and Rje btsun kun dga' bkra shis. Another of his important Lam 'bras teachers was Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507).

Among the various Bka' brgyud teachers he studied under, the most important belonged to the Karma bka' brgyud tradition. From the Fourth Zhwa dmar, he received tantric empowerments and explanations on the Six Dharmas of Nāropa (1016–1100)<sup>429</sup>. Under the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), who became his root teacher, Karma phrin las studied Mahāyāna philosophy as well as tantric topics, with special attention given to Rang byung rdo rje's (1284–1339) *Zab mo nang don*. He also learned from him the Six Doctrines of Nāropa and the Mahāmudrā instructions of Sgam po pa.<sup>430</sup> As we learn from some of Karma phrin las pa's *vajra* songs, another important Mahāmudrā teacher was 'Khrul zhig Sangs rgyas bsam grub (15<sup>th</sup> cent.), another disciple of the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho, who was closely connected with the Ras chung Bka' brgyud tradition. Unfortunately, little is known about this master other than that he was a highly experienced *yogin* well-versed in the *sahaja* teaching system<sup>431</sup> in the tradition of Par phu pa. According to the *Blue Annals*, he was an expert in the *dohās* of the mahāsiddhas and is said to have composed eight textbooks on them.<sup>432</sup> With him, Karma phrin las studied among other things Saraha's *Dohā Trilogy*, on which he would later compose his famed commentary.<sup>433</sup> Karma phrin las pa dedicated some of his spiritual songs to this master, addressing him as his spiritual father and praising him as the embodiment of the Buddha's *nirmāṇakāya* due to whose kindness he was

<sup>429</sup> See Rheingans 2004, 68.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>431</sup> *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 7<sub>18–23</sub>: “My spiritual teacher 'Khrul zhig chen po said ‘When teaching the *dohās*, it is very good to explain [them] according to the outer [aspect] by means of metaphors; according to the inner [aspect] by means of experiences; according to the secret [aspect] by means of the *ḍākinīs*’ sign language. From among [these] three, the first is explained by means of the thirty-five metaphors such as the sky and the jewel; the second by means of the results of the view, the meditation, and the conduct; and the third by means of [the four *mahāmudrā* yogas] mindfulness, beyond mindfulness (*dran med*), non arising and beyond the intellect (*blo 'das*).’” *bdag gi bla ma 'khrul zhig chen po'i zhal snga nas | do hā gsung ba'i tshen na | phyi ltar du dpe'i sgo nas 'chad pa | nang ltar du nyams myong gi sgo nas 'chad pa | gsang ba ltar du mkha' 'gro ma'i brda skad kyi sgo nas 'chad pa dang | gsum las | dang po ni nam mkha' nor bu sogs dpe so lnga'i sgo nas 'chad pa dang | gnyis pa ni | lta ba | sgom pa | spyod pa | 'bras bu'i sgo nas 'chad pa dang | gsum pa ni | dran pa | dran med | skye med | blo 'das kyi sgo nas 'chad par mdzad do | shin tu legs so ||*

<sup>432</sup> Roerich 1979, 864.

<sup>433</sup> See Rheingans 2004, 61–63.

able to free himself from all doubts and to eradicate the roots of delusion.<sup>434</sup> Karma phrin las pa studied as well with other students of the Seventh Karma pa including 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (15<sup>th</sup> c.) who taught him the Gcod (“cutting through [attachment]”) system.<sup>435</sup>

For many years, Karma phrin las held various positions as abbot and teacher at different Sa skya and Bka' brgyud institutions, and was active in various regions of central and southern Tibet.<sup>436</sup> Initially, the Seventh Karma pa installed him as the abbot of the monastery Chos 'khor lhun po which ran two philosophical and two mantra colleges. Later he headed the Karma grwa tshang (Karma college). In 1504, he founded the temple Legs bshad gling, a place where he gave a great number of teachings and where eventually the printing blocks of his collected works were kept. For a period of time Karma phrin las pa also acted as the abbot of the Sa skya monastery Na lendra in the so-called Gzims khang 'og or Gzim skylil 'og ma, the “lower residence”. In 1532 he also set up a tantric college in Byang chub gling focusing on the Hevajratantra.<sup>437</sup> He furthermore set up a hermitage at a place called Dza ri dmar. The most prominent of his many disciples were the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) and the Second Dpa' bo Gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1556). His well-attended teachings on Buddhist classics such as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, and works from Pramāṇa, Abhidharma, and Madhyamaka<sup>438</sup> traditions, ensured that his views on Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā would profoundly influence the subsequent history of the Bka' brgyud *mahāmudrā* tradition.

#### MADHYAMAKA APPROACH

Karma phrin's interest in Rang stong and Gzhan stong was undoubtedly stimulated by the views of these theories advanced by two of his teachers, Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho and Shākya mchog ldan. Yet it is evident that his own view is aligned most closely with that of the Seventh Karma pa rather than that of Shākya mchog ldan who had (as was noted in the previous chapter) controversially equated Gzhan stong with the so-called Alīkākāravāda-Madhyamaka, and who had clearly distinguished the philosophical tenets of Rang stong and Gzhan stong from the Mahāmudrā practice of direct experience. We may recall that although Shākya mchog ldan considered Gzhan stong to be closer to the Mahāmudrā view of unity, when it came to actual Mahāmudrā practice, he regarded both Rang stong and Gzhan stong

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<sup>434</sup> Rheingans 2004, 60.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 56–69.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 70–71.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 71–74.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 112.

as “poisonous” in the sense of being conceptually determined.<sup>439</sup> By contrast, Karma phrin las emphasizes that, correctly understood, Rang stong and Gzhan stong are seen to be fully commensurable. He moreover equates the Great Madhyamaka of Nonfoundational Unity with the ultimate view of Dignāga (480–540) and Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> cent.) and correlates this with the view of Mahāmudrā.<sup>440</sup>

Karma phrin las pa maintains that according to previous Dwags po Bka’ brgyud masters, the five dharmas of Maitreya are Mahāmudrā treatises that teach the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Unity (*zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas dbu ma*) which is superior to the Niḥsvabhāva-Madhyamaka propounded by the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika Mādhyamikas. Because the Niḥsvabhāva-Madhyamaka relies on the continuity of (mnemic and thematic) reflection (*dran pa*) based on prior analysis, thus limiting meditation to mind’s own discursive reflections, it cannot escape the sphere of superimpositions and deprecations. By contrast, the ‘nonfoundationalist’ Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka ‘is not fixed upon (*rab tu mi gnas pa*) any extremes of superimposition or deprecation.’<sup>441</sup> He concludes that the ultimate Madhyamaka view of masters such as Nāgārjuna, Maitreya and Saraha in their works such as the *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa*, the *Dharmadhātustava*, the Maitreya texts, and the *Dohā Trilogy*, are unanimously

<sup>439</sup> He still takes *gzhan stong* and thus the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka perspective as an essential stepping stone into meditation, as the focus here lies on the direct experience through meditation, while the Niḥsvabhāvavāda Mādhyamikas’ focus is on putting an end to the clinging to characteristics through the media of reasoning. See also Brunnhölzl 2010, 88.

<sup>440</sup> KPdl, 150<sub>6</sub>: “The ultimate view of the great siddhas Dignāga and of Dharmakīrti is the Great Madhyamaka that is the Apratiṣṭhāna of Unity. The scriptural tradition that shows [this] clearly as it is consists exclusively in [Dharmakīrti’s] Seven Treatises and [Dignāga’s] *Pramāṇasamuccaya*.” *grub thob chen po phyogs kyi glang po dang || chos kyi grags pa’i lta ma mthar thug pa || zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas dbu ma che || ji bzhin gsal bar ston pa’i gzhung lugs ni || sde bdun mdo dang bcas pa kho na’o ||* The way in which the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka is viewed by a famous contemporary, Padma dkar po, sheds further light on this perspective: “The Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka determines the ultimate through not taking the illusion-like appearances during subsequent attainment as primary, but regarding the very insight during meditative equipoise as primary. Therefore, master Nāgārjuna and his followers guide [beings] as the masters who teach the profound view. The actuality [of this] must be internalized as the unity of view and activity.” Brunnhölzl 2010, 89. (translation altered for consistency)

<sup>441</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me shes bya ba ra ti dgon pa’i gsims khang ba’i dris lan*, (ca 145–161), ca 155<sub>2-3</sub>: “The previous masters of the glorious Dwags po Bka’ brgyud claimed that because both the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika [Madhyamaka] propound [only] the lack of intrinsic essences, the Five Dharmas of Maitreya go beyond both of these. The Mahāmudrā scriptures teach the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Unity.” *dpal ldan dags po’i bka’ brgyud gong ma rnams || thal rang gnyis ka ngo bo nyid med du || smra phyir rgyal ba byams pa’i chos lnga po || de gnyis las ’das phyag rgya chen po’i gzhung || zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas dbu mar bzhed ||* Ibid., 148<sub>2-3</sub>: “Because the Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Madhyamaka counteracts the beliefs in real entities of the lower philosophical systems and because it claims that reliance on the continuous process of memory/reflection based on prior analysis is meditation, it is somewhat different [from Mahāmudrā].” *ngo bo nyid med smra ba’i dbu ma ni || grub mtha’ og ma’i dngos ’dzin bzlog pa’i phyir || rnam par dpyad nas dran pa’i rgyun bsten pa || sgom du bzhed phyir khyad par cung zad yod ||*



considered by previous Bka' brgyud masters to communicate the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Unity, the so-called Great Madhyamaka which is not different from Mahāmudrā.<sup>442</sup>

It is important to understand why Karma phrin las pa considered Dignāga's *Pramāṇa-samuccaya* and Dharmakīrti's *Seven Treatises* to convey the ultimate intent of the Great Madhyamaka which he identifies with Mahāmudrā. He does not consider these scholars to be Cittamātra proponents as was often, though not unanimously, assumed.<sup>443</sup> Rather, he explains that they deliberately used a philosophically pluralistic approach that mixed Madhyamaka with Sautrāntika and Yogācāra tenets in order to progressively guide trainees<sup>444</sup> toward the ultimate.<sup>445</sup> This ultimate is identified as the focus of the famous quotation from the *Pramāṇavārttika* "Mind is naturally luminous; its stains are adventitious"<sup>446</sup>, just as it is the focus of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* passage "Mind's nature is luminous and immutable just like

<sup>442</sup> KPdl, 148<sub>1-2</sub>: "The ultimate assertion of Nāgārjuna and the glorious Saraha, the Madhyamaka [presented in works such as] the *Dohā Tricycle*, the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, the *Dharmadhātustava* etc., as well as [in] the Dharmas of Maitreya along with everything connected with these have one key-point. The key-point which is the intent of all the previous Bka' brgyud masters which was communicated with a single voice and melody is the Madhyamaka which is the Great Madhyamaka. There is no difference between that and Mahāmudrā." *dpal ldan sa ra ha dang klu sgrub kyi* || *bzhed pa'i mthar thug do hā skor gsum dang* || *byang chub sems 'grel chos dbyings bstod pa sog* || *byams chos rjes 'brang bcas dang gnad gcig par* || *bka' brgyud gong ma rnams kyi dgongs pa'i gnad* || *mgrin dang dbyangs gcig nyid du gsungs pa yi* || *dbu ma de ni dbu ma chen po ste* || *phyag rgya che dang de la khyad par med* || In the *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 110<sub>11-15</sub> the author succinctly describes Mahāmudrā meditation: "Our *mahāmudrā* meditation is neither meditation with nor without objective reference, but involves settling into a genuine state of mental nonengagement. Being thus untainted by the stains of these, [one] is liberated in personal self-awareness, i.e. a nonreferential *samādhi* having the nature of the aspect of great joy, allowing for suchness that is freedom from all pain." *kho bo cag gi phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa la ni dmigs pa dang bcas pas bsgom du'ang med la* | *dmigs med kyis kyang bsgom du med de* | *de gang yang yid la mi byed pa gnyug ma'i ngang du bzhag pas de nyid kyi skyon gyis ma gos par so so rang rig tu grol ba ni dmigs pa med pa'i ting nge 'dzin bde ba chen po'i rnam pa'i rang bzhin can yin no ste* | *zug ngu thams cad dang bral ba'i de kho na nyid yin pas so* ||

<sup>443</sup> Even though Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are often considered Yogācāras, there is a group of later Indian commentators in particular Jītari (ca. 940–1000) and Mokṣākaragupta (1050–1292) as well as some early Tibetan scholars, who interpret Dharmakīrti as a Mādhyamika. See Dreyfus 1997, 21 and n. 19, p. 467. See also Shirasaki 1984, "The Sugatamatavibhaṅgabhāṣya of Jītari". See as well Steinkellner 1990, "Is Dharmakīrti a Mādhyamika?" Steinkellner argues that the material available at present does not provide sufficient evidence to establish Dharmakīrti as a Mādhyamika.

<sup>444</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me shes bya ba ra ti dgon pa'i gsims khang ba'i dris lan*, (ca 145–161), ca 150<sub>4-5</sub>: "The root [texts] of [Dharmakīrti's] Seven treatises along with [Dignāga's] Compendium are the ultimate intent, the Great Madhyamaka. However, temporarily, in order to train the respective trainee, they were taught as if Great Madhyamaka was mixed with the tenets of Cittamātra and Sautrāntika." *sde bdun rtsa ba mdo dang bcas rnams kyang* || *dgongs pa'i mthar thug dbu ma che yin mod* || *gnas skabs gdul bya gang la gang 'dul du* || *dbu ma che dang sems tsam mdo sde pa'i* || *grub mtha' 'dres pa lta bur gsungs pa la* ||

<sup>445</sup> On the views of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, see also Dreyfus 1979, 20.

<sup>446</sup> PV 1.208ab: *prabhāṣvaram idaṃ cittam prakṛtyā' gantavo malāḥ* || Tib. D: *sems 'di rang bzhin 'od gsal te* | *dri ma rnams ni glo bur ba* || On differing interpretations of what Dharmakīrti may have meant by this passage, see Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 425–28, 435; Schmithausen 1987: 160–62; Franco 1997: 85–93; and Wangchuk 2007: 208.

space”<sup>447</sup> and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* passage “Mind is no-mind, mind’s nature is luminosity”<sup>448</sup>. In Karma phrin las pa’s view, these all point to the ultimate soteriological goal of luminous emptiness. In one of his spiritual songs, he declares that “natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, natural awareness are precisely what is called the profound view of Gzhan stong. Thus, my teacher explained: ‘even the so-called Rang stong and Gzhan stong are not contradictory’.”<sup>449</sup>

One rather idiosyncratic feature of Karma phrin las pa’s philosophy is his attempt to correlate the principle of other-exclusion (*gzhan sel*; *anyāpoha*)<sup>450</sup> as it developed within the Buddhist epistemological (*pramāṇa*) tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti with the view of Mahāmudrā. Here he once again defers to his teacher Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho who is said to have taught that other-exclusion implies an affirming negation. Chos grags rgya mtsho criticizes those Tibetans who understand this exclusion to consist only in a process of conceptual elimination in the sense of a nonaffirming negation. This in his mind leads inescapably to a wrong concept of emptiness, a mere conceptual negation which is then misconstrued as profound emptiness. In Chos grags rgya mtsho’s words:

Hence, the Tibetans who do not understand the meaning [of other-exclusion] intellectually superimpose outwardly [an absence] with the term “exclusion of other”, a nonaffirming negation, clinging to it as profound emptiness. They thus mistake a reflection of emptiness for emptiness itself, and arrogantly assume this to be the teaching of the noble master Nāgārjuna and his students. Because the profound emptiness which evolved in this [Mahāmudrā tradition] is not akin to that, it was [wrongly] rejected as being on the side of the Vijñānavādins.<sup>451</sup>

<sup>447</sup> RGV 43<sub>9-10</sub>, I.63a: *cittasya yāsau prakṛtiḥ prabhāsvarā na jātu sā dyaur iva yāti vikriyām* || For an English translation see Takasaki 1966.

<sup>448</sup> ‘Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa, 3a<sub>3</sub>: *sems nyid sems ma yin* || *sems kyi rang bzhin nyid ’od gsal ba yin* || *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* 5b.1–2. The corresponding passage from the Sanskrit is given in Schmithausen 1977, 41 as lines E.b.1–2 *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā* || see n. 174.

<sup>449</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yig kyi mun sel*, (ca 88–92), 92<sub>2-3</sub>: *rang bzhin ’od gsal zung ’jug lhan cig skyes* || *dbyings rig dbyer med tha mal shes pa nyid* || *gzhan stong zab mo’i lta ba yin zhes gsung* || *des na rang stong gzhan stong zhes pa yang* || *’gal ba min zhes bdag gi bla ma bzhed* || See also Volume II, translation: 90, critical edition: 93. See also (tr.) Burchardi in Jackson, Kapstein (ed.) 2011, 317–40.

<sup>450</sup> The *apoha* or exclusion theory is usually closely associated with the issue of universals and discussed in the context of epistemology. See for example a broad range of papers on *apoha* in *Apoha, Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, (ed.) Siderits, Tillemans, Chakrabarti, 2011. Karma phrin las pa has here redeployed exclusion of other in a quite different, soteriological context, similar to the Eighth Karma pa who at times equates buddha nature with the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*).

<sup>451</sup> *Rigs gzhung rgya mtsho* vol. 1, 351<sub>17-21</sub>: *des na don ’di khong du ma chud pa’i bod dag ni* | *blos phar la sgro btags nas bzhag pa’i gzhan sel ba’i ming can med par dgag pa zhiig la zab mo stong pa nyid du zhen par byas nas stong pa nyid kyi gzugs brnyan la stong pa nyid du ’khrul ba de nyid slob dpon ’phags pa klu sgrub yab sras*

Karma phrin las considers his teacher's interpretation of *anyāpoha* as an affirming negation to be a crucial strategy for avoiding the mistake of falling into the extreme of nihilism. Such a mistake is characteristic of those who misinterpret the other-exclusion to be a nonaffirming negation and who consequently cling to a mere reflection of emptiness, taking it to be the actual emptiness. It is clear that Chos grags rgya mtsho's reinterpretation of *anyāpoha* is completely in line with the Gzhan stong affirmative stance and Karma phrin las moreover emphasizes the extent to which it accords with the view of Mahāmudrā:

This profound view called “exclusion of other” is in accordance with the view of Mahāmudrā. However, most of the Tibetans who are intoxicated by the poisoned water of intellectualism superimpose [an absence] outwardly with their own intellect and maintain that this imputed other-exclusion is just a nonaffirming negation. Clinging to that as profound emptiness they mistake this reflection of emptiness as [the real] emptiness, and think that this is the assertion of Nāgārjuna and his followers. ... They fetter themselves with the chains of clinging to extremes. My mighty victorious lama, knowing well that mental exclusion is [a matter of] an affirming negation and therefore in accordance with the view of Mahāmudrā, counselled again and again that ‘*dharmatā*, suchness, the ground for all *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is affirmative’.<sup>452</sup>

Karma phrin las pa's adherence to his teacher's unusual redeployment of the *anyāpoha* principle and the latter's contention that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were primarily Mādhyamikas undoubtedly reinforced his own philosophical emphasis on the inseparability of appearance and emptiness, i.e., the view of unity (*yuganaddha*) which can be realized only via an affirming negation which excludes adventitious stains or reifications but makes room for natural luminosity, the nature of mind which prevails when what obscures it is dispelled.

To get a sense of Karma phrin las pa's statement that “other-exclusion is in accordance with the view of Mahāmudrā”, it may be useful to bear in mind that he follows his teacher Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho in underscoring the harmony of the teaching traditions of

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*kyis bzhed par rloms nas 'dir 'byung ba'i zab mo'i stong pa nyid ni de dang mi mthun pas na rnam par shes pa smra ba'i phyogs su 'dor bar byed do ||*

<sup>452</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me shes bya ba ra ti dgon pa'i gsims khang ba'i dris lan*, (ca 145–161), ca 150<sub>6</sub>–151<sub>3</sub>: *gzhan sel zhes bya'i lta ba zab mo 'di || phyag rgya chen po'i lta ba dang mthun yang || rtog ge'i dug chus myos pa'i gangs can pa || phal cher rang blos phar la sgro btags nas || gzhas pa'i gzhan sel med dgag nyid du 'dod || de la zab mo stong nyid du zhen nas || stong pa nyid kyi gzugs brnyan stong nyid du || 'khrul pa de nyid klu sgrub yab sras kyi || bzhed par rlom nas ... de dag mthar 'dzin sgrog gis rang nyid bcings || bdag gi bla ma rgyal ba'i dbang po yis || gzhan sel ma yin dgag tu legs mkhyen nas || de dang phyag chen lta ba mthun pa'i phyir 'khor 'das kun gzhi chos nyid de bzhin nyid || sgrub pa yin zhes yang yang 'doms par mdzad ||*

Asaṅga and Nāgārjuna, reasoning that there is no divergence between proponents of Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka when it comes to the view of the absolute.<sup>453</sup> As he later clarifies, the masters in the Great Madhyamaka lineage of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (which, for him, includes Dignāga and Dharmakīrti), in consideration of those having the capacity to realize that manifold appearances are empty by nature, emphasized luminosity from the standpoint of mind (*sems phyogs*), stressing that mind as such having the nature of emptiness is luminous by nature. On the other hand, those in the Great Madhyamaka lineage of Nāgārjuna, having in mind those with the capacity to realize that it is precisely the emptiness of subject and object which is luminous by nature, emphasized luminosity from the standpoint of emptiness (*stong pa'i phyogs*), stressing that mind appearing in manifold aspects cannot be established as it appears.<sup>454</sup> Since both Great Madhyamaka traditions have the inseparability of emptiness and luminosity as their common frame of reference, they should be seen as complementary.

This principle of complementarity is also evident in Karma phrin las pa's interpretation of the Yogācāra three natures (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine. According to the *Mahāyānasamgraha*

<sup>453</sup> *Rigs gzhung rgya mtsho* vol. 1, 138<sub>4-13</sub>: “Therefore, the great Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas who follow Ārya Asaṅga and his brother ascertain that the dualistic appearances of subject and object, which obscure true reality, are not established in the way they [appear], and thus mainly teach the wisdom that realizes self-aware self-luminous mind. Ārya Nāgārjuna and his spiritual heirs, by thoroughly analyzing the clinging to real [existence] and its objects that obscure true reality through the great [Madhyamaka] arguments, mainly teach that the nature of luminous mind abides as emptiness. In this way, they ascertain that [subject and object] are without nature. Both systems do not differ in teaching the final true reality, since this very nature of luminous mind is primordially emptiness, and this emptiness is present from the first as the nature of luminosity.” *des na 'phags pa thogs med sku mched kyi rjes su 'brang ba'i rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma chen po rnams kyi de kho na nyid la sgrib par byed pa'i gzung ba dang 'dzin pa gnyis su snang ba ltar du ma grub par gtan la phab nas sems rang rig rang gsal rtogs pa'i ye shes gtso bor ston par mdzad la | 'phags pa klu sgrub yab sras kyis ni de kho na nyid la sgrib par byed pa'i bden 'dzin yul dang bcas pa rnams gtan tshigs chen po rnams kyis legs par dbyad nas rang bzhin med par gtan la phab ste | sems gsal ba'i ngo bo stong pa nyid du gnas pa gtso bor ston par mdzad do | shing rta'i srol gnyis ka'ang mthar thug de kho na nyid ston pa la khyad par yod pa ma yin te | sems gsal ba'i ngo bo de nyid dang po nyid nas stong pa nyid yin la | stong pa nyid de'ang dang po nas gsal ba'i bdag nyid du gnas pa'i phyir ro |*

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 352<sub>20</sub>–353<sub>6</sub>: “The glorious Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the Great Mādhyamikas in the lineage stemming from the masters Ārya Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, primarily ascertained that mind as such abiding as emptiness is luminous by nature. Thus, having in mind those having the capacity to realize that any aspects whatsoever that manifest from the play of natural luminosity, are in essence, emptiness—not being established as this or that—[these masters] primarily ascertained [this luminosity] from the standpoint of mind (*sems phyogs*). However, the great Mādhyamikas in the lineage stemming from Ārya Nāgārjuna primarily emphasized that mind as such [in its] appearing as manifold aspects is not established as it appears. Thus, having in mind those having the capacity to realize that it is precisely the emptiness of subject and object which is luminous by nature, they primarily ascertained [luminosity] from the standpoint of mind (*stong pa'i phyogs*).” *slob dpon 'phags pa thog med sku mched nas nye bar brgyud pa'i dbu ma pa chen po dpal phyog kyi glang po dang | chos kyi grags pa rnams kyis stong pa nyid du gnas pa'i sems nyid rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba gtso bor gtan la phab pas rang bzhin gsal ba'i rol pa las rnam pa ci dang cir snang yang de dang der ma grub par ngo bo stong pa nyid du rtogs par nus pa la dgongs nas gtso bor sems phyogs gtan la 'bebs par mdzad la | slob dpon 'phags pa klu sgrub nas nye bar brgyud pa'i dbu ma pa chen po rnams kyis ni | sems nyid rnam pa sna tshogs su snang ba 'di snang ba ltar du ma grub par gtso bor gtan la phab pas gzung ba dang 'dzin pas stong pa de nyid rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba de nyid rtogs nus pa la dgongs nas gtso bor stong pa'i phyogs nas gtan la 'bebs par mdzad pa yin no |*

II.4, the dependent nature empty of the imagined nature is the perfect nature.<sup>455</sup> Seen from the perspective of the unity of the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka tenets, the very essence of the perfect nature or luminosity is primordially empty of any dualistic notions. This nonexistence of duality is understood as a positive quality which exists as the perfect nature or emptiness.<sup>456</sup> Taken together with the idea of buddha nature, it is moreover proposed that this emptiness empty of adventitious stains is primordially imbued with buddha qualities.<sup>457</sup>

For Karma phrin las, emptiness has the essential character of luminosity and is the very ground which is empty of a perceiver and the perceived; it is not a phenomenon posited by the intellect. It cannot be divided and analyzed, but is beginningless, limitless, unceasing, and unfathomable—it is the indestructible *vajra* of mind (*sems kyi rdo rje*), the *dharmadhātu* or *tathāgatagarbha*. When this particular method of other-exclusion—the exclusion of dualistic notions—is realized, and when thus the universal characteristic (*spyi mtshan*; *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) of the imputed nature (*kun brtags*; *parikalpita*) is relinquished, the particular characteristic (*rang mtshan*; *svalakṣaṇa*) or dependent nature (*gzhan dbang*; *paratantra*) is realized as it actually is. In this sense, the exclusion of other, of all notions of duality, is in accordance with Mahāmudrā. Karma phrin las pa has here developed Chos grags rgya mtsho's equation of other-exclusion and affirming negation into a Gzhan stong-like affirmative view of Mahāmudrā.

The Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), one of the main disciples of Karma phrin las pa and certainly one of the most outstanding thinkers of Tibetan Buddhism, adopts the nomenclature of *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* versus *svalakṣaṇa* in some of his Gzhan stong related works. His *Lamp that Eloquenty Highlights the Tradition of the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka Proponents* (hereafter *Lamp*), for example, starts out with “the particular, i.e., the mystery of mysteries, which is in no way mixed with universals, is never realized by the adventitious mind”.<sup>458</sup> Moreover, in *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (hereafter *Tonic*), a polemical

<sup>455</sup> MS II.4 “Finally, what is the perfect nature? It is the complete absence of any objective nature in the dependent nature.” (tr. from the French, Lamotte 1973, 90–91). MS II.15c “If the perfect nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) is the complete absence in the dependent nature (*ātyantikābhāvalakṣaṇa*) of this [imaginary nature in the dependent nature], how is it absolute and why does one call it absolute? Because it is immutable (*avikāra*), it is absolute. Because it is the object of the purified [mind] (*viśuddhālambana*) and the quintessence of all good dharmas (*kuśaladharmaśreṣṭha*), one calls it rightly absolute.” (tr. from the French, Lamotte 1973, 107–8).

<sup>456</sup> See for example Sthiramati's *Trīṃśikābhāṣya*, TŚBh 40<sub>4-5</sub>: “The fact that the dependent [nature] is always, at any time, entirely free from the perceived object and perceiving subject is the perfect nature.” *tena grāhyagrāha-keṇa paratantrasya sadā sarakālam atyantarahitatā yā sa pariniṣpannasvabhāvaḥ* (tr.) Mathes 2012, 2.

<sup>457</sup> In a number of publications, Mathes has pointed to this systematic and consistent synthesis of buddha-nature thought and Madhyamaka with Yogācāra. See Mathes 2000, 2004, 2012 and his forthcoming paper “The Original *Ratnagotravibhāga* and its Yogācāra Interpretation as Realistic Indian Precedents of Gzhan stong”.

<sup>458</sup> *Dbu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, 13<sub>1</sub>: *rang spyi gang dang ma 'dres gsang ba'i gsang | glo<sup>a</sup> bur sems kyi nam yang rtogs min par |* \*text has *blo*

critique of 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal's (1392–1481) and Shākya mchog ldan's (1428–1507) presentations of buddha nature<sup>459</sup>, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains that from the standpoint of actuality (*song tshod*), buddha nature is the particular characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*), i.e., the true mode of abiding whereas from the standpoint of assumption (*rlom tshod*) “sentient being” is the imputed universal characteristic (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). In his eyes this particular is nothing less than perfect awakening, which, even though it is designated by the term fruition, can in fact not be posited in terms of a cause-effect relationship because it is unconditioned.<sup>460</sup> In the same text he explains that the particular is profound emptiness, better phrased as buddha wisdom or buddha nature.<sup>461</sup> Likewise he says, again in his *Lamp* that “the essence of a *tathāgata* and the purity from stains in terms of its inherent essence and particular characteristic are referred to as *tathāgatagarbha* free from adventitious stains.”<sup>462</sup>

In equating the Great Madhyamaka with the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka, Karma phrin las pa, in fact, followed in the footsteps of another of his teachers, the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes, who seems to have had a decisive influence on his view as well. In his

<sup>459</sup> See below, 269–70 and n. 757.

<sup>460</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, 982<sub>3</sub>–983<sub>1</sub>: “Let us further describe the way the *tathāgatagarbha* exists in all sentient beings: If, from the standpoint of assumption (*rlom tshod*), the universal “sentient being” is apprehended, then from the standpoint of actuality (*song tshod*), buddha nature is precisely what is shown to be the particular. As for buddha, there exists no difference between own and other natures, [or between] the categories of universals and particulars. Yet, from the standpoint of not simply relinquishing the [sense of a] potential (*rigs*) to be liberated from what is other than itself, or the way the nature is, or its own essence, we designate it as “buddha nature” and as “fruition that is complete awakening.” Although designated in this way [i.e., in terms of fruition], because this [buddha nature] is unconditioned, one cannot posit it in terms of a cause-result relationship. Having ascertained by these three reasons that all beings are universals, this buddha nature, the non-deceptive object, is taught to exist in all phases of being obscured and non-obscured, contaminated and not contaminated, by stains, and of being or not being a sentient being.” *sems can thams cad la bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po yod pa'i tshul brjod na | rlom tshod sems can gyi tshogs spyi bzung na | song tshod kyi sangs rgyas kyi snying po nyid rang gi mtshan nyid du zhugs par bstan pa dang | sangs rgyas la spyi dang bye brag gi rigs rang dang gzhan gyi ngo bo la tha dad pa med cing de nyid gzhan las dgrol ba'i rigs sam rang bzhin gnas lugs sam rang gi ngo bo mi 'dor ba'i cha de la sangs rgyas kyi snying po mngon par byang chub pa'i 'bras bu zhes ming gis btags pa dang | de ltar btags kyang de nyid 'dus ma byas yin pa'i phyir rgyu 'bras su 'jog mi nus pa dang | rgyu mtshan de gsum gyis 'gro ba thams cad spyi mtshan du gtan la phab nas mi bslu ba'i yul sangs rgyas kyi snying po nyid bsgribs ma bsgribs dang dri mas gos ma gos dang | sems can pa yin min kun gyi gnas skabs su yod par bstan pa'o ||*

<sup>461</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, 983<sub>2-4</sub>: “[Query:] Well then, what is present as the mode of abiding or particular characteristic of all phenomena? [Reply:] As it appears in the *Mother of the Victors* [*Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*], only profound emptiness is present, this being stated in accordance with the vision of those who abide on the spiritual levels. To describe it this way is not bad but according to the vision of the *tathāgata*, from the viewpoint of actuality, only buddha wisdom (*sangs rgyas kyi ye shes*; *buddhajñāna*) or [buddha] nature is fully present [in these beings].” *'o na chos thams cad gnas tshul lam rang gi mtshan nyid du gang zhugs zhe na rgyal ba'i yum las 'byung ba ltar | sa la gnas pa rnams kyi gzigs ngo dang bstun nas | zab mo stong pa nyid kho na zhugs zhes brjod na'ang mi bzang ba ma yin mod kyi | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gzigs ngo dang bstun nas | song tshod sangs rgyas kyi ye shes sam snying po de kho na rjes su zhugs pa yin te |*

<sup>462</sup> *Dbu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol*: 31<sub>3</sub>–31<sub>7</sub>: *des na de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po dang rang gi ngo bo rang gi mtshan nyid kyi dri mas dag pa ni glo<sup>a</sup> bur dri bral gyi de bzhin gshegs snying dang ...* <sup>a</sup>text has *blo*

*Sixty Stanzas of Mahāmudrā*, Chos grags ye shes draws parallels between the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka and the Mahāmudrā ornamented with the bla ma's pith instructions which reveals the key points of the final *dharmacakra* of the Pāramitānaya in accordance with the Mantrayāna.<sup>463</sup> To substantiate this point, Chos grags ye shes cites a passage from Maitrīpa's *Tattvādaśaka*: "Somebody who wishes to know suchness for himself [finds it] neither in [terms of] *sākāra* nor *nirākāra*; even the middle [path], (i.e., Madhyamaka) which is not adorned with the words of a *guru* is only middling."<sup>464</sup> By thus distinguishing a kind of direct introduction to suchness from positions that can be interpreted as clinging to views of eternalism and nihilism, the Fourth Zhwa dmar indirectly criticizes nihilistic Rang stong and eternalist Gzhan stong theories of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>465</sup> Karma phrin las in a similar fashion maintains that the views of Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā are concordant.<sup>466</sup> It is from this perspective that he characterizes Mahāmudrā meditation as the internalizing (*nyams su len*) of *\*sugatagarbha* by cultivating a lucid and nonconceptual state of mind. Revealed in this way, *\*sugatagarbha*, which he equates with "emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects,"<sup>467</sup> is endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and

<sup>463</sup> See *Phyag rgya chen po drug bcu pa*, verses 4–5, *Zhwa dmar bzhi pa spyan snga chos kyi grags pa'i gsung 'bum*, verse 4–5, vol. 6, 320<sub>7–10</sub>: "Those who, having completely identified [suchness] as only *sākāra* [with aspects] or *nirākāra* [without aspects], lose hold of the reality of the Middle. They do not understand the supreme Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Unity. The noble persons of this [Mahāmudrā] lineage have maintained that the *mahāmudrā* ornamented with the bla ma's pith instructions reveals the key points of the last [*dharmā*]cakra of Pāramitā[yāna] in accordance with Mantra[yāna]." *rnam bcas rnam med nyid du yongs gzung nas || dbu ma'i de nyid dgrol bar byed pa dag || rab tu mi gnas zung du 'jug pa yi || dbu ma mchog ni shes par ma gyur to || bla ma'i man ngag gis brgyan phyag rgya che || sngags dang rjes 'brel pha rol phyin pa yi || 'khor lo phyi ma'i gnad rnam ston pa ni || brgyud pa 'di yi dam pa rnam bzhed do ||*

<sup>464</sup> TD, 92: *na 'sākāranirākāre tathatānir' jñatūṃ icchataḥ | madhyamā madhyamā caiva guruvāganalāṅkṛtā |*  
<sup>a</sup>According to Bhattacharya's edition. The Taishō U. study group proposes *sākārā nirākārā tathatā*. See ed. and tr. of Mathes 2006, 209.

<sup>465</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po drug bcu pa*, verse 9–10, *Zhwa dmar bzhi pa spyan snga chos kyi grags pa'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 6, 320<sub>15–19</sub>: "In the case of proclamations of such deceitful words as: "[we] don't maintain any thesis, [and] are free from all extremes," since there is no certainty [in] their own view—whether [because] it is ineffable or a path of error—they are unable to see the ultimate. Like some of the non-Buddhist proponents of eternalism, they cling to [and believe in] a dualism which proclaims some ultimate factor which is permanent and enduring, whereas everything else is deception. Mistaking [this dualistic belief] for *\*sugatagarbha* is a source of laughter." *Phyag rgya chen po drug bcu pa*, verse 9–10: *gang du'ang khas len med pa mtha' bral zhes || g.yo tshig ltar sgrog 'di yang brjod bral la || 'khrul lam yang na rang lta nges med pas || 'dis kyang don dam mthong bar mi nus so || phyi rol rtag par smra ba la la ltar || don dam cha gang rtag dang brtan pa ste || cig shos brdzun par smra ba'i gnyis 'dzin du || bde gshegs snying por 'khrul pa bzhad gad gnas ||*

<sup>466</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me shes bya bar ra ti dgon pa'i gzims khang pa'i dris lan* (145–161), vol. ca 159<sub>6–7</sub>: "The views of Nonfoundationalist Madhyamaka, i.e., of unity, and Mahāmudrā are claimed to be in accord." *zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas dbu ma dang || phyag chen lta ba mthun par khas blangs ...*

<sup>467</sup> The *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV I.92) clarifies the sense of *sarvākāraropetaśūnyatā* using the analogy of a painting. While the painting of a king is compared with emptiness, the painters who paint his image are compared with the excellence of all aspects, i.e., the perfections of giving, ethics, patience, diligence, meditation, and insight. RGVV, 57<sub>16–17</sub>: *lekhaḥ ye tadākārā dāna śīla kṣamādyah | sarvākāraropetā śūnyatā pratimocyate ||*

maturation which are empty in that they are not identifiable and without characteristics. Emphasizing the continuity of view, meditation, and conduct, the author declares in one of his *vajra*-songs: “Looking at mind’s nature is the view; remaining undistracted from it is meditation; and dealing with whatever arises is the supreme conduct.”<sup>468</sup>

## EXTANT WRITINGS

The extant literary legacy of Karma phrin las pa is confined to a number of commentaries, a collection of spiritual songs (*mgur*) and Replies to Queries (*dris lan*) on a variety of topics<sup>469</sup>, and a few miscellaneous texts on ritual. According to the hagiography of the master in the *Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba* by Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas (1699–1774) and ’Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab<sup>470</sup>, Karma phrin las pa composed all in all more than ten volumes (*po ti*). We may conclude that there existed a *Gsung ’bum* of which little is currently extant. Among his commentaries, all that is available at present are those on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, Rang byung rdo rje’s *Zab mo nang don*, and Saraha’s *Dohā Trilogy*.<sup>471</sup> Additionally Kong sprul’s (1813–1899) *Gdams ngag mdzod* contains a ritual text composed by Karma phrin las pa in the context of the Vinaya as well as short instructions for the precepts for householders.<sup>472</sup> Karma phrin las pa is also credited in historical and biographical sources with a commentary on Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje’s work on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*<sup>473</sup>, a

<sup>468</sup> KPdg, 443–445: *sems nyid blta na lta ba yin || de la ma yengs sgom pa ste || gang shar spyod na spyod pa’i mchog ||*

<sup>469</sup> These songs and replies to queries are included in a single volume edited by Ngawang Topgay: *Chos rje Karma ’phrin las pa’i gsung ’bum las rdo rje mgur kyi ’phreng ba rnams*, *The Songs of Esoteric Practice (Mgur) and Replies to Doctrinal Questions (Dris-lan) of Karma-’phrin-las pa*. New Delhi, 1975. The margins have *ga* and *ca*, indicating that they belonged to the Collected Works (*Gsung ’bum*) of Karma phrin las pa which is however not extant.

<sup>470</sup> *Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*. Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas, ’Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab. *Sgrub brgyud karma khams tshang brgyud pa rin po che’i rnam par thar pa rab ’byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*. 2 vol., reprod. based on the Dpal spungs edition of D. Gyaltsan a. Kesang Legshay. Delhi: 1972.

<sup>471</sup> In 2004, the commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (*Mngon rtogs rgyan rtsa ’grel gyi sphyor tīkā ’jig rten gsum sgron la ’jug pa*) was published in Varanasi, Vajra Vidya Library. The author’s *Zab mo nang don* commentary (*Zab mo nang don rnam bshad snying po gsal bar byed pa’i nyin byed ’od kyi phreng ba*) was until recently available only in the form of a blockprint in *dbu can* in the possession of Gene Smith, TBRC. The text was marked with the letter *ka* at the margin; thus it might have been the first in his Collected Works. It was newly published in the *Rang byung rdo rje gsung ’bum*, vol. 14, 1–553, in Zi ling in 2006. A copy of a manuscript of the *Dohā* commentaries (*Do hā skor gsum gyi tīkā ’breng po*) from O rgyan chos gling in Bum thang (Bhutan) was published in 1984.

<sup>472</sup> ’Dul ba’i las chog mthong ba don ldan. In *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 8, p. 555–618, and *Khyim pa la phan gdags pa’i slad du ’dul ba’i zhar las byung ba’i slab pa la sbyor tshul cung zad tsam*, *ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 618–29.

<sup>473</sup> See Rheingans 2004, 192. See also Kong sprul Yon tan rgya mtsho. *Rgyud bla ma’i bshad srol theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos snying po’i don mngon sum lam gyi bshad srol dang sbyar ba’i rnam par ’grel pa phyir mi ldog pa seng ge’i nga ro*. Sarnath: Kagyud Relief & Protection Committee (KRPC), 1999, p. 12<sup>17–18</sup>: “The summary of the overview of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* that was composed by the [Third Karma pa] was



commentary on the Hevajratantra<sup>474</sup>, as well as an explanation of the various classes of tantra.<sup>475</sup> Unfortunately, all of these works which would be of obvious interest in the context of this project, are not currently available.

The following analysis of Karma phrin las pa's views on reality, emptiness, buddha nature and truth draw upon his spiritual songs and replies to doctrinal queries, his commentary to the *Zab mo nang don*<sup>476</sup> and his commentary on Saraha's *People Dohā* and *Queen Dohā*.<sup>477</sup>

## VIEWS OF REALITY

### THE COMPATIBILITY OF RANG STONG AND GZHAN STONG

The clearest statement of Karma phrin las pa's view on Rang stong and Gzhan stong is contained in *Discussion to Dispel Mind's Darkness: A Reply to Queries of [Bsod nams lhun grub, the Governor of] Lcags mo*<sup>478</sup>. His main points may be summarized as follows: First he clarifies that from his perspective Rang stong as understood in genuine Madhyamaka should not be equated with a nonaffirming negation and thus with the view of extinction that establishes mere nonexistence. He reasons that a nonaffirming negation denotes only an absence of existence and is therefore a mere abstraction, i.e., the result of conceptually excluding the notion of existence. Being a conceptual notion about reality, it is not what is experienced by a valid direct yogic cognition that operates without concepts and that perceives reality as it truly is instead of through mental constructs about it. From Karma phrin las pa's perspective, the correct understanding of *rang stong* is that while everything conventional, i.e., the dualistic appearances of the apprehended and the apprehender, is empty of an own self-essence, wisdom which is free of this duality exists. We may recall that Karma phrin las pa here follows the Seventh Karma pa in taking the abstract suffix *nyid* in the Tibetan *stong pa nyid*<sup>479</sup> in an affirmative sense, as an indication that we are dealing not with a sheer nothingness or absence of existence. To illustrate his point Karma phrin las pa uses the example from the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* of an empty vase, that is to say, a vase empty of water, to clarify the sense in which the

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elucidated in detail by Karma dkon gzhon and others. The great Karma phrin las pa wrote a commentary on it.” *rang byung rdo rjes rgyud bla ma'i sa bcad bsodud don mdzad pa la | karma dkon gzhon sogs kyis rgyas par bkral zhing | karma phrin las pa chen pos sbyor dag bkod pa'i 'grel pa mdzad |* See also Burchardi 2000, 68.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 192. *Dgyes rdor rtags gnyis kyi 'grel pa*. See Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, 699.

<sup>475</sup> Rheingans 2004, 192. *Rgyud sde rnam bshad*.

<sup>476</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*, in RDSb, vol. 14, 1–553. Mtshur phu Mkhan po Lo yag bkra shis: Zi ling, 2006.

<sup>477</sup> *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 8–118 and *Btsun mo dohā'i tīkā 'bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 119–94.

<sup>478</sup> For this text, see Volume II, translation: 87–90, critical edition: 90–93.

<sup>479</sup> Rendering *-tā* (from the Sanskrit *śūnya-tā*) and translated as *-ness* (in the English emptiness).

emptiness of own-nature (*rang stong*), that is, the absence of any intrinsic natures such as the real particulars of the Buddhist substance realists (Sarvāstivādins), need not take the form of a nonaffirming negation:

Empty [means] being devoid of what is other, such as a vase being called “empty,” because it is devoid of water. Likewise, phenomena are imagined to be “empty,” because they are devoid of a nature such as particular characteristics.<sup>480</sup>

Karma phrin las pa, taking the Seventh Karma pa as a reference, says:

My omniscient lama [i.e., Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho<sup>481</sup>] has explained, “this emptiness which is empty of an own-nature is indeed genuine Rang stong, but emptiness is *not* said to be a nonaffirming negation.”<sup>482</sup>

Thus, for Karma phrin las pa *rang stong* in short means the “emptiness of an own-nature” of all phenomena and not their complete nonexistence as the consequence of a nonaffirming negation. This is how the extreme of nihilism is avoided.

Conversely, Gzhan stong should not be understood as a view of eternalism. According to Karma phrin las pa, it is wrong to take *gzhan stong* as establishing an ultimate, permanent, enduring, and unchanging truly existent entity. This, he says, is tantamount to reifying the ultimate and is thus at odds with the non-entitative character of the ultimate described in the sūtras. As he explains in his commentary to the *Zab mo nang don*:

In the ultimate sense, since the three-fold designation cause, fruition, and path is mere superimposition accompanied by concepts, it is actually nonexistent. And, in the case of what does exist, it is said that *\*sugatagarbha*, the element of sentient beings which is beyond concepts, exists. Thus, it is the nature of mind which is unconditioned and spontaneously present. It is the *dharmakāya* which, being beyond the entire net of elaborations, has an all-encompassing nature that is like the sky. This is the meaning of the expression “existent as ultimate truth”, which

<sup>480</sup> *Śatasāhasrikāpañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitābṛhaṭṭīkā* (= *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*), D3808, 206a<sub>5-6</sub>: *stong pa ni gzhan bral ba ste | dper na chu dang bral ba'i phyir bum pa stong pa zhes bya ba lta bu'o | de bzhin du rang gi mtshan nyid la sogs pa'i ngo bo nyid dang bral ba'i phyir chos de dag nyid la stong pa zhes kun tu rtog go |*

<sup>481</sup> Regarding Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho's Gzhan stong view, see Burchardi in Jackson, Kapstein (ed.) 2011, 317–40.

<sup>482</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*, see Volume II, translation: 89, critical edition: 93, see also excerpt in Burchardi 2011, 320, 11–14.

did not, however, indicate that *\*sugatagarbha* is something truly established, permanent, stable, and enduring.<sup>483</sup>

This passage reflects the author's views concerning Rang stong and Gzhan stong without making use of these terms. The ultimate is the all-encompassing, spontaneously present, nature of awareness and reality—immanent buddha nature; it is what remains when all conceptual constructs superimposed on phenomena have been dispelled. But what remains can, on this account, never be taken as something truly established and permanent without reducing it to the very conceptual reifications it is said to be free from. In this way, just as Karma phrin las distinguishes the genuine Rang stong in the sense of an affirming negation from the mistaken Rang stong which consists in a nonaffirming negation, he differentiates his nonreified Gzhan stong view from the “eternalist” version of it as upheld by Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan. The latter had employed the two terms of *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* to designate two modes of being which for him constitute two mutually exclusive opposites, the ultimate and the relative.<sup>484</sup> In line with the Tathāgathagarbha scriptures, he considers the absolute, buddha nature or the *dharmakāya*, to be eternal and unchanging; in Dol po pa's view, the absolute is empty of other (*gzhan stong*), i.e., the conventional or adventitious. The conventional comprises all dualistic phenomena which are empty of an own-essence (*rang stong*). As these two, the absolute and conventional, are in this way completely unrelated to each other, no actual identity or difference between them can be determined. Therefore he calls their relationship one of “a difference which negates their identity” (*gcig pa bkag pa'i tha dad pa*). Dol po pa emphasizes that as the absolute or the *dharmakāya* is unchanging, permanent or rather beyond time, it cannot possibly be the actual nature of something that is conventional, i.e., changing. As what is conventional and spurious is unreal, it can have nothing whatever to do with ultimate reality.

Dol po pa consequently makes a clear-cut distinction between the two domains of *saṃsara* and *nirvāṇa*, the relative and the ultimate, and on this basis rejects Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā dictum that the true nature of mind or thoughts is the *dharmakāya*, i.e., *dharmatā*. The gist of his critique is that this dictum neglects the categorical difference between wisdom and consciousness which he compares to the differences between light and darkness or nectar

<sup>483</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*, RDSb vol. 14, 396<sub>2-4</sub>: *don dam par rgyu 'bras lam gsum ming don la rtog pa dang bcas pa sgro btags tsam yin pas don la med cing | gang yod na rtog pa las 'das pa'i sems can gyi khams bde gshegs snying po ni yod pas shes gsungs pa ni 'dus ma byas shing lhun gyis grub pa'i sems nyid chos kyi sku spros pa'i dra ba thams cad las 'das pa nam mkha' lta bur kun la khyab pa'i rang bzhin can de ni don dam pa'i bden par yod ces pa'i don yin gyi | bde gshegs snying po bden grub rtag brtan ther zug tu bstan pa ni ma yin no |*

<sup>484</sup> For a critical assessment of this system by Padma dkar po, see Volume II, translation: 157 f.

and poison. In this sense, the views that afflictions are distorted manifestations of wisdom and that *saṃsara* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable were not tenable for Dol po pa.<sup>485</sup>

Rang byung rdo rje had, by comparison, argued that conventional reality is mere appearance (*snang tsam*), like the reflection of the moon on the surface of water. Through it, the practitioner may come to recognize the representational or ersatz ultimate reality (*rnam grangs kyi don dam*) which is neither the same as nor different from final ultimate truth (*mthar thug gi don dam*). According to the Sa skya Master Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, Dol po pa developed his Gzhan stong system after having met with Rang byung rdo rje and after a Kālacakra retreat in Jo nang.<sup>486</sup> At the time of their meeting which according to historical records took place some time between 1320 and 1324,<sup>487</sup> Dol po pa was still maintaining a Rang stong view whereas Rang byung rdo rje had already developed his view advocating a positive appraisal of the ultimate which later Gzhan stong advocates would identify as *gzhan stong*, though it bears emphasizing that Rang byung rdo rje (like many of his classical contemporaries) refrained from using this term to refer to his own view. In any event, it is important to understand the difference between his and Dol po pa's position.<sup>488</sup>

In regard to the three natures, Dol po pa stipulates that the perfect nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is empty of both the imagined (*parikalpita*) and the dependent nature (*paratantra*). By contrast, Rang byung rdo rje asserts in line with the *Madhyantavibhāga* that the dependent nature empty of the imagined nature is the perfect nature. This was also the position maintained by Shākya mchog ldan and Karma phrin las. Moreover, as for the distinction between the *ālayavijñāna* and a supramundane mind according to the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, Rang byung rdo rje considers the pure aspect of the dependent nature, i.e., the purity of the eight consciousnesses—that is, the four wisdoms—or mere appearance (*snang ba tsam*) to be part of the perfect nature. This pertains to the unity of appearances and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*). When not recognized for what they are, appearances are *saṃsara*. If recognized, they are *nirvāṇa*. From this perspective, appearance and emptiness are one in essence. And it is on this basis that the true nature of mind can be said to function as the ground of everything. A neophyte who studies and practices Buddhist teachings proceeds within the framework of his *ālayavijñāna*, a mundane state of mind. However for the aspiring bodhisattva, the seeds (or germinal capacities) of study are held to have their inception in the *dharmakāya*.<sup>489</sup> The further a bodhisattva progresses on the path, the more stains are purified until the point where all defilements are totally relinquished triggering the full disclosure of mind's inherent

<sup>485</sup> See Stearns 2010, 106–10.

<sup>486</sup> Stearns 2010, 49.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>488</sup> See also Mathes 2008, 56.

<sup>489</sup> Mathes 2008, 59.

qualities. Karma phrin las pa's teachings on Gzhan stong reflect the exegetical tradition of the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje with the important difference that Karma phrin las pa, unlike his predecessor, does make explicit use of the terms Rang stong and Gzhan stong. In this regard, he attempts to show, with reference to his teacher the Seventh Karma pa, how there is no contradiction between them.

For Karma phrin las, the consequences of getting emptiness right extend far beyond the theoretical sphere to that of soteriological praxis. And the traditional Buddhist axiom that correct views are the foundation of correct contemplative practice is nowhere more acute than in the case of realizing emptiness. It is in this regard that the author, in one of his spiritual songs, warns his disciples not to get caught either in the extreme of a nonaffirming negation or in the extreme of superimposing a putative existence on the ultimate:

Since the conventional is not apprehended as characteristics,  
Do not meditate on sheer emptiness or a nonaffirming negation!  
But just be untainted by the fetter of believing in entities.  
Unvitiated by a nihilistic view, let the mind be joyful.  
Since the ultimate is not grasped as [something] real,  
Do not make superimpositions where nothing exists.  
But just behold the nature of the clear and empty mind.  
Unvitiated by an eternalist view, let the mind be joyful.<sup>490</sup>

Karma phrin las pa in another spiritual song advises Slob dpon Sangs rgya ma that Madhyamaka is just a label for a view which eschews extremes of eternalism and nihilism, a view which in reality “neither has nor lacks extremes and is also not a middle, [these being] only imputations.” Nonduality, a mode of being and awareness beyond the apprehending awareness and apprehended objective appearances, is irreducible to extremes of permanence or annihilation. And it is through the inseparability of the nature of mind and reality in the context of view, and of calm abiding and deep insight in the context of meditation, that there arises an uninterrupted experience of nondual awareness which prevails throughout meditative equipoise and post-meditation, and is sustained by mindfulness consisting in the inseparability of stillness and movement.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> KPdg, 39<sub>5-6</sub>: *kun rdzob la mtshan mar ma bzung bas || stong rkyang dang med dgag ma sgoms kyang || dngos 'dzin gyi 'ching bas ma gos tsam || chad lta yis ma slad blo re bde || don dam la bden par ma zhen pas || med bzhin du sgro btags ma byas kyang || sams gsal stong gi rang ngo mthong ba tsam || rtag lta yis ma slad blo re bde ||*

<sup>491</sup> KPdg, 41<sub>6</sub>–42<sub>4</sub>: “Do not be distracted [even] for moments [but] look at your mind. Relax it in the natural state in which there is nothing to remove and nothing to add. May the awareness of the one who relaxes be naked! Let the cloud formations of concepts disperse, just don't get lost in the shallows of nonconceptuality. Enlist the sentinel of nongrasping mindfulness. Diligently sever the ground and root of mind as such. Settle harmoniously

In yet another song, Karma phrin las pa vividly describes his own liberation from the mire of dualism and realization of nonduality and proceeds to give his disciples a direct introduction to self-awareness which culminates in recognizing one's own mind in its unborn nature and unimpeded manifestation as the display of the three spiritual embodiments (*kāya*):

Previously, distinguishing dogmatically between being and nonbeing, existence and nonexistence, [my] elaboration-free mind sank into the quagmire of discursive elaborations. Now, through the self-expressive energy of knowing my own nature, I have soared into the sky of great emptiness, the essence...

Previously, due to hardening my own mind, [I] was strongly attached to outer objects as [something] apprehended. Now that [I] am aware of the true face of my mind, [I] transcended them, having severed the fetters of subject and object.

Previously, by superimposing buddha as something to be attained, [I] deprecated delusion as something primordially nonexistent. Now, having found the mystery of the *dharmakāya* to be mind as such, the superimposing and deprecating of delusion and freedom have vanished in the expanse. ...

Fortunate faithful disciples, not analyzing objects by looking outward, listen to this direct introduction to self-awareness: mind in its twofold purity is the

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in the natural state of self-awareness. The mind [being] empty and clear is free from identification. That freshness of awareness that is beyond the intellect - leaving it unadorned, see it nakedly [for what it is]. The natural expression of mind's nature is a grand display. It is natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) pure and simple. The natural state, unvitiated by contrivance, this moment by moment self-luminous self-awareness is the primordial buddha. Some folks point out the view with words. Other people point to the atmosphere with their finger. Most describe it as a view free from extremes. This mode of being is beyond expression in thought and language. Since the view is not a matter of grasping characteristics, one doesn't fall into the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Yet, [the view] neither has nor lacks extremes and is also not a middle, [these being] only imputations. The outer apprehended object-appearances are the creative energy of mind. The inner awareness that apprehends them is the natural state of mind. As for their inseparability, it is this natural way of being which does not conceptualize them as distinct that arises in [one's] heart; or it is the inseparability of calm abiding and deep insight which flows uninterruptedly in meditative equipoise and post-meditation. Mindfulness as well, self-liberated, is the *dharmadhātu*. Experience this inseparability of stillness and movement." *dus skad cig ma yengs sems la ltos || de bsal gzhaḡ med pa'i ngag du glod || glod mkhan gyi rig pa gcer bur zhog || rnam rtog gi sprin tshogs dengs su chug || mi rtog pa ltengs por ma shor tsam || 'dzin med dran pa yi rgyang so tshugs || sems nyid kyi gzhi rtsa 'bad<sup>a</sup> kyis chos || rang rig gi ngang du chams kyis zhog || sems stong gsal ngos gzung dang bral ba | blo 'das kyi rig pa so ma de || rjen pa ru zhog las gcer gyis ltos || sems nyid kyi rang zhal ltad mor che || tha mal gyi shes pa rang kha ma || bzo bcos kyis ma slad dbyings kyi ngang || skad cig ma rang rig rang gsal 'di || gdod ma yi sangs rgyas yin lags so || khong 'ga' zhig lta ba tshig gis mtshon || mi la la bar snang 'dzub mos ston || phal mo che mtha bral lta bar smra || yin lugs 'di smra bsam rjod las 'das || lta ba la mtshan 'dzin ma mchis pas || rtag pa dang chad mthar ma lhung kyang || mtha' bcas dang mtha' bral gnyis ka min || dbu ma yang min du btags pa tsam || phyi yul snang gi gzung ba sems kyi rtsal || nang de 'dzin gyi rig pa sems kyi ngang || dbyer med la so sor mi rtog pa'i || rang babs 'di thugs la shar lags sam || zhi gnas dang lhag mthong rnam dbyer med || mnyam gzhaḡ dang rjes thob rgyun mi 'chad || dran pa yang rang grol chos kyi dbyings || gnas 'gyu dbyer med 'di nyams su long ||* \*text has bad

original ground. Cultivating the expanse without grasping is the best of paths. Beholding one's own nature is the best of fruitions. These three continua are the mystery of the mind free from extremes. ... The mind upon removal of the host of concepts is the perfect buddha. The purity of awareness and empti[ness] is the noble dharma. The manifold arising is the noble sangha. Thus the infallible refuge is the primordial mind as such. The innate, unborn mind is the *dharmakāya*. The clarity of unimpeded radiation is the *sambhogakāya*. The arising of energy in whichever way is the *nirmāṇakāya*. Thus the three *kāyas* are nothing other than mind. Though discussed in many ways, it is [but] the natural state of mind. When [its] meaning is pointed out in a few [words] it is the basic nature of awareness. When there is a lot of analysis, examination, and excessive elaboration, look at your own nature and just relax!<sup>492</sup>

Karma phrin las pa next advises his disciples to let go of the conscious or subconscious habituations to extremes of existence and nonexistence which lead to eternalist and nihilist views. The best remedy against this conditioning is a vivid and clear state of mind which he equates with the uncontrived natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*).

It is difficult to realize the view through bad mental conditioning that is fixed on the extremes of existence and nonexistence. Therefore without clinging intentionally to eternalism and nihilism, let whatever arises continue nakedly [in its] nonartificial [state]. It is difficult to succeed in meditation when there is bad mental conditioning that is fixed on a mental object and characteristics. Therefore without clinging intentionally to a state of abiding, let whatever arises continue nakedly [in its] nonartificial [state]... Being free from identification is nonartificiality. Clear and vivid awareness is nakedness. Joining these two in unity without flaw is implementing the natural awareness.<sup>493</sup>

<sup>492</sup> KPdg, 55<sub>6</sub>-57<sub>1</sub>: *sngar yin min yod med 'byed 'byed nas || sems spros med spros pa'i 'dam du bying || da rang ngo shes pa'i rang rtsal gyis || ngo bo stong chen gyi mkha' la 'phags || ... sngar rang gi sems la a 'thas pas | phyi yul la gzung bar mngon par zhen || da sems kyi rang 'tshang rig pa na || gzung 'dzin gyi 'ching ba chad nas thal || sngar sangs rgyas thob byar sgro btags pas || 'khrul pa ye med du skur ba btab || da sems nyid chos sku'i gsang rnyed pas || 'khrul grol gyi sgro skur dbyings su yal || ... skal ldan gyi bu slob dad pa can || kha phyir ltas yul la mi dpyod pas || rang rig gi ngo sprod 'di la gson || sems dag pa gnyis ldan gdod ma'i gzhi || dbyings 'dzin med du skyong ba lam gyi phul || rang ngo bo mthong ba 'bras bu'i mchog || rgyud 'di gsum mtha' bral sems kyi gsang || ... sems rtog tshogs sangs pa rdzogs sangs rgyas || rig stong du dag pa dam pa'i chos || sna tshogs su 'char ba 'phags pa'i tshogs || skyabs slu med gdong ma'i sems nyid rang || sems gnyug ma skyed med chos kyi sku || gdangs ma 'gags gsal ba longs spyod rdzogs || rtsal cir yang 'char ba sprul pa'i sku || sku 'di gsum sems las gud na med || mang<sup>a</sup> por smra kyang sems kyi ngang || don nyung ngur mtshon pa rig pa'i gshis || rtog dpyod dang spros spros ma mang bar || rang ngo la lta zhing glong la zhog ||*<sup>a</sup>text has *dmang*

<sup>493</sup> KPdg, 74<sub>3-6</sub>: *yod med kyi mtha' la a 'thas pa'i || blo ngan goms des lta ba rtogs dka' bas || rtag chad la ched du ma 'dzin par || gang shar de bzo med rjen par bskyongs || dmigs gtad dang mtshan mar a 'thas pa'i || blo ngan goms de sgom du 'gyur dka' bas || gnas cha la ched du ma 'dzin par || gang shar de bzo med rjen par bskyongs ||*

Deferring once again to Chos grags rgya mtsho, Karma phrin las pa reiterates that nondual wisdom established as ultimate truth should not be asserted to be truly existent, permanent, stable, and enduring. Those who do so have, in his eyes, not given sufficient thought to what “true” here signifies. To say that nondual wisdom is *established as ultimate truth* is not to say that it is *truly established* (*bden grub*) in the sense of a permanent, stable and enduring entity. By the same token, to say something is *established as conventional truth* is likewise not to say that it is *truly established*. This, he says, is the point on which Rang byung rdo rje and other Gzhan stong proponents differ.<sup>494</sup> With these remarks, Karma phrin las pa undoubtedly alludes to the teaching tradition of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) who, as previously noted, was said to have developed his Gzhan stong view during a Kālacakra retreat and thus in the context of his tantric practice. Dol po pa stresses that buddha nature, i.e., the ultimate exists as an entity that is empty of the adventitious but not empty of an own-nature. He declares it to be permanent and unconditioned, but, in fact, beyond the category of time, being free of moments. In contradistinction to ultimate truth, he considers conventional truth to be empty in and of itself. According to Dol po pa, ultimate truth is thus ultimately true whereas conventional truth is false and deceptive. Here, it once again becomes evident that Dol po pa maintained a much sharper distinction between the ultimate and the conventional than Rang byung rdo rje and his successors.

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| ... ngos gzung dang bral ba bzo med yin || gsal dangs su rig pa rjen pa yin || zung 'jug dang gnyis sdebs ma nor bar || tha mal gyi shes pa nyams su long ||

<sup>494</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 396<sub>4</sub>–397<sub>3</sub>: From the *Rigs gzhung rgya mtsho*: “While the statement that ‘nondual wisdom is established as ultimate truth’ means ‘established as what is ultimate truth’, it does not assert it is ‘truly established’, [i.e.,] permanent, stable, and enduring”. [Quote not identified] Some think that if [something] is established as ultimate truth, then it must be truly established. These [people] did not investigate [the matter]; they are just confused about the term ‘truth’. It is for example just [as follows]: Even though [something is] established as conventional truth, it is not required that it is therefore truly established. Hence, the general *gzhan stong* proponents these days and the writings of the glorious Rang byung differ. Also the statement of my *bla ma*, the All-knowing One, that self-emptiness and other-emptiness are not in contradiction, is well-taught so that this meaning can be understood. So, buddha nature that is existent as the unity of the two truths, the inseparability of appearance and emptiness, the great freedom from extremes, is to be explained in this way.” *rig[s] gzung rgya mtsho las | gnyis med kyi ye shes don dam pa'i bden par grub par gsungs pa yang | de don dam bden pa yin par grub ces pa'i don yin gyi | de bden grub rtag brtan ther zug tu bzhed pa ma yin no || kha cig | don dam pa'i bden par grub na bden par grub dgos so snyam pa de dag ni ma brtags pa ste | bden pa zhes pa'i ming tsam la 'khrul par zad pas so | dper na | kun rdzob pa'i bden par grub kyang bden par grub mi dgos pa bzhin no || de'i phyir | ding sang gi gzhan stong smra ba phal dang | dpal rang byung gi bzhed pa la khyad par yod pa ste | bdag gi bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa'i zhal snga nas | rang stong gzhan stong mi 'gal zhes gsung pa'ang don 'di thugs su byon pa'i legs par bshad pa'o || de ltar na mtha bral chen po snang stong dbyer med bden gnyis zung 'jug tu yod pa'i sangs rgyas kyi snying po de'i tshul brjod par bya'o |* Likewise he explains in his commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* V.20: *Mngon rtogs rgyan rtsa 'grel gyi sbyor tika 'jig rten gsum sgron la 'jug pa* 614<sub>5-7</sub>: “The wisdom of the nonduality of object and subject, moreover, is of the nature that it does not exist as an ultimately true own-being, because it is dependently arisen, as in the example of a magical illusion.” *gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi ye shes de yang chos can | don dam par bden pa'i ngo bo nyid du med pa yin te | rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba yin pa'i phyir | dper na sgyu ma bzhin du'o |*



In his commentary on Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don*, Karma phrin las explains that as the true nature of mind, natural luminosity, the *dharmakāya*, is emptiness, it is unchanging throughout all phases. Therefore, the suchness of sentient beings in the ground [phase], the suchness of bodhisattvas during the path, and the suchness of buddhas in the fruition is undifferentiated; value judgements such as better and worse, or higher and lower, do not obtain.<sup>495</sup> The ground of emptiness of Gzhan stong is *\*sugatagarbha* which is nothing other than the natural luminosity of mind's nature, the coemergent unity of the expanse and awareness, or natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*). Hence, ultimate truth is nothing but mind's true nature. Again in his commentary on Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don*, Karma phrin las pa explains that there are no buddhas and sentient beings at all who have not arisen from the preexisting state of natural purity. Yet, this natural purity does not exist as a real substance and is of the very essence of dependent arising; therefore, there is no beginning, either in the sense of initially occurrent time and a real substance.<sup>496</sup>

This inseparability between natural purity or emptiness and dependent arising provides a valuable key to understanding Karma phrin las pa's views on the compatibility of Rang stong and Gzhan stong. In his discussion on these views of emptiness in the *Zab mo nang don* commentary, he explains that at the time of the ground, when the mind is defiled and unaware of its true nature, we speak of "adventitious stains" or, in other words, "sentient beings". The sixty-four qualities, even though inseparable from mind's true nature, are not functionally present in this ground phase and it is only as a concession to linguistic conventions that one may refer to this state as an "obscured buddha[hood]".

Moreover, Karma phrin las explicitly refers to Rang byung rdo rje's Gzhan stong—though, we may recall, the latter never used this term to identify his own view—as genuine in that it accords with Maitreya's teachings, the sūtras, and the tantras. He finds substantiation for Rang byung rdo rje's view in *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.154–155:

There is nothing to be removed from it and nothing to be added.

<sup>495</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*, RDSb, vol. 14, 40<sub>1</sub>–40<sub>3</sub>: "As the essence of mind's nature, natural luminosity, the *dharmadhātu*, is emptiness, it is unchanging throughout all phases. Therefore, the suchness of sentient beings in the ground [phase], the suchness of bodhisattvas during the path and the suchness of buddhas in the fruition is indivisible in terms of distinctions between better or worse, higher or lower etc." *sems nyid rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba chos kyi dbyings kyi ngo bo stong pa nyid yin pas gnas skabs thams cad du 'gyur ba med pa'i phyir | gzhi sems can gyi de kho na nyid dang lam byang sems kyi de kho na nyid dang 'bras bu sangs rgyas kyi de kho na nyid rnam la bzang ngan nam mtho dman la sogs kyi sgo nas tha dad du dbye ba med de | ...*

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 40<sub>4</sub>–40<sub>6</sub>: "There are no buddhas and sentient beings at all who have not arisen from the preexisting state of natural purity. Yet it does not exist as a real substance because it is of the nature of dependent arising. There is no beginning of initially occurrent time and there is no beginning of a real substance." *rang bzhin rnam dag de yi snga rol na de las ma byung ba'i sangs rgyas dang sems can 'ga' yang med la | bden pa'i rdzas su grub pa med pa rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i ngo bo nyid yin pa'i phyir | dang por byung ba'i dus kyi thog ma dang bden pa'i rdzas kyi thog ma dag med de |*

The real should be seen as real, and seeing the real, one becomes liberated.<sup>497</sup>

The [buddha-]element is empty of adventitious [stains], which have the defining characteristic of being separable;

But it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities, which have the defining characteristic of not being separable.<sup>498</sup>

All this brings Karma phrin las to conclude, as had the Seventh Karma pa, that there is no incommensurability between a Rang stong understood as the emptiness of an own nature of all phenomena—with the implication that there remains nondual wisdom that is free from subject-object dichotomy—and a Gzhan stong understood as the affirmation of this nondual wisdom as being empty of the adventitious stains of dualistic perception. Thus, the compatibilist Rang stong and Gzhan stong views attributed to Rang byung rdo rje and propounded by Chos grags rgya mtsho are understood by Karma phrin las pa to be superior to the oppositional Rang stong and Gzhan stong positions which Tibetan scholastics from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward mainly associated with the Jo nang and Dge lugs pa schools.<sup>499</sup>

It is perhaps worth noting that a quite similar view regarding the unity of Rang stong and Gzhan stong was later maintained by the hermit Gshong chen Mkhas btsun bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.).<sup>500</sup> He maintained that “being empty of the stain of conceptualization is Gzhan stong and being empty of reifications of natures is Rang stong. Since being empty does not negate the nature that is empty, it is taught that emptiness is not empty in and of itself.”<sup>501</sup> In other words, emptiness whether of own-natures or extraneous conceptual projections cannot be taken as an end in itself. He furthermore explains: “If empty of own-nature (*rang gi stong pa*) were not [also] empty of other (*gzhan gyis mi stong*), then such self-empti[ness] would be a partial emptiness, i.e. one thing being empty of another (*nyi tshe'i*

<sup>497</sup> RGV I.54, 76.1–2: *nāpaneyam atah kiṃcid upaneyaṃ na kiṃcana | draṣṭavyaṃ bhūtato bhūtaṃ bhūta darśi vimucyate ||*

<sup>498</sup> RGV I.55, 76.3–4: *sūnya āgantukair dhātuḥ savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ | aśūnyo 'nuttarair dharmair avi nir bhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ ||*

<sup>499</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me zhes bya ba ra ti dgon pa'i gzims pa'i khang pa'i dri lan*, vol. ca 160<sub>2-3</sub>: “Both the *gzhan stong* and *rang stong* as asserted by Rang byung rdo rje are superior to the *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* as they are mostly known here in Tibet. His and the intent of the mighty victor (7<sup>th</sup> Karma pa) are one and the same.” *rang byung rdo rje bzched pa'i gzhan stong dang || rang stong gnyis ka bod 'dir grags che ba'i || rang stong gzhan stong las ni khyad par 'phags || de dang rgyal ba'i dbang po dgongs pa gcig ||*

<sup>500</sup> Mkhas btsun bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan who was a holder of the Gcod and Zhi byed traditions and lived in the sixteenth/seventeenth centuries. He is credited with being the first to put into writing the Gcod and Zhi byed teachings, which could be traced back to his great-great uncle Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1485).

<sup>501</sup> *Gsung 'bum thang stong rgyal po*, vol. 3, 411–15: *Rje btsun rin po che mkhas btsun bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i dgongs bzched dbu ma chen po'i grub mtha'*, 413: *rnam rtog dri mas stong pa gzhan stong dang | rang bzhin spros dang bral ba rang stong yin || stong pa stong pa'i rang bzhin mi 'dor bas | stong nyid rang gis rang nyid mi stong gsungs |*

*stong pa* = *itaretaraśūnya[tā]*). If empti[ness] of other were not [also] empty of itself, what would freedom from discursive elaborations of its own nature refer to?”<sup>502</sup>

In the eyes of the hermit Gshong chen, self-emptiness and other-emptiness, which have their sources respectively in the second and the third *dharmacakra*, are compatible accounts of reality. If self-emptiness of the second *dharmacakra* did not hold true, then “who would realize the expanse of the profound freedom from extremes?” And if other-emptiness of the final *dharmacakra* did not hold true, then “who would attain the accomplishments of the fruition, the *dharmakāya*?”<sup>503</sup> On this last point, Gshong chen rejects the standard objection that this affirmative view implies the notion of permanence saying “In what is not [just] blank nothingness,<sup>504</sup> i.e., self-occurring wisdom—there being nothing to remove, add, and grasp—where can there be the view of permanence?”<sup>505</sup> He rather criticizes those who uphold the view of negation saying: “If the fruition, wisdom [actualized through] the path, were not established, what nihilist view is there but that? If fruition, spontaneously present, unfabricated by the intellect, is intellectually fabricated and grasped as real, [this is] precisely the eternalist view.”<sup>506</sup>

This brief excursus on the compatibilist Rang stong and Gzhan stong view of the hermit Gshong chen is presented as evidence that the type of reconciliatory interpretation emphasized by Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho and Karma phrin las pa survived, at least as a marginal yogic tradition, well into the post-classical period in spite of the growing tendency among leading Bka’ brgyud scholastics (as witnessed by the writings of the Eighth Karma pa) to treat them as oppositional doxographical rubrics used to characterize the type of extreme eternalist and nihilist positions that are to be transcended by a Mahāmudrā of the Middle Way.

Let us now return to Karma phrin las pa’s interpretation of Rang stong as emptiness of an intrinsic essence of all phenomena, which supports the view that mind’s true nature is wisdom free from all adventitious duality, empty of perceiver and perceived. This view is reflected in his commentary on verse six of Saraha’s *Queen Dohā*, “All these phenomena which are posited by the intellect are empty of an own [nature]. In the absence of the condition

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 413<sub>4-5</sub>: *rang gi stong pa gzhan gyis mi stong na || de 'dra'i rang stong nyi tshe'i stong pa yin || gzhan gyi stong pa rang gis mi stong na || rang gi rang bzhin spros bral gang la zer ||*

<sup>503</sup> *Gsung 'bum thang stong rgyal po*, vol. 3, 413<sub>5</sub>–414<sub>1</sub>: *'khor lo bar pa'i rang stong mi 'thad na || mtha' bral zab mo'i dbyings de su yis rtogs || 'khor lo tha ma'i gzhan stong mi ' thad na || 'bras bu chos sku'i dngos grub su yis thob ||*

<sup>504</sup> That is, a state of emptiness (*stong*) that is like insentient matter (*bem po*).

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 414<sub>1</sub>: *bem po ma yin rang shar ye shes la || bsal bzhag 'dzin med rtag ltag ga la 'gyur ||*

<sup>506</sup> *Gsung 'bum thang stong rgyal po*, vol. 3, 414<sub>1-2</sub>: *lam gyi ye shes 'bras bu ma grub na || de las gzhan pa'i chad lta su zhig yod || 'bras bu blo yis ma byas lhun grub la || blos byas bden par 'dzin na rtag lta nyid ||*

[of the intellect], all imputations are nonexistent....”<sup>507</sup> Karma phrin las explains this verse as follows:

All phenomena subsumed under appearance and existence, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, are only posited by one’s own intellect’s conceptualization. Objects are without even an iota of existence in terms of their own essence. For that reason, all these phenomena of appearance and existence posited by the intellect are empty of an intrinsic essence and do not have even the slightest existence in the way they appear in conceptual thought. Thus, when one becomes free from conceptualizing, one does not perceive anything, neither *saṃsāra* nor *nirvāṇa*, but realizes [their] basic equality. Therefore, because one then becomes free from the condition of the intellect, all phenomena that are imputed by the intellect are liberated of their own accord and do not exist [any longer]. ....<sup>508</sup>

Karma phrin las pa explicitly rejects a nonaffirming account of the emptiness of intrinsic essences when commenting on verse 7ab of Saraha’s *Queen Dohā* which reads “All those who conceptualize existence are said to be as stupid as cattle, but those who conceptualize nonexistence are far more stupid”.<sup>509</sup> Here Karma phrin las pa identifies those who conceptualize nonexistence with nihilist Mādhyamikas who hold the fundamental mode of being to consist in sheer nonexistence, like an extinguished flame. They are in this regard even more stupid than those who take the basic nature to consist in the existence of real entities.<sup>510</sup> He explains that their mistake lies in trying to justify the belief in nonexistence

<sup>507</sup> *Btsun mo dohā*’i *ṭīkā* ’bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long, 125<sub>3</sub>: *blo yis gzhaḡ pa’i chos ’di thams cad rang gis stong | rkyen dang bral phyir btag pa thams cad yod ma yin || ...*

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 125<sub>5-17</sub>: *snang srid ’khor ’das kyis bsduḡ pa’i chos thams cad rang gi blo rnam par rtog pas bzhaḡ pa tsam yin gyi | yul rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni rdul tsam yang med do | de’i phyir blo yis bzhaḡ pa’i snang srid kyi chos ’di thams cad ni rang gi ngo bos stong zhiḡ rtog pa la snang ba ltar du grub pa cung zad kyang med de | rnam rtog las grol ba na ’khor ’das gang du yang mi dmigs shiḡ mnyam pa nyid du rtogs pas so | des na rkyen blo dang bral ba’i phyir blos btags pa’i chos thams cad rang sar grol te yod pa ma yin no || ... rang bzhiḡ gnas su grol ba yang yin la | de bzhiḡ nyid kyang yin pas rang bzhiḡ gnas su grol ba’i de bzhiḡ nyid ni lhan cig skyes pa’i ye shes so |*

<sup>509</sup> *Btsun mo dohā*’i *ṭīkā* ’bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long, 125<sub>21-22</sub>: *dngos por rtog pa thams cad phyugs dang ’dra bār brjod || dngos med rtog pa de bas shin du blun ’gyur zhes ||*

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 126<sub>6-9</sub>: “Because this mode of abiding is not established as any essence, it is non existent. For example when a candle-[flame] is extinguished, it no longer appears to the mind [lit. mental faculty]. The Mādhyamikas who analyze and deprecate in this way are said to be even more stupid than the earlier ones [i.e., those holding onto existence].” *gnas lugs de ni ci’i ngo bor yang ma grub pas dngos por med de | dper na mar me bsad pa’i tshe dbang yid la dngos por mi snang ba bzhiḡ no zhes rtog cing skur ba ’debs pa’i dbu ma pa rnams ni snga ma de bas kyang shin tu blun par ’gyur zhes bya’o ||*

based on negating an entity that is, however, nonexistent to begin with. An established nonexistence is an absurdity.<sup>511</sup> One should rather understand that

The ultimate truth, i.e. coemergent wisdom, is the supreme mode of abiding, i.e., *mahāmudrā*, that, by its nature, is neither existent nor nonexistent.<sup>512</sup>

In his *A Mystical Song of the View Proclaiming the Mode of Being*<sup>513</sup>, Karma phrin las pa concisely describes the affirmative character of negation within the experience of emptiness. A state of mind that is truly aware of emptiness is not a state of a mere negation but is imbued with qualities. And these, as stated above, are in turn not established as something identifiable and as having defining characteristics:

Simply knowing the true face of emptiness, any kind of empti[ness] still [has] unsurpassable qualities [and is] only empty of adventitious stains untainted by the marks of delusion.<sup>514</sup>

#### THE TWO TYPES OF PURITY

For Karma phrin las pa, “mind in its twofold purity is the original ground”.<sup>515</sup> In his commentary to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (ASA) VIII.1, he specifies the two types of purity as follows:

What is qualified as *svābhāvikakāya* possesses twofold purity because [1] it has primordially had the characteristic of being free by nature from stains and [2] it is totally purified in every respect from adventitious stains. It is of the nature of stains that they are purified by way of remedies because they are adventitious.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 126<sub>17-19</sub>: “If an object of refutation or a nonexistent thing is not established, then the nonexistence that depends on it is impossible. Therefore, conceptualizing it as that makes them even more stupid than the former [who believe in existence].” *dgag bya’am med rgyu’i dngos po ma grub na de la ltos pa’i dngos med mi srid pas der rtog pa ni snga ma de bas kyang ni blun par ’gyur te |*

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 126<sub>12-14</sub>: *don dam bden pa lhan cig skyes pa’i ye shes de ni dngos po dang dngos med gnyis su med pa’i rang bzhin phyag rgya chen po’i gnas lugs mchog tu gyur pa yin no |*

<sup>513</sup> See Volume II, translation: 95–98, critical edition: 98–99.

<sup>514</sup> KPdg, *yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba’i mgur*, see Volume II, translation: 97, critical edition: 99.

<sup>515</sup> KPdg, 56<sub>3</sub>: *sems dag pa gnyis ldan gdod ma’i gzhi ||*

<sup>516</sup> *Mngon rtogs rgyan rtas gyi sbyor tika ’jig rten gsum sgron la ’jug pa*, 532<sub>5-8</sub>: *ngo bo nyid sku chos can | dag pa gnyis ldan yin te || gdod ma nas dri ma rang bzhin gyis dben pa’i mtshan nyid du gyur cing glo<sup>a</sup> bur gyi dri mas rnam pa thams cad du rnam par dag pa yin pas so || dri ma rnams chos can || gnyen pos ’dag ste | glo bur ba yin pa nyid kyis so ||* <sup>a</sup> text has *blo*

The author here adds the clarification that the accomplishment of the *svābhāvikakāya* and of the associated qualities such as the ten powers are nothing newly produced through causes and conditions. Being unconditioned in this way, the *svābhāvikakāya* is not a result of having practiced a supramundane path because it is a goal that is not fabricated.<sup>517</sup>

Further elucidating the meaning of the two kinds of purity with respect to coemergent mind (*lhan skyes kyi sems* : *sahajacitta*) and natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in his commentary to Saraha's *People Dohā*, Karma phrin las again acknowledges his indebtedness to the teachings of his mentor Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho:

What are the two [types of] purity? They are natural purity and purity [from] adventitious [stains]. ... Coemergent mind being without identification and defining characteristics is the natural purity. ... Coemergent mind that is not tainted by the conceptualizations of the apprehended and the apprehender is the purity of the adventitious. Therefore, the mighty victor, my all-knowing spiritual teacher, says that natural awareness is without identification and defining characteristics and without being tainted by the conceptualization of subject and object; this he actually introduced as the *svābhāvikakāya*.<sup>518</sup>

Commenting on a concluding verse in the *People Dohā* that, in language strongly reminiscent of Tathāgatagarbha texts, describes an ever-present Buddha[hood] in all beings, Karma phrin las clarifies the nature and significance of twofold purity of the naturally abiding potential (*rang bzhin gnas pa'i rigs* : *prakṛtisthagotra*):<sup>519</sup>

All sentient beings have the nature of a buddha that abides primordially and continuously [in them]. [*Query*:] What is the nature of a buddha? [*Reply*:] It is the mode of abiding of the mind. Being essentially pure, it has been present since beginningless time as *dharmadhātu* which is uncurtailed in scope and primordially

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 532<sub>13-17</sub>: “What is qualified as *svābhāvikakāya* is not newly produced by causes and conditions that are obtained through having rid oneself from stains by virtue of the supramundane path, because it is the actuality of nonfabrication.” *ngo bo nyid sku chos can* | ‘jig rten las ‘das pa’i lam gyis sems dri ma dang bral bar byas pa’i sgo nas ‘thob kyi rgyu rkyen gyis gsar du byas pa ni ma yin te | bcos ma ma yin pa’i don gyis so ||

<sup>518</sup> *Dmangs dohā*’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long, 37<sub>11-38</sub>: *dag pa gnyis po de gang zhe na* | *rang bzhin rnam dag dang* | *glo<sup>a</sup> bur rnam dag go* || ... *sems lhan cig skyes pa ngos bzung dang mtshan ma med pa ni rang bzhin rnam dag go* | ... *sems lhan cig skyes pa la gzung ‘dzin gyi rnam par rtog pas ma gos pa ni glo<sup>b</sup> bur rnam dag go* | *des na tha mal gyi shes pa ngos bzung dang mtshan ma med cing gzung ‘dzin gyi rtog pas ma gos pa ‘di la ngo bo nyid kyi skur dngos su ngo sprod par mdzad pa ni* | *bdag gi bla ma rgyal ba’i dbang po thams cad mkhyen pa’i gsung ngo* || <sup>a</sup>text has *blo*; <sup>b</sup>text has *blo*

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 113<sub>17-18</sub>: “All [have] the continuously abiding (i.e., the primordial) Buddha. When the mind is essentially pure, this very [purity] is the immaculate supreme state.” *ma lus rgyun du gnas pa’i sangs rgyas te* || *sems ni ngo bo nyid kyi dag pa na* || *de nyid dri med mchog gi go ‘phang ngo* ||

present as *dharmakāya*, naturally luminous and not falling into any extreme (*phyogs su ma lung*). [Query:] Why is it a naturally present potential? [Reply:] It is such because when that which has been present since beginningless time as the pure nature of mind becomes pure in the sense that not the slightest concept of dualistic clinging, i.e., the adventitious stains, exists, it is said that one has attained the sublime status of supreme awakening endowed with two purities.<sup>520</sup>

Here the two kinds of purity are clearly distinguished and their relationship clarified: buddha nature, the unborn nature of mind, is primordially pure in every respect, yet it has to be purified of adventitious stains in order to reveal itself. This relationship reflects very precisely the author's interpretation of the commensurability of self-emptiness and other-emptiness along the lines of Rang byung rdo rje and Chos grags rgya mtsho. Stated simply, the natural purity of mind means it is empty of any (putative) own-essence (*rang stong*) while purity of the adventitious means it is empty of all that is other than or extraneous to (*gzhan stong*) it. Karma phrin las only explicitly discusses the Rang stong and Gzhan stong views in his *Discussion to Dispel Mind's Darkness: A Reply to Queries of [the Governor of] Lcags mo* and his Commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* in the context of advocating the type of compatibilist view ascribed to the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje and articulated by the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho. Yet, there are clear indications in his writings that he accorded primacy to the Gzhan stong view, as for example in verse 15 of his *Vajra Song on the View Proclaiming the Mode of Being* quoted already above:

Simply knowing the true face of emptiness, any kind of empti[ness] still [has] unsurpassable qualities [and is] only empty of adventitious stains untainted by the marks of delusion.<sup>521</sup>

Furthermore, just as Rang stong and Gzhan stong are understood to be without contradiction, the same may be said of buddha nature imbued with the sixty-four qualities and emptiness:

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 113<sub>19</sub>–114<sub>4</sub>: *sems can ma lus pa ni ye gdod ma nas rgyun chags su gnas pa'i sangs rgyas kyi rang bzhin can yin te | sangs rgyas kyi rang bzhin de yang gang zhe na | sems kyi gnas lugs ni ngo bo nyid kyis rnam par dag pas na | thog ma med pa'i dus can gyi chos kyi dbyings rgyar ma chad | phyogs su ma lung ba rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba ye gdod ma nas chos kyi skur bzhugs pa de'o || de ci'i phyir rang bzhin gnas rigs yin zhe na | yin te thog ma med pa nas sems kyi rang bzhin rnam dag tu gnas pa de nyid glo<sup>a</sup> bur gyi dri ma gnyis 'dzin gyi rtog pa cung zad tsam yang med par dag pa na | dag pa gnyis ldan byang chub mchog gi go 'phang thob par 'dod pas so ||*<sup>a</sup> text: *blo*

<sup>521</sup> KPdg, *Yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur* (ga 8<sub>5</sub>–10<sub>4</sub>), 9<sub>6</sub>–9<sub>7</sub>: ... *stong pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar stong yang bla med chos || 'khrul pa'i mtshan mas ma gos pa || glo<sup>a</sup> bur dri mas stong pa tsam ||* ... <sup>a</sup>text has *blo*

Emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects and *\*sugatagarbha* have the same meaning. Therefore, it is explained that *\*sugatagarbha* being actually endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation is the meaning of “endowed with the excellence of all aspects” and their not being established as identifiable essences and characteristics is the meaning of emptiness.<sup>522</sup>

#### BUDDHA NATURE ENDOWED WITH QUALITIES

In order to get a clearer picture of the Karma Bka' brgyud view of buddha nature that Karma phrin las pa advocated and developed, let us now turn our attention to a synopsis of buddha nature theories in India and Tibet that forms a section of his *Zab mo nang don* commentary bearing the outline (*sa bcad*) heading “A delimitation of buddha nature [theories]”.<sup>523</sup> This presentation, succinct as it is, provides valuable insight into how the Karma Bka' brgyud masters positioned their own buddha nature views in relation to the generally-accepted Indian Buddhist theories and in contrast to a number of contentious Tibetan interpretations. It appears to have been modeled on the similar but slightly longer overviews provided by Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489) and Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419) in their *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentaries. More valuable for the present study is the author's concluding remarks on the Karma Bka' brgyud Madhyamaka view of buddha nature as articulated by the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. Karma phrin las pa's historical overview and summary of Rang byung rdo rje's view are worth briefly summarizing.

Examining his overview of buddha nature and *gotra* theories in India and Tibet, the author first discusses the Vaibhāṣika idea of a noble lineage; those having few desires and contentment are said to be part of (or possess) the ‘lineage of the Āryas’ (*'phags [pa'i] rigs : āryavaṃśā*).<sup>524</sup> He next describes the Sautrāntika view regarding a germinal capacity of mind (*sems kyi sa bon nus pa : cittabījaśakti*)<sup>525</sup> with a supporting quotation from the *Abhidharma-kośaṭīkā* (AKT). He then turns his attention to the Yogācāra *gotra* theory, focusing on its

<sup>522</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDsb vol. 329<sub>4-5</sub>: *rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid dang bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po don gcig pas | bde snying la bral rnam smin gyi yon tan drug bcu rtsa bzhi dngos su ldan pa ni rnam kun mchog ldan dang | de yang ngos bzung dang mtshan mar ma grub pa ni stong nyid kyi don du bzhed pas ...*

<sup>523</sup> We intend to include the full passage in a forthcoming monograph on the Eighth Karma pa's contributions to post-classical buddha nature debates.

<sup>524</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 464. La Vallée Poussin 1980, AK 6, 182.

<sup>525</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 465 n. 4. According to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (*Phar phyin mtha' dpyod*, vol. 1, 178b, 182b<sub>4</sub>), the definition of *prakṛtiśthagotra* in the system of the Sautrāntikas is the germinal capacity (*bījaśakti*) of the uncorrupted mind (*zag pa med pa'i sems kyi sa bon gyi nus pa*).



distinction between the naturally present potential (*rang bzhin gnas rigs* : *prakṛtisthagotra*) and the acquired potential (*bsgrubs pa'i rigs*; *samudānītagotra*), as outlined in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.<sup>526</sup> The naturally present potential is identified with the so-called “distinct set of six cognitive domains” (*skye mched drug gi khyad par* : *ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ*)<sup>527</sup>—an important term in the Eighth Karma pa’s buddha nature theory which he identifies with the all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*)—and the unfolded potential is characterized as the potential attained by former familiarization with the roots of virtue.

Turning to the Madhyamaka-systems as propounded in Tibet, Karma phrin las pa suggests that there were a lot of conflicting and contradictory view regarding suchness and the status of buddha nature.<sup>528</sup> In the tantric buddha nature theory of the Sa skyas, although it is (correctly) explained “in the *Dag ljon*<sup>529</sup> [cycle] and other texts that mind as such is utterly

<sup>526</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 34<sub>1-3</sub>: “From the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*: What is the *gotra*? It has two aspects: [1] naturally present and [2] acquired (Skt. *samudānīta*). Here, [1] the naturally present *gotra* is the distinct set of six cognitive domains of a *bodhisattva*. Such a [bodhisattva] is one who from [one existence] to the next [without interruption] is endowed with beginningless *dharmatā*. [2] The acquired potential is attained by former familiarization with the roots of virtue.” *byang sa las | de la rigs gang zhe na mdor na rnam pa gnyis te | rang bzhin gyis gnas pa dang yang dag par bsgrubs pa'o | de la rang bzhin gyis gnas pa'i rigs ni byang chub sems dpa' rnam kyi skye mched drug gi khyad par gang yin pa ste | gcig nas gcig tu rgyud de 'ongs pa thog ma med pa'i dus can chos nyid kyi thob pa de lta bu yin no || de la yang dag par bsgrubs pa'i rigs ni sngon dge ba'i rtsa ba goms par byas pa las thob pa gang yin pa ste ||* BBh I.24-6: *samāsato gotraṃ dvididhaṃ prakṛtisthaṃ samudānītaṃ ca | tatra prakṛtisthaṃ gotraṃ yad bodhisattvānāṃ ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ | sa tādrśaḥ paramparāgato 'nādikāliko dharmatāpratīlabdhaḥ |* For a discussion of this and related passages in MSA, MAV and their commentaries, see Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 88 n. 2 et passim.

<sup>527</sup> The term “distinct set of six cognitive domains” renders *ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ* (Tib. *skye mched drug gi khyad par*) where the suffix *-viśeṣaḥ* may denote a particular type among a wider class of things. See also n. 661.

<sup>528</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 34<sub>4-7</sub>: “In the Madhyamaka system, although there is general agreement that suchness, the nature of things possessing defilement, is a *gotra*, there are a great many different systems of identifying this suchness, the nature of things. Consequently, here in the country of Tibet, [the *gotra*] has been viewed from a wide range of different perspectives and there is evidently an unending amount of prattle.” *dbu ma pa'i lugs la | dri ma dang bcas pa'i chos nyid de bzhin nyid rigs su 'dod pa la phal cher mthun yang | chos nyid de bzhin nyid kyi ngos 'dzin lugs mi 'dra ba mang ches pas bod kyi yul 'dir lta ba tha dad pa sna tshogs pas gzings te | mu cor smra ba dpag tu med pa zhig snang ngo ||*

<sup>529</sup> The *Dag ljon* [*skor gsum*] or *Three Cycles of [the Comprehensive Summary, Precious] Tree and Pure [Commentary]* refers to the three parts of the *Rgyud sde spyi'i rnam bzhag* or *Comprehensive Summary of Tantras*, a monumental overview of Buddhist tantra (with special attention to the *Hevajra* cycle) according to the Sa skya Lam 'bras system. The first is the *Rgyud sde spyi'i rnam bzhag* itself, an introductory summary of tantra by the early Sa skya scholar Bsod nams rtse mo (1142–1182), the second is the *Rgyud kyi mngon par rtogs pa rin po che'i ljon shing*, a continuation of the first by Bsod nams rtse mo's brother Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216), and the third is the *Brtag gnyis rnam 'grel dag ldan*, a commentary on the *Hevajra* that is also by Grags pa rgyal mtshan. These are found in several collections including *Sa skya bka' 'bum* vol. 3, 1–147, vol. 6, 1–291, and vol. 6, 403–682 respectively. A famous work on the *Three Cycles* was the *Dag ljon skor gsum gyi lung 'grel lung don gsal ba'i nyi ma* by the Sa skya scholar Ye shes rgyal mtshan (d. 1406). It is included in the *Rgyud sde kun btus* (vol. 32, 491–638). For a study of the first cycle of the summary, see Verrill 2012, 18–25. See also Sobisch 2008, 66 and 151. Shākya mchog ldan wrote a short commenary on difficult topics in the *Three Cycles* entitled *Dag ljon skor gsum gyi dri ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa dka' ba'i gnas gsal ba'i me long*, in *Shākya mchog ldan gsung 'bum* vol. 17, 426–32.

pure by nature,” Sa skya masters nonetheless “declare that the [buddha] qualities do not actually exist in it, but just subsist innately in the manner of causes.”<sup>530</sup> These causes undergo transformation by amassing the two accumulations and by the Generation and Completion stages of Vajrayāna practice, leading to the attainment of buddha qualities. Karma phrin las pa outlines the Jo nang system as formulated by Dol po pa, who maintains that the thirty-two qualities of the *dharmakāya* being immanent to the mind are always present in sentient beings, and are equated with actual buddhahood.<sup>531</sup> He describes the position of Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375–1459) to whom the *gotra* possesses three special features of the indestructible clarity of body, speech, and mind.<sup>532</sup> He outlines the Dge lugs pa position that buddha nature is a nonaffirming negation, i.e., mind that is empty of a truly existent mind.<sup>533</sup> Turning to Rang byung rdo rje’s account of buddha nature, Karma phrin las pa explains the latter’s equation of buddha nature with natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*)<sup>534</sup>. On this view, natural

<sup>530</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 34<sub>6-1</sub>: “Even in regard to buddha nature as expounded according to the Vajrayāna, eminent masters of the Glorious Sa skya tradition, having explained in the *Dag ljon*<sup>530</sup> [cycle] and other texts that mind as such is utterly pure by nature, go on to declare that the [buddha] qualities do not actually exist in it, but just exist naturally in the manner of causes.” *dpal ldan sa skya pa’i rje btsun gong ma rnams kyis dag ljon la sogs par | sems nyid rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa la bshad nas | de la yon tan gyi chos rnams dngos su med kyang rgyu’i tshul gyis lhun grub tu yod pa |*

<sup>531</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 35<sub>1-3</sub>: “According to the Great Omniscient Jo mo nang pa [Dol po pa], the naturally present *gotra*, together with the thirty-two qualities of *dharmakāya*, has been innately present in all sentient beings forever and always and that is the actual buddhahood whereas, the unfolded (*paripuṣṭa*) *gotra* is said to newly arise when developed by the conditions of latent tendencies of study and so forth.” *kun mkhyen chen po jo mo nang pas ni rang bzhin gnas rigs chos kyi sku’i yon tan sum bcu rtsa gnyis dang bcas pa sems can thams cad la ye gdod ma nas rang cas su yod cing de yang sangs rgyas dngos yin la | rgyas ’gyur gyi rigs ni thos pa la sogs pa’i bag chags rkyen gyis bskyed nas gsar du byung bar bzhed do ||* No mention is made that according to Dol po pa in the context of the Buddhist Tantras the thirty-two bodily marks as well exist fully developed in sentient beings.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 35<sub>3-4</sub>: “The great Tibetan scholar Gsang ba[’i] byin [i.e. Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375–1450)]<sup>532</sup> of the Bo dong sect] explains [*gotra*] which is referred to as “possessing three special features of indestructible clarity” in terms of the clarity of the three [factors] of body, speech and mind.” *bod kyi slob dpon chen po gsang bas byin gyis ni | dang ma mi shigs pa khyad par gsum ldan zhes ba ba | lus ngag yid gsum gyi dangs ma la bshad cing |*

<sup>533</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 35<sub>4-5</sub>: “Some other Tibetans [i.e., Dge lugs pa] explain [the *gotra*] as an instance of a nonaffirming negation, i.e., as nonexistence referred to as ‘emptiness that is empty of a truly [existent] mind’.” *bod la la dag gis ni | sems bden pas stong pa’i stong nyid ces bya ba med pa dag pa’i phyogs las bshad do |*

<sup>534</sup> Karma phrin las pa clarifies the scope of natural awareness and its relationship to wisdom in his *Zab mo nang don rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 350<sub>4-6</sub>: “When natural awareness is completely purified of obscurations, it is the very nature of the three wisdoms. Purification of the afflictive mind (*kliṣṭamanas*; *nyon yid*) yields the wisdom of equality (*samatājñāna*; *mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes*) that unwaveringly works for the fulfilment of others. Purification of the sixth, mental consciousness) with its misconceptions, yields the discriminating wisdom (*pratyavekṣanājñāna*; *so sor rtog pa’i ye shes*). The purification of the cognitions of the five sense-gates and their objects yields the task-performing wisdom (*krtyānuṣṭānājñāna*; *bya ba [s]grub pa’i ye shes*) [with its] fundamentally transformed engaged cognitions (‘*jug shes*’).” *tha mal pa’i shes pa ’di nyid sgrib pa rnam par dag pa na ye shes gsum gyi ngo bo nyid yin te | nyon mongs pa can gyi yid rnam par dag pa ni mi g.yo bar gzhan don byed pa mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes dang | kun tu rtog pa ste drug pa yid shes rnam par dag*

awareness, i.e., buddha nature, is beyond identifications and characteristics, free from truth and falsity, its nature being the inseparability of the expanse (*dbyings*) and wisdom (*ye shes*). In commenting on Rang byung rdo rje's view of buddha nature, Karma phrin las clarifies the sense of several technical terms that are central to Karma Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā exegesis:

Here, “expanse” (*dhātu*) refers to the naturally luminous “expanse of phenomena”.<sup>535</sup> Consequently, the basic meaning of *dharmadhātu* is [this]: because both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are nothing that is truly established from their own side as different things, the whole spectrum of appearances of dual phenomena such as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, factors to be relinquished and their antidotes, subject and object, and signifiers and signified, have the same flavour as the ever-present great indestructible nucleus, the very essence of nonduality. This is called “the expanse of phenomena” (*dharmadhātu*)...

As for the meaning of “luminous by nature”, while it has already been explained elsewhere that “nature” and “essence” and “way of abiding” and so forth are synonyms, “luminous” refers to the self-luminosity (*rang 'od*) that transcends identifications and characteristics. Consequently, the principle meaning is this: while in its way of abiding, its ceaseless expressive energy—an auto-effulgence that is not established as anything—may manifest in myriad ways, it is nonetheless free from elaborations such as “it is this” or “it is not this”.<sup>536</sup>...

As for “wisdom” (*ye shes*), the [Sanskrit] term *jñāna* was [variously] rendered [in Tibetan] as wisdom (*ye shes*), knowing (*shes pa*) and fathoming (*khong du chud pa*). Thus, in this context, the principal meaning of wisdom is personally realized self-awareness (*so so rang gis rig pa*).<sup>537</sup> It is therefore described as wisdom from

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*pa so sor rtog pa'i ye shes dang | sgo lnga'i rnam shes yul dang bcas pa rnams rnam par dag pa ni | 'jug shes gnas gyur pa bya ba grub pa'i ye shes so ||*

<sup>535</sup> See *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.13.

<sup>536</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 361–372: *de la dbyings ni | chos kyi dbyings rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba de nyid do || de'i phyir chos kyi dbyings shes pa'i go don ni || 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa gnyis ka rang ngos nas tha dad du bden par grub pa med pa'i phyir | 'khor 'das sam spang gnyen nam gzung 'dzin nam rjod bya rjod byed la sogs pa gnyis chos su snang ba mtha' dag gnyis su med pa'i rang gi ngo bo gdod ma'i mi shigs pa'i thig le chen po dang ro mnyam pa la chos kyi dbyings shes bya ste | ... rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba zhes pa'i don ni | rang bzhin dang ngo bo dang gnas tshul la sogs pa rnams ni rnam grangs yin par gzhan du bshad zin la 'od gsal ba ni | ngos gzung dang mtshan ma las 'das pa'i rang 'od de | de'i phyir | gnas tshul la cir yang ma grub pa'i rang gdangs ma 'gags pa'i rtsal sna tshogs par shar yang 'di yin dang 'di min gyi spros pa dang bral ba ni | de'i go don yin no ||*

<sup>537</sup> *Ye shes* is thus to be understood as self-awareness of its own true nature, an awareness-emptiness and therefore as a particular type of *pratisvasaṃvedana*. See for example Mathes 2008, 351. In his *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, MKsb, vol. 15 (1028<sub>1</sub>–1029<sub>3</sub>), Mi bskyod rdo rje points to that this *so so[r] rang rig pa'i ye shes* should not be understood in the sense of ordinary self-awareness (*rang rig*), but as coemergent wisdom, i.e. wisdom that coemerges with the termination of ignorance-based cognitions. He

the perspective of its clarity, appearance, and awareness. It follows that the principal meaning of “its nature being the inseparability of the expanse and wisdom” is personally realized self-awareness of the nonduality of [mind’s] profundity and clarity.<sup>538</sup> ...

As for “natural awareness”, it is “the awareness that is natural” (*shes pa rang bzhin pa*), this very awareness in the present that is unspoiled by contrivance and calculation.<sup>539</sup> ...

Moreover, although “[buddha] nature” (*snying po*) is free from partiality and uncurtailed in scope, its remedial orientation may nonetheless be described by the term “virtue” (*gnyen po’i phyogs dge ba*).<sup>540</sup> It defies categorization into good and evil and transcends expression in language, yet it transpires continuously since time without beginning in [everyone from] sentient beings up to buddha.<sup>541</sup>

Personally realized self-awareness which is in this passage equated with buddha nature and coemergent wisdom is, in Karma phrin las pa’s explanation of Saraha’s *Queen Dohā* verse 4, further identified with the wisdom of suchness (*de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes*).<sup>542</sup> Commenting on verse 74, he explains that cultivating and internalizing such wisdom is tantamount to cultivating the buddha qualities and thereby “making the goal the path”. Since it simply makes manifest what is already there, it is a matter of direct perception that does not change what is revealed into something else:

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continues: “When ignorance-based cognition has ceased, the coemergent wisdom which is unmixed with it and nonconceptual—that is, the ultimately authentic personally realized self awareness—wells up from the expanse.” *de nas ma rig pa’i shes pa de rgyun chad pa’i tshe | de dang lhan cig tu skyes pa’i ye shes ma ’dres pa rtog bral don dam pa’i mtshan nyid pa’i so so rang rig gi ye shes de nyid dbyings las ldang ba’o ||* See also Kapstein 2000 and Higgins 2013.

<sup>538</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDsb, vol. 14, 37<sub>2-4</sub>: *ye shes ni dznā na zhes pa | ye shes dang shes pa dang khong du chud pa la ’jug pas | so so rang gis rig pa ni skabs ’dir ye shes kyi go don yin pa’i phyir | gsal ba dang snang ba dang rig pa’i cha nas ye shes su brjod do | des na zab gsal gnyis med du so so rang rig pa ni dbyings dang ye shes dbyer med pa’i rang bzhin gyi go don te |*

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 38<sub>1-2</sub>: *tha mal gyi shes pa ni | shes pa rang bzhin pa bzo bcos dang rtsis btab sogs kyis ma bslad pa’i da lta’i shes pa ’di nyid de |*

<sup>540</sup> For example in LAS, X.750a, 358s: “The naturally luminous mind is the Tathāgata’s *garbha*, it is virtuous.” *prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam garbham tathāgatam śubham |*

<sup>541</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDsb vol. 14, 38<sub>3-4</sub>: *snying po de yang | rgyar ma chad phyogs su ma lung yang gnyen po’i phyogs dge ba zhes pa’i sgras brjod du rung la | sems can nas sangs rgyas kyi bar la bzang ngan gyi dbye ba med cing tha snyad dang smra brjod las ’das kyang thog ma med pa nas rgyud de ’ongs pa |*

<sup>542</sup> *Btsun mo dohā’i ṭīkā ’bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long*, 123<sub>9-14</sub>: “The wisdom of suchness is ‘suchness’ as well as ‘wisdom’; thus it is the ‘wisdom of suchness’. ... It [being] personally realized wisdom, it is to be known by oneself alone”. *de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes te | de bzhin nyid kyang yin la | ye shes kyang yin pas na de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes so | ... so so rang rig pa’i ye shes rang nyid kyis shes bar bya ba kho na yin ...*

Cultivating and internalizing the primordial self-arisen wisdom, which is unfathomable because it is beyond the conceptual mind and inexpressible because it is not an object of language, is tantamount to cultivating all the qualities of a buddha, the fruition. Therefore, this path of the essential meaning of the unsurpassable Great Vehicle is called the “instruction on taking fruition as the path”. From training in taking that inconceivable and indescribable wisdom of the ground phase which primordially abides as the fruit as the path, it is perceived directly without the essence changing into something different.<sup>543</sup>

By now it is evident that, for Karma phrin las pa, “buddha nature” (*bde gshegs snying po*) and “mind as such” (*sems nyid*) are coextensive terms, both referring to a discernable depth dimension of experience that is primordially both pure (empty) and luminous in nature. As he states in his commentary of Saraha’s *Queen Dohā*, “mind as such, immaculate buddha nature, has the nature of luminosity, natural primordial purity from stains”.<sup>544</sup> Returning to his account of Rang byung rdo rje’s view of buddha nature as natural awareness in the *Zab mo nang don* commentary, Karma phrin las pa goes on to state:

It is immutable in essence and persists as the nature of a cause (*rgyu’i ngo bo nyid*), yet it is replete with myriad [buddha] qualities (*yon tan gyi chos*). It defies categorization into ground and goal, yet it manifests according to circumstances as pure or impure.<sup>545</sup>

And:

The essence of the indivisibility of the basic expanse and awareness remains uncurtailed by limits such as eternalism and nihilism and immune to partialities

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 183<sub>13–18</sub>: *blo las ’das pas bsam du med cing sgra’i yul ma yin pas brjod pa las ’das pa’i ye shes ye gdod ma nas rang byung ba gang yin pa de bsgom zhing nyams su len pa de ni ’bras bu sangs rgyas kyi chos ma lus pa bsgom par gyur pa yin no || de’i phyir theg pa chen po bla na med pa snying po’i don gyi lam ’di la ni ’bras bu lam du ’khyer ba’i gdams pa zhes bya ste | ye gdod ma nas ’bras bur gnas pa’i gzhi dus kyi ye shes smra bsam brjod med de nyid lam du khyer nas sbyangs pa las ngo bo gzhan du mi ’gyur bar mngon sum du mthong bar ’gyur ro ||*

<sup>544</sup> *Btsun mo dohā’i tīkā ’bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long*, 124<sub>6–8</sub>: “The mind, immaculate sugatagarbha, has the nature of luminosity, natural primordial purity from stains”. *sems nyid dri ma med pa’i bde gshegs pa’i snying po de ni rang bzhin gyi[s] dri mas ye gdod ma nas rnam par dag pa ’od gsal ba’i bdag nyid can yin |*

<sup>545</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 38<sub>4</sub>: *ngo bo la ’gyur ba med cing rgyu’i ngo bo nyid du gnas kyang yon tan gyi chos du mas phyug pa | gzhi ’bras dbye ba med kyang dag ma dag ci rigs par snang ba’o |*

such as factors to be relinquished and their antidotes. It therefore prevails as an all-pervading sovereignty. According to the root text [*Zab mo nang don* 1.7]: “The cause is the beginningless mind as such, uncurtailed and impartial”.<sup>546</sup>

Although it is described as “virtue” given that it transcends the characteristics of nonvirtue, it is not a “virtue” in the sense of a real entity because it does not have the nature of karma.<sup>547</sup> It is described as an antidote that purifies away the *ālayavijñāna* because it is a seed of the *dharmakāya* of all buddhas.<sup>548</sup> And it is held to be an essential cause of the realization of the qualities of noble ones (*’phags pa’i chos*) because, although it totally pervades the states of worldly beings, it is nonetheless the outflow (*rgyu mthun pa*) of the thoroughly pure *dharmadhātu*.<sup>549</sup>

Following the lead of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, Karma phrin las pa regards the traditional equation of *ālayavijñāna* with buddha nature, as presented in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, as a provisional claim and instead bases his interpretation on the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (I.48). In that regard, Rang byung rdo rje had explained that the latent tendencies of studying (*thos pa’i bag chags*), being the pure outflow of the supramundane *dharmadhātu*, are not of the nature of the *ālayavijñāna* as are the karmic latent tendencies. Rather, buddha nature is considered to be a virtue that transcends the characteristic of nonvirtue and purifies away the *ālayavijñāna*. On this *Mahāyānasamgraha*-based interpretation, the tendencies of studying are understood precisely as that which counteracts or remedies the *ālayavijñāna*.

These [actions] such as generosity that are connected with virtuous qualities are beyond the nature of ordinary consciousness and are taken as principles of nondual wisdom. This is ascertained as natural luminosity, the purity of mind, which is concordant with the immaculate *dharmadhātu* because it functions as the ground for unsurpassable perfect awakening. It is thus referred to as all-ground wisdom

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 386: *dbyings rig dbyer med kyi ngo bo la ni rtag chad sogs kyi rgyar chad pa dang spang gnyen sogs kyi phyogs su lung ba med pa’i phyir | kun gyi khyab bdag tu grub ste | gzhang las | rgyu ni sems nyid thog med la || rgya chad phyogs lung ma mchis kyang ||*

<sup>547</sup> In other words, real entities (*dngos po*) are reified constructs deriving from specific causes and conditions.

<sup>548</sup> Karma phrin las pa follows Rang byung rdo rje’s interpretation of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* which states that the latent tendencies of studying (*thos pa’i bag chags*), being the pure outflow of the supramundane *dharmadhātu*, are in the *ālayavijñāna* but are not of its nature as are karmic latent tendencies; rather they are its antidote. See Rang byung rdo rje’s *Zab mo nang don rang ’grel*, 3873–3895 and *Dbu ma chos dbyings bstod pa’i rnam bshad* 293–313. See in particular *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.48, for a translation see Mathes 2008: 58–59.

<sup>549</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDsb, vol. 14, 386–392: *mi dge ba’i mtshan ma las ’das pas dge bar brjod kyang | las kyi ngo bo nyid ma yin pa’i phyir | dge ba’i dngos po ni ma yin la | sangs rgyas thams cad kyi chos kyi sku’i sa bon yin pa’i phyir | kun gzhi’i rnam par shes pa dag par byed pa’i gnyen por brjod cing | ’jig rten pa’i gnas skabs thams cad du khyab kyang chos kyi dbyings shin tu rnam par dag pa’i rgyu mthun pa yin pa’i phyir | ’phags pa’i chos rtogs par ’gyur ba’i rgyu’i ngo bo nyid du ’dod de |*

(*kun gzhi ye shes*). Hence, it does not function as a ground for wandering in cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). The all-ground that is endowed with all the habitual tendencies is called “all-ground consciousness” because it functions as a ground for the unfolding of worldliness. However, it is not able to be a ground for *nirvāṇa*.

The all-ground *simpliciter* (*kun gzhi tsam*) is the very wisdom dwelling in the ground. Consequently, it is said that sentient beings are buddhas possessing stains. Even though [the ground] is the ground of all, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, it is not the case that it is both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. This is a point that eludes ordinary thinking. Even if one maintains that the all-ground wisdom exists, one does not say that the all-ground and wisdom are identical. Because sentient beings are buddhas having stains, they are buddhas, but not perfectly realized buddhas. Although the all-ground and wisdom are not the same, there is not the slightest fallacy of contradiction in explaining that the indestructible nucleus (*mi shigs thig le*) is the ground of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.<sup>550</sup>

With the help of the term ‘all-ground wisdom’ (*kun gzhi ye shes*)—a term originally coined by Dol po pa and widely employed by many Tibetan exegetes<sup>551</sup>—and his own idea of an all-ground *simpliciter* (*kun gzhi tsam*), Karma phrin las pa reconciles two quite distinct traditional Buddhist conceptions of the *ālaya* (*kun gzhi*, ‘all-ground’) which were to be further clarified by his leading disciple, the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje.<sup>552</sup> One is an inclusive conception that construes the all-ground itself—or what Karma phrin las pa here terms the all-ground *simpliciter* (*kun gzhi tsam*) or ground (*gzhi*)—as the source of all phenomena, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate *kun gzhi* which Rang byung rdo rje had equated with the *dharmatā*.<sup>553</sup> The second is an exclusive conception according to which the all-ground is

<sup>550</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan drang ba dang nges pa'i don gyi snang byed ces bya ba ngo gro* (ca 108–139), 1124–1131: *de dag sbyin sogs dkar chos dang 'brel bas || rnam par shes pa'i chos nyid las 'das shing || ye shes gnyis su med pa'i tshul 'chang ba || dri med chos kyi dbyings kyi rgyu mthun pa'i || sems kyi dag pa rang bzhin 'od gsal nges | | bla med rdzogs byang chub pa'i gzhi byed phyir || kun gzhi ye shes zhes gsung de yis ni || 'khor bar 'khor ba'i gzhi mi byed do || bag chags kun dang ldan pa'i kun gzhi la || kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa zhes bya ste || des ni srid pa 'phel ba'i gzhi byed kyang || mya ngan 'das pa'i gzhi ru mi rung ngo || kun gzhi tsam ni gzhi la bzhugs pa yi || ye shes nyid yin de phyir sems can rnams || dri mar bcas pa'i sangs rgyas yin par 'dod || 'khor dang myang 'das kun gi gzhi yin kyang || 'khor 'das gnyis ka yin par mi 'gyur ba || 'di ni bsam gyis mi khyab pa yi gnas || kun gzhi ye shes yod par khas len kyang || kun gzhi ye shes gcig par mi smra mod || dri bcas sangs rgyas yin phyir sems can rnams || sangs rgyas yin kyang rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas min || kun gzhi dang ni ye shes mi gcig kyang || mi shigs thig le 'khor 'das kun gyi gzhi || bshad la 'gal ba'i nyes pa rdul tsam med ||* The Ngo gro bla ma in the title likely refers to Ngo khro rab 'byams pa Dbang phyug dpal, see 195, n. 565.

<sup>551</sup> Interestingly, the term is used by some of Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don* commentators including Karma phrin las and Dwags ram pa though it is not attested in the Third Karma pa's own writings.

<sup>552</sup> See below, 232–35 et passim.

<sup>553</sup> See below, 232.

construed either as the source of *saṃsāra* in the case of the all-ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna* : *kun gzhi rnam shes*) or the source of *nirvāṇa* in the case of the all-ground wisdom (*\*ālayajñāna* : *kun gzhi ye shes*). Here Karma phrin las understands the expression “all-ground wisdom” not as an appositional compound between two coextensive terms but rather (if analyzed along the lines of a Sanskrit locative *tatpuruṣa* compound) as specifying that wisdom is present in the all-ground in the same way that buddhahood resides in sentient beings, ever-available though concealed by defilements.<sup>554</sup> It follows that the recovery of the wisdom by purifying away the all-ground within which it dwells consists in the disclosure of the inclusive all-ground *simpliciter*, the *dharmadhātu*, from which the entire spectrum of *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa* and the path have arisen.

In his commentary to the *Zab mo nang don* Karma phrin las pa further clarifies the distinction between the *kun gzhi rnam shes* (*ālayavijñāna*) and *kun gzhi ye shes*:

The all-ground wisdom is the aforementioned *\*sugatagarbha*. This is precisely what is meant by “the nature of mind” (*sems kyi rang bzhin*) in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Uttaratantra* (RGV), “the mind that is like a wish fulfilling gem” in the *Dohā*,<sup>555</sup> and “the beginningless element that is the basis of all phenomena” in the *Abhidharmasūtra*.<sup>556</sup> Here it is explained as wisdom. It abides in the all-ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) in the manner of a mixture, like water and milk<sup>557</sup>. Therefore, those being ignorant regarding the definitive meaning do not recognize the all-ground wisdom (*\*ālayajñāna*).<sup>558</sup>

<sup>554</sup> In his *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*, 917–921, the author explains that although the sixty-four buddha qualities inherent in buddha nature are never separated from the mind, this nature is nonetheless termed ‘obscured buddhahood’ during the phase of the ground when it is obscured by defilements and as ‘immaculate buddhahood’ during the phase of the fruition when the defilements which had obscured it are dispelled and the buddha qualities are able to manifest fully. See below 196 and Volume II, translation: 90–91.

<sup>555</sup> This passage (DK 41) is quoted in *Dmangs dohā’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long* 45<sup>19–20</sup>. “Mind alone is the seed of everything, from which existence and nirvāṇa spring forth. Homage to the mind which, like a wish-fulfilling jewel, grants all the fruits of one’s desires.” See above 76 notes 180 and 181.

<sup>556</sup> Quote not identified.

<sup>557</sup> According to the Indian concept, water and milk do not fully mix. In the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (I.49) it is noted that a goose can extract from a mixture of milk and water only the milk so that the water remains. This is used as an analogy to explain how impure tendencies are relinquished when pure tendencies are elicited.

<sup>558</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb vol. 14, 60<sub>1–4</sub>: *de la kun gzhi’i ye shes ni | gong du bshad pa’i bde bar gshegs pa’i snying po ste | de yang sher phyin dang rgyud bla ma las | sems kyi rang bzhin du gsungs pa dang | do hā las | yid bzhin nor ’dra’i sems su gsungs la | chos mngon pa’i mdo las | thog ma med pa’i dus kyi dbyings | chos rnams kun gyi gnas yin te | zhes gsungs pa yang don ’di nyid do | de la ye shes su bshad de | de yang kun gzhi’i rnam shes la chu dang ’o ma bzhin ’dres pa’i tshul du gnas pas | nges don la rmongs pa rnams kyis kun gzhi’i ye shes ngos ma zin par |*



If Karma phrin las pa thought that the question of how a ground construed as the source of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is related to the grounds of wisdom and dualistic consciousness defied ordinary comprehension, he adopts a similar stance of philosophical humility and agnosticism regarding the question of the beginnings of self-awareness. Asked what kind of history is necessary to account for how self-awareness first arose<sup>559</sup>? Karma phrin las pa replies:

\**Sugatagarbha* in the ground phase has been primordially present as self-awareness as such. Thus who [can] say “it came originally from *x*”? No one has [ever] seen its beginning or end. Therefore, this is also called the “first buddha”. Because it is beginningless, how could there be a first? Hence, “from what have these [self-awareness and buddha nature] first arisen?” This is beyond the domain of what is expressible in language and thought. Hence, its story is [as vast] as the limits of space.<sup>560</sup>

As for the buddha qualities, Karma phrin las pa explains in his commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* that they have primordially remained inseparable from buddha nature:

Regarding this buddha nature that is the spiritual element, there is no extraneous creator (*byed pa po*) of new, previously nonexistent, phenomena of buddha-qualities. Rather, [buddha nature] is what primordially remains inseparable from all qualities because it retains its particular nature without changing into something else. Hence, it is presented in the sense of an element or a cause.<sup>561</sup> ...

The expressive energy of the unimpeded radiance of that [buddha] nature abides inseparably with the ten million sets of sixty-four indivisible *dharma* qualities

<sup>559</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan dngul dkar me long*, vol. ca 2026: “What kind of individual history is necessary [concerning that] from which self-awareness like this has first arisen?” *rang rig ’di ’dra dang por gang nas byung ba’i rnam thar cig kyang dgos* |

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 2027–2031: *gzhi yi dus kyi bde gshegs snying po ni || ye nas rang rig nyid du bzhugs pas na || dang po ’di nas byung zhes sus brjod nas || de yi thog mtha’ sus kyang ma dmigs pas || de la dang po’i sangs rgyas zhes gsungs so || thog ma med phyir dang po’ang ga la yod || des na de dag dang por gang nas byung || smra bsam brjod pa’i yul las ’das bas na || de yi rnam thar mkha’i mtha’ ’dra’o || zhe’o ||*

<sup>561</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 406–412: *khams bde bar gshegs pa’i snying po de la sangs rgyas kyi yon tan gyi chos rnam sngar med gsar du byed pa po gzhan med kyang gdod ma nas yon tan thams cad dang dbye ba med par gnas pa nyid rang gi mtshan nyid ngo bo gzhan du mi ’gyur bar ’dzin pa’i phyir | khams sam rgyu’i don du rnam par gzhang ste |*

summed up by dissociation and maturation which are not recognized as something disconnected (*avinirmuktajñāna*) [from it].<sup>562</sup> ...

These *dharma* qualities are called “stainless qualities” at the time of buddhahood and “qualities possessing stains” during the phase of sentient beings.<sup>563</sup>

In one of his *vajra* songs, he similarly explains how all the qualities of ground, path and fruition are but the self-effulgence of mind as such and not discoverable elsewhere:

When the throng of concepts is naturally purified, the thirty-two qualities that abide in the ground are of the nature of manifesting effortlessly. From them, the manifold activities occur spontaneously, appearing as form *kāyas* for the benefit of pure sentient beings. These thirty-two qualities of maturation are likewise the self-effulgence of the nature of mind free from elaborations. They have always resided in it [but] are awakened by [specific] conditions. Thus, as all the qualities of the ground, the path, and the fruition are never separate from the mind, wise ones dedicated to meditation with the desire for liberation should always look at the true face of mind!<sup>564</sup>

In reply to one of the questions put to him by Ngo khro bla ma<sup>565</sup>, Karma phrin las pas summarizes his tradition’s disclosive view of buddha nature:

<sup>562</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 41<sub>2-3</sub>: *snying po de’i gdangs ma ’gags pa’i rtsal la bral mi shes pa’i yon tan gyi chos bral ba dang rnam par smin pas bsdu pa bye ba phrag drug bcu rtsa bzhi dbye ba med pa’i tshul du gnas te* |

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 41<sub>4</sub>: *yon tan gyi chos de rnams la sangs rgyas pa’i tshe na dri ma med pa’i yon tan dang sems can gyi gnas skabs su dri ma dang bcas pa’i yon tan zhes bya ste* |

<sup>564</sup> KPdg, *Rje mati ba la phul ba’i chab shog nas zur du phyung ba’o*, vol. ga 36<sub>3-5</sub>: *rtog tshogs rang bzhin nyid kyis dag pa na || gzhis la bzhugs pa’i yon tan sum bcu gnyis || ’bad med mngon du ’gyur ba chos nyid yin || de las ’phrin las sna tshogs shugs kyis ’byung || dag pa’i ’gro la gzugs skur snang byed pa || rnam par smin pa’i yon tan so gnyis kyang || sems nyid spros dang bral ba’i rang gdangs la || ye nas bzhugs pa rkyen gyis sad pa yin || des na gzhi dang lam dang ’bras bu’i chos || ma lus sems las gud du ma mchis na || thar ’dod sgom la gzho ba’i mkhas pa rnams || sems kyi rang zhal rtag tu gzigs mdzod cig ||*

<sup>565</sup> Rheingans 2004, 171, 116 suggests that Ngo gro bla ma who was called Ngo gro bla ma sgron mdog ’bum pa is identical with Ngo khro mkhyen rab Rab ’byams dbang phyug dpal. He was appointed teacher of the *grwa tshang* in Mtshur phu and was also the teacher of the king Sa tham. A brief biographical treatment of him is given in Chos kyi ’byung gnas’s *Sgrub brgyud karma kaṃ tshang brgyud pa rin po che’i rnam par thar pa rab byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*, vol. 1, 648<sub>1-3</sub>. Ngo gro bla ma is said to have easily comprehended the full range of Buddhist teachings (*gsung rab*) under the guidance of Shākya mchog ldan at the latter’s famous Serdokchen (*gser mdog can*) monastic college located south of Shigatse (*gzhis ka rtse*) in Central Tibet (*gtsang*). But it was from the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), who he regarded as supreme among teachers (*ibid.* 648<sub>6</sub>), that he received instructions exclusively of definitive meaning by which he realized the true nature of mind. We are further told that Ngo khro rab ’byams pa adhered to the true Bka’ gdams tradition by relying on teachers such as Mkhan chen ra tna pa (likely Mkhan chen rin chen ’byung gnas, b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) and Lo pa Spyan snga Bsod nams legs mchog (note however that a Lo pa Spyan snga is later mentioned as a disciple of

Listen to this concise explanation on the sublime meaning of that which is widely known in this precious Bka' brgyud [lineage]: The buddha having stains at the time of the ground and the perfect buddha without stains at the time of the fruition differ merely being obscured or not obscured by these obscurations but their essence is unchanging. Since the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation, while they abide in the ground, are associated with stains, they do not perform any functions.<sup>566</sup> However, it is impossible that they are ever tainted by obscurations. Consequently, at the time of the fruition there is no improvement for the better. This is the meaning of the essence being inseparable. Despite this inseparability of ground and the fruit in terms of the essence, at the time of perfect buddhahood, the sixty-four qualities each express their individual capacities and unobstructedly accomplish their respective functions. [This] occurs due to the power of having become free from stains.<sup>567</sup>

We are told in Karma phrin las pa's *Discussion to Dispel Mind's Darkness: A Reply to Queries of [Bsod nams lhun grub, the Governor of] Lcags mo*<sup>568</sup> that although the sixty-four buddha qualities are not separable from mind's true nature, they remain unmanifest and unable to operate during the time of the ground:

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Ngo khro, *ibid.* 649<sub>2</sub>). Ngo khro rab 'byams pa is credited with "composing many treatises such as a commentary on the [Zab mo] nang don" (*nang don gyi 'grel pa sogs bstan bcos kyang du ma mdzad*) while teaching dharma at Tshur phu (*mtshur phu'i chos 'chad mdzad*). His students included Bla ma Kun dga' dpal, G.ya'/G.yam bzang Spyian snga (possibly Bsod nams 'od zer, d. 1426), Bla ma Gru bzhi pa, Bla ma Tshe dbang rgya mtsho and Rje Blos gros dbang phyug. This person is not to be confused with Ngo khro rab 'byams pa bshes gnyen rnam rgyal (16<sup>th</sup> c.) who is counted as one of Mi bskyod rdo rje's disciples. For a short biography of him, see *ibid.* vol. 2, 54<sub>4</sub>.

<sup>566</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan drang ba dang nges pa'i don gyi snang byed ces bya ba Ngo gro bla ma'i dris lan*, he writes as well (ca 108–139), 119<sub>1–3</sub>: "sugatagarbha pervades all sentient beings. This is the buddha present in the ground. Being in the chaff of stains, the *kāyas*, wisdoms, the qualities of relinquishment and realization, and the enlightened activities are not fully completed, because it is buddhahood with stains. Even though at present the enlightened activities of a *muni* are not performed, when the stains are purified, the pervading, permanent enlightened activities will be accomplished." *bde bar gshegs snying 'gro kun la khyab pa || 'di ni gzhi la bzhugs pa'i sangs rgyas yin || de dag dri ma'i sbubs su son pas na || sku dang ye shes spangs rtogs yon tan dang || mdzad pa phrin las yongs su rdzogs pa min || dri mar bcas pa'i sangs rgyas nyid yin phyir || deng sang thub pa'i dzad pa'i mi mdzad kyang || dri med dag pas khyab rtag phrin las mdzad ||*

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, ca 119<sub>6</sub>–120<sub>2</sub>: *bka' brgyud rin chen 'di la yongs grags pa || de yi gongs don cung zad bshad kyis nyon || gzhi yi dus kyi dri bcas sangs rgyas dang || 'bras bu'i dus kyi dri med rdzogs sangs rgyas || de dag sgrib pas bsgribs dang ma sgrib pa'i || khyad par tsam yin ngo bo 'gyur ba yin || bral dang rnam smin yon tan drug bcu bzhi || gzhi la bzhugs tshe sgrib pa dang 'grogs pas || de dang de yi byed las mi mdzad kyang || sgrib pas gos pa nam yang mi srid phyir || 'bras bu'i dus su bzang du mi 'gro ba || ngo bo dbyer med yin pa'i go don yin || ngo bo'i sgo nas gzhi 'bras dbyer med kyang || rdzogs sangs rgyas tshe yon tan drug bcu bzhis || so sor nus pa 'byin zhing rang rang gi || byed pa'i las rnam thogs pa med sgrub pa || dri ma bral ba'i mthu las byung ba yin ||*

<sup>568</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*, see Volume II, translation: 88–91, critical edition: 91–93. See for an analysis and partial translation also Burchardi 2011, 317–43.

The sixty-four qualities that are present in the basic nature are indeed never separated from the mind. However, let us call it “obscured buddhahood” in the phase of the ground and “immaculate buddhahood” in the phase of the fruition. The thirty-two qualities of dissociation from all obscurations and the thirty-two qualities of maturation that unfold as enlightened activity are special qualities exclusive to perfect buddhahood. They are not held to be present at the time of the ground. The sixty-four qualities present in the ground are veiled by obscurations. When these stains are vanquished, [one] becomes an immaculate victor. Thus the ground of emptiness of *gzhan stong* is \**sugatagarbha*, mind’s nature, this very natural luminosity.<sup>569</sup>

It is on the basis of this disclosive model of goal-realization that Karma phrin las pa distinguishes within buddha nature between the naturally present and unfolded spiritual potentials (*gotra*) in line with the distinction in Sgam po pa’s Mahāmudrā system between the coemergent mind as *dharmakāya* and coemergent appearances as the *dharmakāya*’s light. In this way he connects the naturally present potential with the *dharmakāya* and the unfolded potential with the cause to manifest the two form *kāyas*:

During the time when this buddha nature is ensconced within the sheath of ignorance, from the perspective of the cause, it is referred to as “potential” (*rigs*) which is twofold: the naturally present potential and the unfolded potential. The first is the naturally pure nature of mind that is inseparable from the sixty-four buddha qualities, the *dharmadhātu* whose very nature is luminous emptiness.<sup>570</sup> ... While there is a classification of noble individuals into śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas according to the successive stages of how—in the contexts of the potential that is being purified of stains—the cognition which is the pure part is realized, the pure nature of mind was not contaminated by the stains of consciousness. However, in the case of the [Yogācāra] analysis of consciousness

<sup>569</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*, 917–921: *gshis la bzhugs pa’i yon tan drug bcu bzhi || de ni nam du’ang sems dang mi ’bral mod || gzhi yi dus su sgrib bcas sangs rgyas dang || ’bras dus dri med sangs rgyas zhes smras shig || sgrib kun bral ’di yon tan so gnyis dang || phrin las rgyas pa’i rnam smin sum bcu gnyis || rdzogs pa’i sangs rgyas kho na’i khyad chos te || ’di ni gzhi la bzhugs par mi ’dod do || gzhi la bzhugs pa’i yon tan drug bcu bzhi || sgrib pas bsgribs shing dri ma de bcom pas || dri med rgyal bar ’gyur phyir gzhan stong gi || stong gzhi bde bar gshegs pa’i snying po ni || sems nyid rang bzhin ’od gsal ’di nyid yin ||* See also (tr.) Burchardi 2011, 320<sub>11–14</sub>. KPdl, see Part II, translation: 90–91, critical edition: 94.

<sup>570</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 424–6: *de lta bu’i sangs rgyas kyi snying po de yang ma rig pa’i sbubs su chud pa de’i tshe na rgyu’i cha nas rigs shes brjod pa de la gnyis te | rang bzhin gnas rigs dang | rgyas ’gyur gyi rigs so | dang po ni | sangs rgyas kyi yon tan drug bcu rtsa bzhi dang dbye ba med pa’i sems nyid rang bzhin gyi rnam par dag pa chos kyi dbyings stong pa nyid ’od gsal ba’i bdag nyid de’o |*

into eight groupings, they were posited by classifying each according to [the differing modes of] false imagining.

The second [i.e., the unfolded potential] is that which abides as the nature of the four wisdoms, whose own essence is to be without the stains of the eight groupings of consciousness, [the four wisdoms being] inseparable from the natural purity of the mind's nature which is the emptiness of *dharmadhātu*. It is thus the potential that is the cause of the unfoldment of the two form *kāyas*. This means as well that by having fully elicited the virtuous qualities, one vanquishes the stains of not recognizing the eight groupings as they are. When the eight groupings are thereby liberated in and as self-awareness, this receives the name “fundamental transformation of the eight groupings of consciousness into the four wisdoms”. In the perceptions of others, they appear as the form *kāyas*. In short, these two potentials are a distinction based on unity. Thus, the master Zla 'od gzhon nu [Sgam po pa] says: “Coemergent mind as such is the *dharmakāya* and coemergent appearances are the light of *dharmakāya*”.

Accordingly, the unborn nature of mind as such which is contaminated by stains is the naturally present potential and its unimpeded radiance is the unfolded potential. Therefore, it is called unity of the two *kāyas* possessing stains. The unborn nature of mind as such which is completely purified of stains is the *dharmakāya*, being one's own aim, and its unimpeded radiance is the appearance of the form *kāyas*, being the aims of others. Therefore, this is called the unity of the two *kāyas* [i.e., the *dharmakāya* and the form *kāyas*] free from stains.<sup>571</sup> ...

This potential, [this] element, was not produced by any causes in the beginning, is not established as any essence in the middle, and is not changed by any conditions

<sup>571</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 42<sub>6</sub>–44<sub>1</sub>: *dri mas dag rgyu'i rigs de'i steng du rnam par dag pa'i cha shes ji ltar rtogs pa'i rim pas nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' ste | 'phags pa'i gang zag rnam rab tu phye ba yin la | sems rang bzhin rnam dag la rnam par shes pa'i dri mas ma gos kyang | rnam shes tshogs brgyad du rnam par gzahag pa ni yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pas so sor phye nas bzahag pa'o | gnyis pa ni | sems nyid rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa chos kyi dbyings stong pa nyid dang dbye ba med par rnam shes tshogs brgyad kyi dri ma med pa'i rang gi ngo bo ye shes bzhi'i rang bzhin du bzhugs pa de yin te | de gzugs sku gnyis rgyas par 'gyur rgyu'i rigs yin pa'i phyir | de'i don yang | dkar po'i chos yang dag par bslangs pas tshogs brgyad kyi rang ngo ma shes pa'i dri ma bcom pa las | tshogs brgyad ka rang rig tu grol ba na rnam shes tshogs brgyad ye shes bzhir gnas gyur pa zhes bya ba'i ming thob cing de dag gzhan snang la gzugs kyi skur snang ba yin no | mdor na rigs 'di gnyis ni zung 'jug las phye ba ste | rje zla 'od gzhon nus | sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku dang snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od ces gsungs pa ltar | dri ma dang bcas pa'i sems nyid kyi gshis skye med ni rang bzhin gnas rigs dang gdangs 'gag med ni rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs yin pas | de la dri bcas kyi sku gnyis zung 'jug ces bya shing | dri ma rnam par dag pa'i sems nyid kyi gshis skye med ni rang don chos kyi sku dang gdangs 'gag med ni gzhan don gzugs kyi skur snang bas | de la dri bral gyi sku gnyis zung 'jug ces brjod pa yin ...|*

in the end. Therefore, it is unconditioned. Because it is a nature without beginning, middle, and end it is unconditioned.<sup>572</sup>

Although the buddha element prevails unchanged and unconditioned, without beginning, middle or end, buddhahood and its powers are said to be absent during the phase of sentient beings because they remain undisclosed.

Some say, if the sixty-four qualities primordially existed in this buddha nature, then the qualities of a fully perfected buddha would exist in the mind-streams of sentient beings. In that case, the buddha wisdom of the mind-stream of a hell being would undergo the experience of the hell's suffering. However, it is precisely for this reason that the distinction is made between the stained phase of sentient beings and the unstained phase of a buddha. In the mind-stream of sentient beings, perfect buddhahood and its powers and so forth are absent.<sup>573</sup> Nevertheless, by repeatedly saying “the stained [i.e., obscured] buddhahood and its powers and so on *do* exist [in them]”, it will be recognized.<sup>574</sup>

With reference to the views of his teacher Chos grags rgya mtsho, Karma phrin las pa correlates the cultivation of a clear and nonconceptualizing state of mind that is aware of its inherent buddha nature endowed with qualities with the practice of Mahāmudrā:

“The assertion of my *bla ma*, the mighty victor [Seventh Karma pa] is that emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects and *\*sugatagarbha* are of one meaning. Therefore, it is maintained that *\*sugatagarbha* being actually endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation means ‘endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ and that these are not established as [something] identifiable and as characteristics [means] emptiness. Thus, integrating these, i.e.,

<sup>572</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14., 45<sub>4-5</sub>: *rig[s] kham de ni thog mar rgyus ma bskyed | bar du ci'i'ang ngo bor ma grub | tha mar rkyen gang gis kyang mi 'gyur ba'i phyir | 'dus ma byas yin te | thog ma dbus mtha' med pa yi | rang bzhin yin phyir 'dus ma byas* | See also RGV 8<sub>1</sub>, I.6ab: *anādimadhyānidhanaprakṛtatvād asaṃskṛtam* |

<sup>573</sup> One should keep in mind that according to Karma phrin las pa mind primordially is endowed with the sixty-four buddha qualities of dissociation and of maturation, however they are not functionally present. This is meant when he says they do not exist or that they are absent (*med pa*) in sentient beings.

<sup>574</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 46<sub>6</sub>–47<sub>3</sub>: *yang kha cig na re | snying po de la yon tan drug bcu rtsa bzhi gdod ma nas yod na | sems can gyi rgyud la rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi yon tan yod par 'gyur zhing | de lta na | sems can dmyal ba pa'i rgyud kyi sangs rgyas kyi ye shes des | dmyal ba'i sdug bsngal nyams su myong bar byed dam | zhes zer mod | de nyid kyi phyir | sems can gyi skabs su ni dri ma dang bcas pa dang | sangs rgyas kyi skabs su ni dri ma med pa'o zhes khyad par phyed nas smras te | sems can gyi rgyud la rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas dang de'i stobs la sogs pa ni med do | de lta mod kyi dri ma dang bcas pa'i sangs rgyas dang de'i stobs la sogs pa ni yod do | zhes yang yang smras pa nyid kyis shes par 'gyur ro |*

the very cultivation of [a state of mind that is] lucid yet nonconceptual, is asserted to be the meditation of Mahāmudrā.”<sup>575</sup>

Let us now summarize Karma phrin las pa’s views on buddha nature and its qualities which we have extracted mainly from his Question and Answer (*dris lan*) texts and *Zab mo nang don* commentary. Buddha nature, as far as the naturally present potential is concerned, is endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation. It is characterized as emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects, the *dharmadhātu* whose very nature is luminous emptiness. At the time of the ground it is covered with stains. Therefore, these occluded qualities remain unmanifest and inoperative. Once purified of adventitious stains these buddha qualities become fully manifest. In terms of cognition, self-occurring wisdom becomes manifest to the extent that adventitious dualistic thoughts are purified away. In this process, the wisdom of the ground phase which primordially abides as fruition is taken as the path and is finally beheld directly without it being changed into something else. Far from being altered states of consciousness, buddhahood and buddha wisdom are invariant and ever-present modes of being and awareness that are said to be “absent” to the extent that they are concealed and “present” to the extent that they are revealed. This differs from Rngog Blo ldan shes rab’s view according to which buddha nature has, at most, a conventional existence in the phase of sentient being.

The unfolded potential is latently present as the four wisdoms, the stainless essence of the eight groupings of consciousness, inseparable from mind’s natural purity, which function as the cause of the unfoldment of the two form *kāyas*. In sum, the nature and nurture aspects of buddha nature, the naturally present and unfolded potentials, both refer to the nature of mind, the former to its unborn empty essence, the latter to its unimpeded effulgence. Any distinction between them stems from their fundamental unity.

It is not difficult to see how Karma phrin las pa’s view of buddha nature would have lent support to the Eighth Karma pa’s arguments for considering the idea of “sentient beings” to be coextensive with idea of “adventitious stains”. For both scholars, sentient beings are characterized as beings in the grip of dualistic consciousness, obscured by the adventitious *ālayavijñāna* and its seven modes of cognition. When this superfluous eightfold complex is purified away, a deeper source, the primordially pure ground or all-ground *simpliciter*, reveals itself. From the standpoint of contemplation, this revelation consists in the adept’s progressive familiarization with natural awareness or coemergent wisdom whereby the unfolded spiritual

<sup>575</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 329<sub>4-6</sub>: *bdag gi bla ma rgyal ba’i dbang po’i bzhed pa la | rnam kun mchog ldan dang bde bar gshegs pa’i snying po don gcig pas | bde snying la bral rnam smin gyi yon tan drug bcu rtsa bzhi dngos su ldan pa ni rnam kun mchog ldan dang | de yang ngos bzung dang mtshan mar ma grub pa ni stong nyid kyi don du bzhed pas de’i nyams len gsal la mi rtog pa bsgom pa nyid phyag rgya chen po’i sgom du bzhed do |*

potential comes fully into play. It is because Karma phrin las pa understands goal-realization to consist in the revelation of, or familiarization with, what has been there all along, and not as a production of or transformation into something new, that he so strongly emphasizes the unconditioned and unchanging aspects of buddha nature. Put simply, as a bodhisattva seemingly “develops” toward buddhahood, all that really changes are the relative degrees of concealment and revealment of the invariant buddha nature and its effulgent qualities. In this regard, Karma phrin las pa’s buddha nature view is fully in line with the interpretation by the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje who in turn based himself on *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.45-48 and its clear distinction between the *ālayavijñāna* and supramundane mind.<sup>576</sup>

We may finally note that Karma phrin las pa considers the Bka’ brgyud view that the ground, i.e., buddha nature, and the fruit, i.e., buddhahood, are of one essence to be a matter of direct acquaintance and not of intellectual speculation. In his *Questions and Answers: A Mirror of White Silver*, which documents Dpal Ngag gi dbang po’s reply to ’Brug pa kun legs’s query about of the ground and fruition, Karma phrin las pa states:

The *dharmakāya* of fruition is present during the phase of the ground within the sheath of coemergent ignorance. Once the sheath of obscuration has been vanquished by means of remedies, then liberation is attained [and] not the slightest obscuration remains. Be this as it may, the intrinsic essence of mind is not “bad” when it abides in the sheath of obscurations, nor does it become “good” when it is free from obscuration. Hence, the adage that “the ground and the fruition are of one essence” is widely known in this precious Bka’ brgyud tradition [but] this principle is not understood by the sophists (*rtog ge ba*).<sup>577</sup>

#### ON THE UNITY OF THE TWO TRUTHS

Central to Karma phrin las pa’s philosophy of Mahāmudrā and Tathāgatagarbha are his interpretations of the unity of the two truths, the conventional and ultimate, otherwise characterized as the inseparability of appearance and emptiness. In his commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* he goes so far to say that buddha nature *is* the unity of the two truths.<sup>578</sup>

<sup>576</sup> For further details on Rang byung rdo rje’s buddha nature view, see Mathes 2008, 58–64.

<sup>577</sup> KPdl, ca 206<sub>5</sub>–206<sub>6</sub>: ’bras bu chos sku gzhi yi gnas skabs su || lhan skyes ma rig pa yi sbubs na yod || gnyen pos sgrib pa’i sbubs de bcoms nas ni || rnam grol thob tshe sgrib pa cung zad med || de lta na yang sems kyi rang ngo bo || sgrib pa’i sbubs na bzugs tshe mi ngan la || sgrib pa bral bas bzang du mi ’gro ba || de phyir gzhi ’bras ngo bo gcig yin zhes || bka’ brgyud rin chen ’di la yongs su grags || de tshul rtog ge ba yis mi shes pas ||

<sup>578</sup> Rang byung rdo rje maintains that ultimate truth is the principle of the true nature (*dharmatāyukti*), the natural emptiness as presented in the context of the eighteen types of emptiness. As conventional truth he understands the expressible ultimate truth (*paryāyaparamārtha*) which is mere appearances—buddha nature or the pure



While its undeluded essence, i.e., its natural purity, is the ultimate, the eight groupings of consciousness and their workings constitute the conventional. The two truths are here interpreted in terms of the modes of cognition—consciousness and wisdom—that are the conditions for their possibility. While the world of conventional appearances belongs to the sphere of operations (*gocara*) of the eightfold consciousness, emptiness belongs to the sphere of self-occurring wisdom:

“Conventional” refers to the appearances of the apprehended and apprehender. They are imagined by way of concepts while not actually existing, appearing as the world and its inhabitants and so forth. As for “truth”, since it was declared that what appears yet does not exist is like the moon [reflected] in water, it is only “true” from the perspective of a deluded mind. As for the ultimate, it is that natural emptiness belonging to the explanation of eighteen aspects of emptiness such as inner emptiness and the rest.<sup>579</sup> As for truth, it is characterized as self-arisen wisdom devoid of subject-object duality and this exists ultimately.<sup>580</sup>

What interests us in this reframing of the two truths in line with the Bka’ brgyud distinction between dualistic consciousness and nondual wisdom is the way in which the author has subsumed the Yogācāra analysis of mind in terms of the *ālayavijñāna* and its seven subsidiary modes of dualistic consciousness under conventional truth, while specifying an unconditioned essence of the eightfold ensemble, which he identifies as buddha nature (and elsewhere as the all-ground *simpliciter*), as ultimate truth. The result is a syncretistic soteriological model of consciousness worked out within the framework of the two truths that combines Yogācāra, Tathāgatagarbha and Vajrayāna concepts and models.

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mind. In this way, he takes the absolute and conventional truth as being inseparable and included in buddha nature. See Mathes 2008, 67–68.

<sup>579</sup> The *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* lists eighteen kinds of emptiness whereas other *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras speak of four, sixteen, or twenty kinds. Various śāstras such as the *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra* speak of sixteen types of emptiness. One is the “natural emptiness” also called the emptiness of an intrinsic essence (*svabhāvaśūnyatā*). For a detailed listing of the various types of emptiness see Brunnhölzl 2004, 117–25. In the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* [XIV.34], 169<sub>1–11</sub>, a bodhisattva is said to know emptiness when he is aware of the emptiness of nonexistence, of existence and of natural emptiness. Here, natural emptiness is explained as the perfect nature (*pariniṣpanna* : *yongs grub*).

<sup>580</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po gsal bar byed ’od kyi phreng ba*. In RDSb vol. 14, 393<sub>5</sub>–394<sub>1</sub>: *kun rdzob ni gzung ’dzin gyi snang ba ste don la med bzhin du rtog pas kun du brtags pa snod bcud la sogs pa’i snang ba dang bden pa ni snang yang rang bzhin med pa chu nang gi zla ba lta bur gsungs pas blo ’khrul pa’i ngor bden pa tsam yin la | don dam pa ni nang stong pa nyid la sogs pa stong nyid bco brgyad kyi rnam par bshad pa’i rang bzhin stong pa nyid dang bden pa ni gzung ’dzin gnyis su med pa’i rang byung gi ye shes la brjod de don dam du’ang yod pa’o |*

The author goes on to explain that those who do not understand the unity of the two truths because they are confused about the mode of dependent arising end up subscribing to one of the views based on extreme beliefs (*mthar 'dzin gyi lta ba : antagrāhadrṣṭi*) such as eternalism or nihilism and thereby continue to circle in *samsāra*.<sup>581</sup>

The crucial identification of nondual cognition with ultimate truth is further clarified in a reply to questions posed by the Ra ti dgon pa gzims khang ba<sup>582</sup> in which Karma phrin las pa recalls a teaching of Chos grags rgya mtsho:

“In short,” he said pointing with his finger, “cognition free from the subject-object duality, this mind as such that is [1] in essence, emptiness, the *dharmadhātu*; [2] by nature, pure and luminous; and [3] [in] aspects, manifesting as anything whatsoever, is the ultimate truth.”<sup>583</sup>

For Karma phrin las pa, spiritual practice aims at realizing the unity of the two truths by dispelling the superimpositions of conceptual constructs of an apprehending subject and

<sup>581</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*, RDsb, vol. 14, 397<sub>3-5</sub>: “\**Sugatagarbha* is precisely the undeluded intrinsic essence of the eight groupings explained in the first chapter [of the *Zab mo nang don* commentary]. Moreover, it is the unity of the two truths in that the eight individual, distinct groupings are the conventional and the undeluded intrinsic essence is the ultimate. However, those who do understand the meaning of the two truths, being confused about the mode of dependent arising, which remains captivating to those alone who have not investigated it, [maintain] beliefs in extremes such as eternalism and nihilism etc. and it is said that they thereby circle in *samsāra*. This description of the shortcoming of not understanding the two truths has demonstrated the need to train in the principle of unity of the two truths.” *bde gshegs snying po ni le'u dang por bshad pa'i tshogs brgyad kyi rang gi ngo bo ma 'khrul pa de nyid de || de yang tshogs brgyad so sor ma 'dres pa kun rdzob dang rang ngo ma 'khrul pa don dam ste bden gnyis zung 'jug yin kyang | bden gnyis kyi don ma rtogs pa rnam ma brtags gcig pur nyams dga' ba'i rten 'brel gyi tshul la rmongs nas rtag chad sogs mthar 'dzin gyi lta bas 'khor bar 'khor ro zhes bden gnyis ma rtogs pa'i nyes dmigs brjod de bden gnyis zung 'jug gi tshul la bslab dgos par bstan |*

<sup>582</sup> Ra ti dgon pa gzims khang ba was a chamberlain evidently held in high esteem by Karma phrin las for his erudition. In the introduction of the *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me zhes bya bar ti dgon ba'i gzims khang ba'i dris lan bzugs*, ca 145<sub>6</sub>–146<sub>1</sub>, he offers the following words of praise: “[You] waving the broad white wings of [knowledge of] scriptures and reasoning on the treasure mine of ocean of extremely vast erudition are skilled in beating the drum of [your] voice of eloquent teachings. [You] leader of geese along with your companion, needless to say that someone like me is able to answer only a little to the melodious sound of your pleasant question voiced as a song! However, as a scholar has put a question, in order to relinquish complacency, I am going to elaborate [the topic] a little bit.” *rab yangs mang du thos pa'i chu gter du || lung rigs gshog yangs dkar po rab bskyod nas || legs bshad mgrin pa'i rdza nga brdung mkhas pa || ngang pa'i ded dpon mched dang bcas de yis || dri tshig snyan pa'i nga ro glur blangs pa || de lan bdag 'dras phyogs tsam smos ci dgos || de lta na yang mkhas pas dris pa la || btang snyoms spang phyir cung zad spro bar bya ||*

<sup>583</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me zhes bya bar ti dgon ba'i gzims khang ba'i dris lan bzugs*, (ca 145<sub>5</sub>–154<sub>5</sub>), 151<sub>7</sub>–152<sub>1</sub>: *mdor na gzung 'dzin gnyis dang bral ba yi || shes pa ngo bo stong nyid chos kyi dbyings || rang bzhin gyis ni rnam dag 'od gsal ba || rnam pa cir yang 'char ba'i sems nyid 'di || don dam bden pa yin zhes phyag mdzub btsugs ||*

apprehended object.<sup>584</sup> Yet, he considers this state of nonduality, the unity of the two truths, to be completely ineffable, since it eludes appropriation by representational thinking which is accustomed to understanding things in terms of oppositional categories such as identity and difference. According to Karma phrin las, this ineffability is the meaning of all the Buddha's teachings.<sup>585</sup> It is noteworthy that the author avoids representing the two truths as being either [1] "a single essence having different delimitations" (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*) or [2] "a difference that negates identity" (*gcig pa bkag pa'i tha dad pa*) in line with Dol po pa's interpretation of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* statement that the ultimate (*dharmatā*) exists whereas the conventional (*dharma*s) does not exist<sup>586</sup>. Indeed, Karma phrin las pa's disciple Mi bskyod rdo rje would advocate a middle way between the extremes of identity and difference, arguing that the unity of the two truths means precisely that they are reducible neither to a single essence with different delimitations nor to a difference in which identity is negated.<sup>587</sup>

The question regarding the relationship between the conventional and the ultimate, between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, brings us to the central topic of coemergence. For Karma phrin las pa, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable or nondual in the specific sense that all dualistic appearances which are collectively termed *saṃsāra* recede into the expanse of the ultimate at the time of realization, while what is labelled ultimate truth, *nirvāṇa* or self-awareness is beyond the scope of what is expressible in thought and language. Nondual awareness is precisely devoid of the distinction between an apprehending cognition and an apprehended object of cognition. Viewed in relation to the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, appearance and emptiness are also known to be coemergent. As Karma phrin las pa explains, while *saṃsāra* is the aspect of clarity of the mind, *nirvāṇa* is the aspect of its emptiness and

<sup>584</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 394<sub>3-5</sub>: "Based on practising unmistakably the indistinguishability of the two truths, [i.e.] this mode of coemergence, correct concepts, that is the remedy, and the unmistakable view will be directly realized. Thus, the wisdom that is the remedy brought forth through correct concepts which allow for understanding regarding the unity of the two truths is explained as the method which purifies the conceptualizations of grasped and grasping. Because the ground of the clearing process, the objects to be cleared, the clearing, and its goal of clearing are concordant denominations." *bden gnyis zung 'jug dbyer med lhan cig skyes pa'i tshul 'di phyin ci ma log par nyams lu bslangs pa la brten nas gnyen po yang dag pa'i rtog pa dang phyin ci ma log pa'i lta ba mngon sum du rtogs par 'gyur bas | bden gnyis zung 'jug der rtog par byed pa'i yang dag pa'i rtog pas bskyed pa'i gnyen po ye shes ni gzung 'dzin gyi rnam rtog sbyong bar byed pa'i thabs yin par bshad la | sbyang gzhi dang sbyang bya sbyong byed sbyangs 'bras rnam grangs mthun pa'i phyir |*

<sup>585</sup> KPdl, 401<sub>5-6</sub>: "Since the two truths, phenomena and the true nature of phenomena, are free from elaborations of identity and difference. The complete ineffability of the [relationship of these] two is the meaning of all dharmas taught by the Buddha." *bden pa gnyis chos can dang chos nyid bzhin du gcig pa dang tha dad pa'i spros pa las grol bas de gnyis gang du'ang brjod du med pa 'di sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa'i chos thams cad kyi don yin ...*

<sup>586</sup> Mathes 2008, 79. As the author notes, this is also the way *dharma*s and *dharmatā* are defined in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*.

<sup>587</sup> See below, 229.

these two are not distinct from each other. It is a wonder, he exclaims, that phenomena appear while being nonexistent, and are empty while appearing.<sup>588</sup>

We previously noted that Karma phrin las distinguished two main strands of the Great Madhyamaka, one transmitted through Nāgārjuna and his students and the other transmitted through Asaṅga and his followers. These are further explained as complementary systems for ascertaining the nature of mind and reality: the Nāgārjuna tradition ascertains them from the perspective of emptiness and the Asaṅga tradition from the perspective of clarity.

In the Great Madhyamaka of those who follow the essence of Nāgārjuna, it is primarily ascertained that mind as such, though it appears as manifold aspects, is not established in the way it appears. However, having in mind those with the capacity to realize that the emptiness which is empty of apprehended and apprehender is naturally luminous, they primarily ascertained mind from the standpoint of empti[ness].

<sup>588</sup> KPdg, 48<sub>3</sub>–50<sub>1</sub>: “The ruler of men does not see *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as two. The object appearances imputed as *saṃsāra* subside on the path of appearances and vanish. These apprehended things imputed as *saṃsāra* disperse in the sky of nonapprehension and vanish. These thoughts imputed as *saṃsāra* dissolve in the ocean of self-awareness and vanish. These nonexistent appearances imputed as *saṃsāra* are taken up by direct perception and vanish. Conventions proclaimed as *saṃsāra* dissolve in the expanse of the ultimate and vanish. Now, not finding a basis of designation for *saṃsāra*, *saṃsāra* as the designated object is not apprehended. Nonetheless, empti[ness] is superimposed as *nirvāṇa*. Although it appears as a variety, it is beyond that. That nongrasping which is labelled *nirvāṇa* is beyond all elaborations such as apprehended and apprehender. That self-awareness which is labelled *nirvāṇa* is beyond the limits of awareness and objects of awareness. That direct perception which is called *nirvāṇa* is beyond valid and invalid cognitions. While the ultimate is labelled as *nirvāṇa*, it is beyond the domain of what is expressed in thought and language. Now, not finding a basis of designation of *nirvāṇa*, *nirvāṇa* is not apprehended as the designated object. This appearing is the inherent radiance of the mind. That nonarising is the *dharmakāya*. This coemergence of both appearance and emptiness is the meaning of the indistinguishability of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. ... Again, *saṃsāra* is the aspect of clarity of the mind. *Nirvāṇa* is the aspect of empti[ness] of mind. This unity of mind’s clarity and emptiness is the meaning of the nondifferentiation of the two *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. ... How astonishing that [they] appear while being nonexistent! How wondrous that [they] are empty while appearing! **mi bdag** gis ’khor ’das gnyis ma mthong || ’khor ba ru brtags pa’i yul snang de || snang ba yi lam du nub nas thal || ’khor ba ru brtags pa’i gzung ba de || ’dzin med kyi nam mkhar dengs nas thal || ’khor ba ru brtags pa’i rnam rtog de || rang rig gi rgya mtshor thim nas thal || med snang la ’khor bar brtags pa de || mngon gsum gyi tshad mas bskyal<sup>a</sup> nas thal || kun rdzob la ’khor bar sgrog pa de || don dam gyi dbyings su yal nas thal || da ’khor ba’i bdags gzhi ma ’tshal zhing || gdags bya yi ’khor ba ma dmigs yang<sup>b</sup> || stong pa la myang ’das su sgro ’dogs mod || sna tshogs su snang yang de las ’das || myang ’das su gdags pa’i ’dzin med de || gzung ’dzin sogs spros pa kun las ’das || rang rig la myang ’das su gdags pa de || rig bya rig byed kyi mtha’ las ’das || myang ’das su sgrog pa’i mngon sum de || tshad ma dang tshad min gnyis las ’das || don dam la myang ’das su ’dogs mod kyi || de smra bsam rjod pa’i yul las ’das || da myang ’das kyi gdags gzhi ma ’tshal zhing || gdags bya yi myang ’das ma dmigs yang<sup>c</sup> || snang ba ’di sems kyi rang gdangs yin || de skye ba med pa chos kyi sku || snang stong gnyis lhan cig skyes pa ’di || ’khor ’das gnyis tha dad med pa’i don || ... lar ’khor ba sems kyi gsal cha yin || myang ’das sems kyi stong cha yin || sems gsal stong zung du ’jug pa ’di || ’khor ’das gnyis so sor med pa’i don || ... med bzhin du snang ba ngo mtshar che || snang bzhin du stong pa a la la || <sup>a</sup>text has *bskal*; <sup>b</sup>text has *ang*; <sup>c</sup>text has *ang*

In the Great Madhyamaka of the lineage stemming from Maitreya and Asaṅga, when luminosity, mind as such, that abides in empti[ness], is recognized just as it is, due to the self-effulgence of mind, manifold aspects appear. However, having in mind those with the capacity to realize the expanse of emptiness in which nothing is established just as it is, viz. as that very manifold, they primarily ascertained mind as such from the perspective of clarity.

[My teacher] says that those who cling to clarity and empti[ness] as separate things are not in accord with these two exegetical traditions; indeed they deprecate the valid cognition of the noble ones.<sup>589</sup>

Karma phrin las pa goes on to succinctly summarize clarity and emptiness as the inseparable unity of wisdom:

Clarity and empti[ness] are precisely the unity of wisdom. This being so, despite the different ways of describing [wisdom], it is nothing other than this single authentic essence. Hence, from whichever [perspective] it is explained, it comes back to this unity itself. Among those who pretend to be scholars in this Land of Snow, many confuse unity with a mere conjoining of two [things]. My all-knowing teacher says that unity is a single inseparable [whole].<sup>590</sup>

It is from the perspective of unity as a single inseparable whole that the author unravels the meaning of verse 26 from Saraha's *People Dohā* which reads "Don't create duality [but] unity! Do not make any 'caste or colour'<sup>591</sup> distinctions! In all the three world realms, the one great passion is of a single colour".<sup>592</sup>

<sup>589</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan snang gsal sgron me zhes bya bar ti dgon ba'i gzims khang ba'i dris len bzhugs*, (ca 145<sub>5</sub>–154<sub>5</sub>), Vol. ca 153<sub>3–6</sub>: **klu sgrub** snying po'i rjes 'brang dbu ma che || der ni sems nyid rnam pa sna tshogs su || snang yang snang ba ltar du ma grub pa || gtso bor gtan la phab pas gzung 'dzin gyis || stong pa'i stong nyid rang bzhin 'od gsal der || rtogs par nus pa nyid la dgongs nas kyang || sems nyid stong pa'i phyogs nas gtan la phab || **byams** dang **thogs med** nas brgyud dbu ma cher || stong par gnas pa'i sems nyid 'od gsal ba || ji bzhin shes na sems kyi rang gdangs las || rnam pa sna tshogs snang yang sna tshogs der || grub pa med pa'i stong pa nyid kyi dbyings || ji bzhin rtogs par nus pa la dgongs te || sems nyid gsal ba'i phyogs nas gtan la phab || de bas gsal stong so sor zhen rnams kyis || shing rta'i lam srol gnyis po mi mthun zhes || 'phags pa'i tshad ma la ni skur 'debs mod ||

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 153<sub>6</sub>–154<sub>1</sub>: gsal dang stong pa ye shes zung 'jug nyid || yin phyir brjod pa'i tshul la tha dad kyang || don gyi ngo bo gcig las ma 'das pas || gang nas bshad kyang zung 'jug nyid la 'jug || gangs can 'di na mkhas par rlom rnams kyang || zung 'jug gnyis sdebs kho nar 'khrul pa mang || bdag gi bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa ni || zung 'jug ces ba dbyer med gcig yin gsung ||

<sup>591</sup> Bhāyānī 1997, 17: *varṇa*.

<sup>592</sup> DKG 26cd: *etasmīn sakalatribhuvane mahārāga eko varṇo 'pi ekaḥ* || Bhāyānī 1997, 17. Tib. *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 33<sub>20–24</sub>: gnyis su mi bya gcig tu bya ba ste || rigs la bye brag

In a more critical vein, one of Karma phrin las pa's spiritual songs highlights the dangers of taking any Buddhist ideas as ends in themselves, be they specific philosophical theories such as the Madhyamaka principles of having no thesis (*pratijñā*) and nonelaboration (*niṣprapañca*) or more general Buddhist approaches to goal-realization ranging between the extremes of overly abstract intellectual speculation or blank-minded nonconceptuality. The challenge, in each case, is to clearly determine how Buddhist concepts and models can serve to aid, rather than hinder, the process of goal-realization. Soteriological ideas that are wrongly applied, or not applied at all, are at best deviations from the path of awakening:

The views of those expert in explaining exegetical traditions, when explained, may seem to be truth, but they are just verbal abstractions<sup>593</sup>.

Views connected with scriptural authority and reasoning at face value, may seem to be learned, but they are just plain rhetoric.

Views based on philosophical hair-splitting, when discussed, may seem eloquent, but they are just plain conceitedness.

Views that investigate using linguistic conventions, when expressed, seem factual<sup>594</sup> indeed, but they are just assumptions.

Views that secure certainty [through] rational inference, when contemplated, may appear to be realization, but they are just conceptual constructs.

Views that are demonstrated by illustrations using symbols, when shown, may seem profound, but they are just objective abstractions.<sup>595</sup>

The view of freedom from elaborations of the four extremes may seem to be the definitive meaning, but it is just blank emptiness.

The view of freedom from all theses may seem like a vision of the abiding nature, but it is just a bogus lie.

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*dag tu ma 'byed par || khams gsum ma lus 'di dag thams cad ni || 'dod chags chen po gcig tu kha dog sgyur cig dang ||*

<sup>593</sup> Literally, “language universal” (*sgra spyi* : *śabdāsāmānya*), one of two types of universals, the other being the “object universal” (*don spyi* : *arthasāmānya*). Conceptualization (*rtog pa* : *vikalpa*) involves the coordination of a language universal (e.g., recognizing the sound “pot”) and a object universal (e.g., recognizing the object referred to as “pot”).

<sup>594</sup> That is, “seem indeed to be the case” (*yin yin 'dra*).

<sup>595</sup> Literally, “object-universals” (*don spyi*).

The view that differentiates the two truths may seem to be unity, but it is just a coupling of the two.

The view that loses itself in shallow nonconceptuality may seem to be equipoise, but it is just dazed stupefaction.

The view that rejects and accepts *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* respectively may seem to be a short path, but it is just the belief in extremes.

The view that severs superimpositions from within, though transcending expression in thought and language is nonetheless the definitive meaning.

This view that beholds the true face of the mode of abiding though it eludes illustrative example, is nonetheless the path of direct [perception].

This view that fathoms the depths of the mode of being, though free from identifications and characteristics is nonetheless the primordial way things are.

This view that realizes the equality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is without acceptance or rejection and negation and affirmation, but is nonetheless genuine reality.

This view in which thoughts dissolve into the expanse, though without reflection and apprehension, is precisely self-awareness.<sup>596</sup>

It is important to note that the “self-awareness devoid of reflection and apprehension” which Karma phrin las pa equates with the nature of mind cannot be identified unequivocally with either of the two basic kinds of self-awareness (*sva-saṃvitti*, °-*saṃvid*, °-*saṃvedana*, *ātma*-°) recognized by the Yogācāra tradition.<sup>597</sup> One type was the object-oriented (transitive)

<sup>596</sup> KPdg, 113–122: *gzhung lugs 'chad la mkhas pa'i lta ba de || 'chad tshe bden bden 'dra yang sgra spyi tsam || lung dang rigs par 'brel ba'i lta ba de || 'phral du mkhas mkhas 'dra yang bshad chos tsam || grub mtha'i spu ris 'byed pa'i lta ba de || smra tshe legs legs 'dra yang pho tshod tsam || tha snyad tshig la 'tshal pa'i lta ba de || rjod dus yin yin 'dra yang yid dpyod tsam || rjes dpag nges ngo skyong ba'i lta ba de || bsgom na rtogs rtogs 'dra yang rnam rtog tsam || brda thabs dpe yis mtshon pa'i lta ba de || ston tshe zab zab 'dra yang don spyi tsam || mtha' bzhi spros dang bral ba'i lta ba de || nges don yin yin 'dra yang stong rkyang tsam || khas len kun dang bral ba'i lta ba de || gnas lugs mthong mthong 'dra yang brdzun rib tsam || bden gnyis so sor 'byed pa'i lta ba de || zung 'jug yin yin 'dra yang gnyis sdebs tsam || mi rtog ltengs bor shor ba'i lta ba de || mnyam par gzhas bzhas 'dra yang bying rmugs tsam || 'khor 'das blang dor 'byed pa'i lta ba de || nye lam yin yin 'dra yang mthar 'dzin tsam || sgro 'dogs nang nas chod pa'i lta ba de || smra bsam brjod las 'das kyang nges pa'i don || gnas lugs rang zhal mthong ba'i lta ba de || mtshon byed dpe dang bral yang mngon sum lam || yin lugs phu thag chod pa'i lta ba de || ngos gzung mtshan ma bral yang gdod ma'i babs || 'khor 'das mnyam nyid rtogs pa'i lta ba de || blang dor dgag sgrub med kyang yang dag don || rnam rtog dbyings su thim pa'i lta ba de || dran dang 'dzin pa med kyang rang rig nyid ||*

<sup>597</sup> Following a distinction made by the Dge lugs pa scholar Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa (1823–1905) in his outline of the ninth chapter of Śāntideva's (ca. 650–700) *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Paul Williams distinguishes two basic kinds of self-awareness: that which appears to itself (*rang snang*) and that which appears as the object (*yul du snang*). See Williams 1998, 4. Kellner (2010, 205) characterizes these as intentional and non-intentional respectively. On these two types of self-awareness, see also Yao 2005.

self-awareness or reflexivity, which was thought by Yogācāra thinkers to accompany all intentional cognitive acts such that perceiving and knowing *that* one is perceiving always go together. This type of self-awareness consisting in mind's apprehending subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) being aware of mind's own apprehended objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*) was taken as a cornerstone of Yogācāra epistemology which attempted to verify its existence by means of memory arguments. For example, I not only can remember an object because I previously perceived it sensorily, but can remember perceiving that object because the earlier sensory perception was also self-aware.

The second type is the subject-oriented (intransitive) self-awareness, often qualified as an ordinary type of auto-illumination (*rang rig rang gsal*) and identified with mind's luminosity (*cittaprabhāsvaratā*), which was taken by Yogācāra thinkers to be a hallmark of all consciousness such that its presence or absence is what distinguishes the sentient from the insentient (*jaḍa*).<sup>598</sup> Human beings have this clear and knowing cognition but rocks and chairs do not. In Karma phrin las pa's tradition, both these types of self-awareness are rejected as idealist presuppositions—so long as they are tied to an idealist epistemology that takes the mental as a real entity—in favour of a nondual mode of self-awareness, the nondual type of auto-illumination (*rang rig rang gsal*) that is beyond elaborations and not amenable to extremes of existence and nonexistence. Far from being taken as a real entity having real properties, the veritable cornerstone of an idealist standpoint, the self-awareness advocated by Karma phrin las pa as the ultimate truth and ultimate goal can only be a matter of direct personal familiarization that remains irreducible to the categories of representational thought. In his words, “without superimposing or deprecating the clear and luminous mind which is beyond intellect, leave it in the state of personally realized self-awareness. This deep insight (*vipaśyanā*) is the ultimate meditation.”<sup>599</sup>

Karma phrin las pa is insistent that all of the Buddha's teachings serve but one purpose—to provide sentient beings with methods to clear away obstructions and to progress towards awakening. To this extent, they are always concerned with emptiness. “The entire range of teachings conveyed by the Buddha were taught solely for the sake of dispelling obscurations from the midstream of the trainees and establishing them on the path to awakening. Therefore, they [all] come down to emptiness, and are dedicated to emptiness

<sup>598</sup> Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 16 (=Tattvasaṃgraha k. 2000) in Ichigo 1985, 70 f.: *vijñānaṃ jaḍarūpebhyo vyāvṛttam upajāyate | iyam evātmasaṃvittir asya yā 'jaḍarūpatā | Tib. rnam shes bem po'i rang bzhin las || bzlog pa rab tu skye ba ste || bems min rang bzhin gang yin pa || de 'di'i bdag nyid shes pa yin ||* “Consciousness arises as something opposed to the nature of insentient matter. That whose nature is non-material has *this* self-awareness.”

<sup>599</sup> KPdg, 67s: *sems gsal stong blo bral rjen pa la || sgro 'dogs dang skur ba ma 'debs par || so so rang rig gi ngngang du zhog || lhag mthong 'di sgom kyi mthar thug yin ||*



alone.”<sup>600</sup> It is in this regard that the compassion and altruistic activities of buddhas work within the deluded perceptions of conventional reality to bring sentient beings to the ultimate reality of *dharmadhātu* in which the conventional has lost its hold over them:

[*Query*:] If this suffering of *samsāra* is real, what about the activity of those who are the great refuge? [*Reply*:] Though the sufferings of those wandering in *samsāra* are real only [within] the mode of appearing of the conventional, they are not established [within] the mode of abiding of ultimate truth. Therefore, once the compassion and activities of those who are the great refuge have cleared away the shroud of conventional delusive appearances [or deluded perceptions], they fulfil the aim [of making sentient beings] realize the *dharmadhātu*, the ultimate truth of the mode of abiding.<sup>601</sup>

It is against this background that Karma phrin las pa maintains that all appearances are but manifestations of mind<sup>602</sup>, but without subscribing to the Vijñāpatimātra thesis that mind

<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 953: *sangs rgyas kyis chos ji snyed cig gsungs pa thams cad kyang gdul bya'i rgyud kyi sgrub pa bsal nas byang chub kyi lam la 'dog pa'i ched kho nar gsungs pas stong pa nyid la 'bab pa dang stong pa nyid la gzhol ba sha stag yin la ||*

<sup>601</sup> KPdl, *Dpal ngag gi dbang po'i zhal snga nas chos kyi rje 'brug pa kun legs pa la bzhi bcu mdzad snang ba'i brjod don dri ba nyer drug tu bsdu te de'i lan dang bcas pa*, (ca 198–210), 2007–2012: *'khor ba'i sdug bsngal 'di ka bden na skyabs chen rnams kyi phrin las gang || zhes pa'i lan ni | 'khor bar 'khyams pa'i sdug bsngal 'di | kun rdzob snang tshul tsam du bden na yang || gnas tshul don dam bden par grub pa med || des na skyabs chen rnams kyi thugs rje dang || phrin las kyis ni 'khrul snang kun rdzob kyi || ra ri sbyangs nas gnas tshul don dam pa'i || bden pa chos dbyings rtogs pa'i don byed do || zhe'o ||*

<sup>602</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan the tshom mun sel zhes pa khams ri bo che'i dge slong gi zhu lan*, (ca 210–218), 216–2174: “In the explanations in the various tantras such as the *Kālacakra*, in the various sūtras such as the *Daśabhūmika* and in the various *śāstras* on the essential meaning (*snying po'i don*) such as the twenty works connected with Maitreya [*chos sde nyi shu*], the *Dohā Trilogy* [*do hā skor gsum*], the [Sevenfold Cycle of] Accomplishment [*grub pa sde bdun*] and the [Sixfold Cycle of] the Essence [*snying po skor drug*], the *Dharmadhātustava* and the *Bodhicittavivarāṇa* etc., as well as in the teachings of the precious Bka' brgyud of [masters] such as Ti lo, Nā ro, Mar pa, Mi la, Sgam po pa, it is declared that appearances are mind. Therefore, we also say just the same thing. Moreover, if appearances existed as real appearances, it would contradict the claim that they are mind. There being not even an atom of truly established appearances, all these outer are mere appearances of the deluded mind. Hence, having in mind that they are appearances of the mind, it was declared that appearances are mind. Nonetheless, some say that appearances are truly established as mind, and thus subscribe to the thesis that appearances are mind. This is the philosophical tenet of the Vijñāptimātra [“Cognition Only”]. Therefore appearances are maintained to be mind. This is the tenet of the proponents of mere cognition.” *dus kyi 'khor lo la sogs pa rgyud sde du ma dang | sa bcu pa sogs mdo sde du ma dang | byams pa dang 'brel ba'i chos sde nyi shu dang | do hā skor gsum dang | grub snying rnams dang | chos dbyings bstod pa dang | byang chub sems 'brel sogs snying po'i don gyi bstan bcos du ma'i bzhed pa dang | tai lo nā ro mar pa mi la sgam po pa sogs bka' brgyud rin po che'i bzhed pa la snang ba sems su bzhed pa yin no | de'i phyir kho bo cag kyang de kho na ltar smra'o || de yang | snang ba rnams snang bden du yod na sems su bzhed par 'gal yang | snang bden du grub pa rdul tsam yang med de | phyi rol gyi snang ba 'di thams cad sems 'khrul pa'i snang ba tsam yin pas | de'i phyir sems kyi snang ba yin pa la dgongs nas snang ba sems su bzhed pa yin gyi | kha cig snang ba sems su bden par*

is truly established. This leads unavoidably to the controversial question of how to distinguish amongst the Buddha's teachings those which are of definitive meaning and those which are of merely provisional meaning (i.e., in need of further interpretation). In this regard, Karma phrin las pa refers the reader to the dictum expressed by 'Jig rten gsum mgon in his *Single Intent*<sup>603</sup> that all the Buddha's teachings are of definitive meaning on the grounds that whatever he taught was truthful and not taught in a duplicitous way. In this light, Karma phrin las pa proposes that the Buddhist hermeneutical methodologies of classifying the *buddhadharma* according to definitive and provisional meanings, or literal and nonliteral language, as elaborated, for example, in the six parameters of interpretation (*mtha' drug*), do not reflect internal contradictions within but different ways of individually getting at what is true and nondeceptive.<sup>604</sup>

#### “THOUGHTS ARE *DHARMAKĀYA*”

Like many other Bka' brgyud scholars, Karma phrin las pa devoted considerable attention to clarifying the sense of Sgam po pa's provocative dictum that “thoughts are *dharma-kāya*”. Against critics who contended that it contradicted basic Buddhist distinctions between the mundane and transmudane—e.g., phenomena (*chos can*) versus the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*), mind (*sems*) versus mind as such (*sems nyid*), and conventional versus ultimate truth—Karma phrin las pa argued that this precept was to be understood precisely *in light of* such distinctions as well as their underlying unity. In short, the precept makes the aspirant see thoughts not as objects to abandon by means of antidotes but rather as the

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*grub pas snang ba sems su khas len pa yin zer ba de ni | rnam par rig pa tsam du smra ba'i grub pa'i mtha' yin la |*

<sup>603</sup> KPdl, 956: “For the assertion as to differences between *sūtras* of provisional meaning and *sūtras* of definitive meaning 'Jig rten gsum mgon taught about that in detail; it is sufficient to refer to that.” *drang don gi mdo dang nges don gyi mdo'i khyad par du bzhed pa 'jig rten gsum mgon* (text: *sgron du rgyas par gsungs yod pas de nyid la bltas pas chog go* |

<sup>604</sup> The “six parameters” (*mtha' drug*) are presented in the *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1063: [1] provisional and [2] definitive meaning, the two being [3] literal and [4] not literal, and the two [5] with hidden intention and [6] without hidden intention.” *drang don nges don gnyis | sgra ji bzhin pa dang ji bzhin ma yin pa gnyis | dgongs pa can dang dgongs pa can ma yin pa gnyis te...* In *Gongs gcig*, 165<sub>1-8</sub>, it is declared that all six are of definitive meaning: “The intent of the six parameters is exclusively of definitive meaning. As for the special doctrine [of 'Jig rten gsum mgon] that “everything taught [encompassed by] the six parameters [of interpretation] is exclusively of definite meaning”, because what the victor taught is truthful because he did not speak in a duplicitous [way]. He taught exclusively that the nondeceptive definitive meaning of all phenomena is cause and effect. Other than that there is nothing to be taught. Yet, due to the differences in the dispositions and potentials of the trainees, it appeared according to their different ways of understanding [in line with] the six [interpretive] parameters etc.” *mtha' drug dgongs pa nges don 'ba' zhig bzhed || mtha drug dag tu gsungs pa thams cad ni || nges don 'ba' zhig ces pa'i khyad chos ni || rgyal ba gsung bden gnyis su mi gsung phyir || chos kun nges don bslu med rgyu dang 'bras || kho na bstan gyi bstan bya gzhan yod min || 'on kyang gdul bya'i kham rigs khyad par gyis || mtha' drug la sogs go lugs so sor snang ||* See for a description of the ‘six parameters’ as a hermeneutic prescription for the disclosive explanation (*rgyas bshad*) of any tantric text Thurman in Lopez 1993, 137.

expressive energy or self-effulgence of the unborn nature of mind, *dharmakāya*, like light-rays emanating from the sun. Indeed, it is only when thoughts are misapprehended as existing independently of their unborn source that they become objects to relinquish.

Karma phrin las pa arrives at this understanding of Sgam po pa's terse formulation with the help of another of Sgam po pa's precepts, namely that "coemergent mind as such is *dharmakāya* [while] coemergent appearances are the light of *dharmakāya*".<sup>605</sup> Here, Karma phrin las pa explains, "the statement 'coemergent mind as such is *dharmakāya*' pertains to the unborn fundamental mode of mind as such, [while] 'coemergent appearances are *dharmakāya*'s light' refers to the unimpeded effulgence of mind. The two, mind and its light, are not mutually opposed [but] are unitary like the sun and its rays,"

Therefore, he concludes, whatever appears is nothing external but the auto-illumination of mind as such and "because not even an atom of external objects exist apart from mind, the inseparability of appearance and emptiness is the path of coemergence".<sup>606</sup> In response to questions by Ngo gro bla ma (Ngo khro rab 'byams pa), he further explains:

<sup>605</sup> See for example Sgam po pa's *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*, 47<sup>22-23</sup>: "Coemergent mind as such is *dharmakāya*. Coemergent appearances are *dharmakāya*'s light. 'Coemergent mind as such' refers to the nature or essence of mind. 'Coemergent appearances' refers to the thoughts arising from that. They are like the sun and its rays or like sandalwood and the fragrance of sandalwood." *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku || snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od || sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa ni || sems kyi rang bzhin nam ngo bo de yin || snang ba lhan cig skyes pa ni || de las byung ba'i rnam par rtog pa de yin || de yang nyi ma dang nyi ma'i 'od bzhin nam || tsandan dang tsandan gyi dri lta bu yin ||* See also *ibid.*, 47<sup>22-23</sup>: "[He] said when coemergent mind as such is realized as *dharmakāya*, this is the fruition. When one does not realize one's own mind, one does not attain enlightenment". *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos skur rtogs na 'bras bu yin gsung || rang gi sems ma rtog na 'tshang mi rgya ||* And *ibid.*, 53<sup>14-16</sup>: "Wisdom (*ye shes*) is the luminous coemergent mind as such which is directly 'recognized' (*ngo shes*) as it exists 'primordially' (*ye nas*) recognizing what exists primordially. Empti[ness] is suchness free from identification." *ye shes ni sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa 'od gsal ba || ye nas yod pa ngo shes pa'o || stong pa de nyid ngos bzung dang bral ba'o ||*

<sup>606</sup> KPdg, 33<sup>4</sup>–34<sup>1</sup>: "The statement 'mind as such is the innate *dharmakāya*' pertains to the unborn fundamental mode of mind as such. 'Appearances are the innate *dharmakāya*'s light' refers to the unimpeded effulgence of mind. The two, mind and its light, are not contradictory but are unitary like the sun and its rays. The *dharmakāya* coemergent with mind as such is not tainted by the discursive elaborations of manifold appearances. Yet, due to the self-effulgence of [its] unimpeded light, one beholds all manner of elaborated characteristics. But they are just like waves on water or patina on gold, appearing and disappearing again... In short, what appears as objects are the auto-illumination of mind as such. Therefore, because not even an atom of external objects exists apart from mind, the inseparability of appearance and emptiness is the path of coemergence." *sems nyid lhan skyes chos kyi sku zhes pa || skyes med sems kyi gshis lugs de nyid yin || snang ba lhan skyes chos sku'i 'od de ni || 'gag med sems kyi gdangs la gsung bar gda' || sems dang de yi 'od gnyis mi 'gal te || nyi dang zer bzhin rang bzhin gcig pa'o || sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa'i chos sku la || sna tshogs snang ba'i spros pas ma gos kyang || 'gag pa med pa'i 'od kyi rang gdangs las || spros pa'i mtshan ma ci yang mthong mod kyis || chu yi rlabs dang gser gyi g.ya' bzhin du || gang les de byung gang du nub pa dang || ... mdor na don du snang rnam sems nyid kyi || rang 'od yin phyir sems las ma gtogs pa'i || phyi rol yul ni rdul tsam ma mchis pas || snang stong dbyer med lhan cig skyes pa'i lam ||*

The unimpeded expressive energy of mind is the thoughts, while the fundamental nature of the mind is the unborn *dharmakāya*. Because they are inseparable like the sun and its rays, it is said that thoughts are *dharmakāya*. “*Samṣāra*” is the aspect of clarity of the mind, while “*nirvāṇa*” is the aspect of its emptiness. It is on account of the unity of clear and empty that [mind] is actually present as the “inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*”.<sup>607</sup>

Karma phrin las pa provides further support for Sgam po pa’s controversial precept in his reply to queries put by a monk of Ri bo che. To begin with, he points out that some scholars were of the opinion that Sgam po pa integrated this view from his Bka’ gdams pa scholastic background into his Bka’ brgyud pa doctrine.<sup>608</sup> However, Karma phrin las pa observes that precepts on the unity or coemergence of thoughts and *dharmakāya* can be traced to Indian Buddhist Siddha discourses such as Saraha’s *People Dohā* and that it was precisely this tradition which formed the backbone of Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā. Moreover, Karma phrin las pa defers to teachings of Mi la ras pa to show that the precept “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” had its inception in Bka’ brgyud as well as Bka’ gdams doctrinal traditions:

Nowadays, on this Snowy Plateau, the statement that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” in the religious terminology of the precious Bka’ brgyud [tradition] is as widespread as the wind. In this regard, the Dharmarāja, the glorious Zla ’od gzhon nu [Sgam po pa], persistently and deliberately taught that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” again and again. One should consider whether or not this is why it became so well-known in all directions. Moreover, among the instructions he mastered, which united the two streams of Bka’ [gdams pa] and Mahāmudrā, many determined that [the precept that thoughts are *dharmakāya*] is a Bka’ gdams pa doctrine. Nevertheless, since there occur statements among the teachings of Mi la [ras pa] that

<sup>607</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan drang ba dang nges pa’i don gyi snang byed ces bya ba ngo gro bla ma’i dris lan bzugs*, (ca 1083–1397), 1092-3: || ‘gag med sems kyi rtsal ni rnam par rtog || sems kyi gshis ni skye med chos kyi sku || nyi ma dang ni de yi ’od zer bzhin || dbye ba med phyir rnam rtog chos skur gsungs || ‘khor ba zhes bya sems kyi gsal cha ste || sems kyi stong pa’i cha ni myang ’das so || gsal dang stong pa zung du ’jug pas na || ‘khor ’das dbyer med nyid du don la gnas ||

<sup>608</sup> See Gyatrul Rinpoche 2004, 208–9 for an excerpt from Sgam po pa’s *Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod* where he asks Dge shes Lcags ri ba whether in the Bka’ gdams pa transmission there existed instructions on taking thoughts as the path without giving up Kadampa [teachings]. “To [that] Lcags ri ba declared: “It is said that when Geshe Glang ri thang pa asked [this question of] Geshe Phu chung ba [the latter], gritting his teeth, replied ‘There are [such instructions], but [you know] I have no right to repeat [them].’ Later two yogis received [these teachings] as instructions.” *lcags ri ba’i zhal nas | dge bshes glang ri thang pas | dge bshes phu chung ba la zhus pas | tshems nem mdzad nas | yod dang<sup>a</sup> yod de | nga la zlas dbang med pa gsung skad | phyi rnal ’byor pa rnams gnyis la gdams ngag tu byung gsung |* <sup>a</sup>text has *dag*

“thoughts are necessary, highly beneficial, and indispensable”, it is a doctrine of both [streams].<sup>609</sup>

The understanding that dichotomic concepts (*rnam rtog*) are the very self-effulgence (*rang gdangs*) or expressive energy (*rtsal*) of *dharmakāya* is based on an account of human thought that is strikingly different from the more standard Buddhist portrayal of conceptual thoughts as obscuring superimpositions that are foreign to, or even antithetical to, the *dharmakāya* and therefore typically regarded as objects to be eliminated (*spang bya*). As Karma phrin las suggests, the insight that thoughts are self-expressive differentiations arising from an undifferentiated source (*dharmakāya*) allows the aspirant to regard them as catalysts rather than hindrances to spiritual awakening, and to ultimately transcend the duality between acts and objects of elimination, and between subject-object fabrications in general. What this account requires, however, is a clear understanding of how it is possible to come to the realization of *dharmakāya* in and through conceptual thought without succumbing to the deeply ingrained tendency toward reification.

In this regard, to truly understand the statement “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” Karma phrin las pa deems it necessary to investigate both the meaning of thoughts and the meaning of the *dharmakāya* within the Buddhist soteriological framework of ground, path, and fruition. He follows the traditional Yogācāra definition of conceptual thought (*rnam par rtog pa* : *vikalpa*) as unreal imagining (*yang dag ma yin kun tu rtog pa* : *abhūtaparikalpa*): “because the totality of mind and mental factors having aspects which constitute the three realms are unreal, they are explained as imaginings”. But viewed in relation to their prereflective source (*dharmakāya*), “the flickering movements of reflective awareness (*dran rig*) during the ground phase are naturally spontaneously present as [the *dharmakāya*’s] essence, nature and responsiveness whose very essence is the indivisibility of the three *kāyas*.” The author here uses classical Rdzogs chen language to characterize thoughts as the self-expressive manifestation of the three *kāyas* which, when not recognized as such, become the unreal imaginings that are (mis)taken as the real world.

A variation of the Rdzogs chen classification of wisdom in terms of essence (*ngo bo*), nature (*rang bzhin*) and responsiveness (*thugs rje*) had been used by Rang byung rdo rje in his *Zab mo nang don* to characterize the pure aspect of mind (*sems dag pa*) which he contrasts with the impure aspect (*ma dag pa'i sems*), a cover term for the *ālayavijñāna* and its seven

<sup>609</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan the tshom mun sel zhes pa khams ri bo che'i dge slong gi zhu lan* (ca 210–218), ca 212<sub>5</sub>–213<sub>7</sub>: *ding sang gangs can gyi ljongs 'di na || bka' bgyud rin po che'i chos skad rnam rtog chos sku zhes rlung ltar grags pa 'di ni || chos kyi rgyal po dpal ldan zla 'od gzhon nur gyur ba'i zhal snga nas || rnam rtog chos sku zhes ched du gtad nas yang yang gsungs pas phyogs thams cad du grags pa yin nam bsam mo || de yang || rje de nyid la bka' phyag chu bo gnyis 'dres kyi gdams pa mnga' ba las || bka' gdams pa'i bzhed pa'o || zhes kha tshon gcod pa mang mod kyi || rje mi la'i gsung las kyang || rnam par rtog pa ni | dgos pa | sku drin che ba | med du mi rung ba | zhes sogs 'byung bas de gnyis ka'i bzhed pa'o ||*

subsidiary modes of consciousness. This distinction between impure and pure minds and the description of the pure aspect as empty in essence (*ngo bo*), radiant in nature (*rang bzhin*), and unobstructed in expression (*rnam pa*) had a profound influence on his successors, not least of all Karma phrin las as well as his student Mi bskyod rdo rje who would use this analysis to support his distinction between innate mind (*gnyug ma'i sems*) and adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*).<sup>610</sup>

Stated concisely, although thoughts fundamentally are *dharmakāya* in their abiding or enduring mode, they become unreal imaginings through the reflexive objectifying and subjectivizing reifications that engender the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, self and world.

My all-knowing teacher [Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho] proclaimed the following: If one wishes to understand the meaning of the precept “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”, then [it is necessary] to identify what ‘thoughts’ are in the dictum “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” and to identify what “*dharmakāya*” is in the declaration that they are *dharmakāya*. As to the first, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* [I.8ab] states “unreal false imaginings are mind and mental factors which constitute the three realms.”<sup>611</sup> Because the totality of mind and mental factors having aspects which constitute the three realms are unreal, they are explained as imaginings. Therefore, the thoughts in “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” are unreal imaginings. Hence, in this context, the totality of mind and mental factors during the phase of the ground are referred to [by] the term “thoughts”. That these are said to be the *dharmakāya* pertains to the causal *dharmakāya*.

Among the three aspects of *dharmakāya* as ground, path, and fruition, in this context, regarding the *dharmakāya* in the ground phase, the statement “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” is taken as an instance of the causal *dharmakāya* in the ground phase. [Query:] What is the *dharmakāya* in the ground phase? [Reply:] It is explained as *dharmakāya* from the standpoint that the flickering movements of reflective awareness (*dran rig*) during the ground phase are naturally spontaneously present as [*dharmakāya*’s] essence, nature and responsiveness<sup>612</sup> whose

<sup>610</sup> On Mi bskyod rdo rje’s application of this distinction with citations from relevant sources, See below, 281 f. and Volume II, translation: 118–20; critical edition: 120–22.

<sup>611</sup> MAV, 24<sub>14</sub>, I.8ab: *abhūtaparikalpāś ca citta-caittās tridhātukāḥ*

<sup>612</sup> This terminology essence (*ngo bo*), nature (*rang bzhin*), and responsiveness (*thugs rje*) is characteristic of classical Rdzogs chen. It is worth noting that Karma phrin las pa’s *Zab mo nang don*’s commentary contains references to the teachings of Vimalamitra.

very essence is the indivisibility of the three *kāyas*.<sup>613</sup> Since the way of abiding or enduring mode or fundamental mode which constitutes the intrinsic essence of these unreal thoughts abide as the very essence of the three *kāyas*, these unreal thoughts are established as the *dharmakāya* during the ground phase. Hence, unreal imaginings in the ground phase are *dharmakāya* in the ground phase, and thus it is said that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”.<sup>614</sup>

Turning to his interpretation of the precept “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” in the context of the phases of the path and fruition, Karma phrin las pa describes how the aspirant comes to recognize the unreal imaginings for what they are through “a state of equipoise in which there is nothing fabricated and manipulated in addition to that [*dharmakāya*]”. By thus “internalizing [them] through integrating [them] in one’s mind-stream,” one vividly realizes the coemergence of thoughts and *dharmakāya*. With the dissipation (*sangs*) of thoughts—understood here as “reflective awareness having the aspects of proliferating movements,” the *dharmakāya*—“empty essence, luminous nature and unimpeded responsiveness”—fully unfolds (*rgyas*).<sup>615</sup> The culmination of this process is described by the expressions “perfect buddhahood” (*rdzogs pa’i sangs rgyas*, literally “perfect dissipation [and] blossoming”) or “*dharmakāya* in the fruition phase”. Upon attaining goal-realization, the phase wherein superfluous fluctuations of reflective thought have receded into their prereflective source (*dharmakāya*) and the spontaneous capacities of empty essence, luminous nature and

<sup>613</sup> In classical Rdzogs chen, originally pure (*ka dag*) essence (*ngo bo*) corresponds to the *dharmakāya*, spontaneously present (*lhun grub*) nature (*rang bzhin*) to the *sambhogakāya*, and unimpeded (*ma ’gags pa*) responsiveness (*thugs rje*) to the *nirmāṇakāya*.

<sup>614</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan the tshom mun sel zhes pa kham ri bo che’i dge slong gi zhu lan*, (ca 210–218). 213<sub>6</sub>–214<sub>5</sub>: *bdag gi bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa’i zhal snga nas ’di skad du gsung ste | rnam rtog chos ku’i go don shes bar ’dod na | rnam rtog chos sku zhes pa’i | rnam rtog ngos gzung ba dang | de chos skur bzhed pa’i chos sku ngos gzung ba gnyis las | dang po ni | dbus mtha’ las | yang dag ma yin kun rtog ni | sems dang sems byung kham gsum pa | zhes gsungs pas | kham gsum pa’i rnam pa can gyi sems sems byung thams cad yang dag pa ma yin pas kun tu rtog par gsungs so || de bas na | rnam rtog chos sku zhes pa’i rnam rtog de ni yang dag min rtog de dag go | de’i phyir skabs ’dir gzhi dus kyi sems sems byung thams cad la rnam rtog gi sgra gsungs pa yin no || de chos sku yin zhes pa’i yin rgyu’i chos sku de ni | gzhi lam ’bras bu’i chos sku gsum las | skabs ’dir gzhi dus kyi chos sku la rnam rtog chos sku yin zhes pa’i yin rgyu’i chos sku de’i mtshan gzhi zung zhig | gzhi dus kyi chos sku de yang gang zhe na | gzhi’i dus kyi dran rig ’gyu ’gyu ’gyu ba ’di’i ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum po sku gsum dbyer mi phyed pa’i ngo bo nyid du rang bzhin lhun grub tu bzhugs pa’i cha nas chos skur bzhed pas | yang dag min rtog de’i rang gi ngo bo’i gnas tshul lam | sdod lugs sam | gshis lugs sku gsum gyi ngo bo nyid du bzhugs pas | yang dag min rtog de nyid gzhi dus kyi chos sku yin par grub ste | des na | gzhi’i dus kyi yang dag pa ma yin pa’i kun tu rtog pa de gzhi dus kyi chos sku yin pas | rnam rtog chos kur gsungs pa yin no ||*

<sup>615</sup> *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, 5: “The term “buddha” is explained as follows: having awakened from the sleep of ignorance ... the mind opened up and unfolded, similar to the blossoming and opening up of a lotus flower. *gti mug gi gnyid sangs ... blo bye zhing rgyas pa na padma kha bye zhing rgyas pa dang ’dra bar yang bshad de sangs rgyas shes bya’o ||*

unimpeded responsiveness have come fully into play, the sense of the proposition “thoughts are *dharmakāya*” is no longer applicable.

Accordingly, the phase of the path is as follows. Once these unreal imaginings are recognized for what they are through a state of equipoise in which there is nothing fabricated and manipulated in addition to that [*dharmakāya*], this is precisely the coemergence of thoughts and *dharmakāya*. It can also be explained with the expression “internalizing [them] through integrating [them] in one’s mind-stream”. By internalizing them in this way, thoughts are purified on the spot without relinquishing [them]. When reflective awareness having the aspects of proliferating movements—an apt characterization of the term “thoughts”—have dissipated (*sangs*), then empty essence, clear nature and unimpeded responsiveness—an apt characterization of the term “*dharmakāya*”—can manifest in any way, but without straying anywhere. Present as the very nature of the three [facets of the] unity of clarity and emptiness, they are not anything, are not established as anything, and [yet] they unfold as the very essence of what is inexpressible in thought and language. [This is] described with the terms “perfect buddhahood” or “*dharmakāya* during the fruition phase”.<sup>616</sup>

Therefore, concerning the phase of fruition from among the subdivisions ground, path, and fruition, after the myriad manifestations of thematic reflections which are the chaff of mental fluctuations—an apt characterization of “thoughts”—has been purified away on the spot, then there is the blossoming (*rgyas pa*) into the inconceivable and ineffable intrinsic essence of the inseparability of the three *kāyas* which is beyond identifications and characteristics—an apt characterization of *dharmakāya*. One is then free even from the proposition that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”.<sup>617</sup>

<sup>616</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan the tshom mun sel zhes pa khams ri bo che'i dge stong gi zhu lan* (ca 210–218), 214<sub>5</sub>–215<sub>1</sub>: *de bzhin du lam gyi dus su ni | yang dag min rtog de ngos gzung nas de nyid kyi steng du bcas bcos med par mnyam par gzhaq pas rnam rtog dang chos sku lhan cig tu skyes pa de nyid | rang rgyud la sbyar nas nyams su len pa'i sgrar bshad du yang rung ngo || de ltar nyams su blangs pas rnam rtog ma spangs gnas su dag ste | rnam rtog gi sgrar brjod du rung ba'i dran rig 'phro 'gyu'i rnam pa can de sangs nas | chos sku'i sgrar brjod du rung ba'i ngo bo stong | rang bzhin gsal | thugs rje 'gag med cir yang 'char ba la | gang du yang mi g.yo bar gsal stong zung 'jug gsum gyi bdag nyid du gnas shing | gang yang ma yin pa | gang du yang ma grub pa | smra bsam rjod med kyi ngo bo nyid du rgyas pa la | rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas sam | 'bras bu'i dus kyi chos sku zhes ming du brjod pa yin no ||*

<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 215<sub>1-2</sub>: *de'i phyir | gzhi lam 'bras gsum gyi zlas phye ba'i 'bras bu'i skabs ni | sngar bshad pa'i rnam rtog gi sgrar brjod du rung ba'i | 'gyu ba sbun po dran rig sna tshogs su snang ba de rang gnas su dag nas | chos kyi sku'i sgrar brjod du rung ba'i ngos gzung dang mtshan ma las 'das pa sku gsum dbyer med smra bsam rjod las 'das pa'i ngo bo nyid du rgyas pas na | rnam rtog chos sku zhes bya ba'i tha snyad dang yang bral ba yin no ||*



The view of goal-realization Karma phrin las pa presents in this passage is decidedly innatist and disclosive. Buddhahood is already fully present in beings from the outset and its realization is entirely a matter of dispelling what obscures it. The goal of spiritual exercises is not constructive but disclosive, their function being to clear away superimpositions and deprecations that veil the way things always already are. Given this view, it is hardly surprising that Karma phrin las pa considered buddha qualities to be fully present, naturally and primordially, in the ground phase, obscured though they are by adventitious stains. In contrast to some Tibetan masters, such as ‘Gos Lo tsā ba, who held that buddha qualities are present only in a subtle form during the ground phase and must be made to mature on the path,<sup>618</sup> Karma phrin las pa and his disciple Mi bskyod rdo rje, who was openly critical of ‘Gos Lo tsā ba’s buddha nature theory, understood these qualities to be full-fledged and primordially present in an obscured condition during the ground phase.<sup>619</sup> That Karma phrin las pa held such a view is conspicuous from his commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* where he says that “\**sugatagarbha* being actually endowed with the sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation means ‘endowed with the excellence of all aspects’”<sup>620</sup> and that buddha nature is “immutable in essence, persists as the nature of a cause, yet is replete with myriad [buddha] qualities.”<sup>621</sup> From this perspective, the term “blossoming” is to be understood as a figure of speech which, for Karma phrin las pa, has the sense not of “ripening” or “maturing” but of “revealing” or “making fully evident”.

#### UNDERSTANDING COEMERGENCE: THE INSEPARABILITY OF *SAṂSĀRA* AND *NIRVĀṆA*

Documenting the answer to a question regarding *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* which Dpal Ngag gi dbang po had put to the legendary crazy saint ‘Brug pa kun legs, Karma phrin las presents the core view (*lta ba’i gnad*) of the Bka’ brgyud tradition, namely, the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* by virtue of the one essence of the two truths. This view is the gist of Sgam po pa’s Mahāmudrā instructions, as transmitted, for example, to the First Karma pa Dus

<sup>618</sup> See Mathes 2008, 321.

<sup>619</sup> See Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Dbu ma gzhan stong smra ba’i srol legs par phye ba’i sgron me*, 15<sub>3-5</sub>: “As the *tathāgata* is inseparable from the buddha qualities (*yon tan*) which are present primordially as buddha attributes (*chos*), the aim of oneself and others is perfectly accomplished.” *sangs rgyas kyi yon tan ye gdod ma nas gnas pa’i sangs rgyas kyi chos rnam dang tha mi dad par de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyi rang gzhan gyi don phun sum tshogs pa bsgrub pa’i bya ba byed do* | In his *Bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku’i dris lan*, 304<sub>1</sub>–305<sub>2</sub>, Mi bskyod rdo rje replies to a question about the relationship between buddha nature and the *dharmakāya* by explaining that causal buddha nature and the *dharmakāya* are not the same, but the resultant buddha nature and the *dharmakāya* are of the same nature. See below, 275.

<sup>620</sup> RDSb, vol. 14, 329<sub>4-6</sub>.

<sup>621</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi rnam bshad snying po*. In RDSb, vol. 14, 384; *ngo bo la ’gyur ba med cing rgyu’i ngo bo nyid du gnas kyang yon tan gyi chos du mas phyug pa* |

gsum mkhyen pa.<sup>622</sup> The answer by 'Brug pa kun legs, which Karma phrin las pa recorded in his *Questions and Answers: A Mirror of White Silver*, runs as follows:

Saṃsāric phenomena are conventional truth. Their abiding nature is ultimate truth. Since the two truths are held to be of one essence, the nature of *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*, and the phenomena of *nirvāṇa* are *saṃsāra*. Apart from the mere difference between phenomena (*chos can*) and the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*), *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are an inseparable unity.<sup>623</sup> This is the core view of the precious Bka' brgyud [tradition] which is known from the dictum that thoughts are *dharmakāya*.

...

From the perspective of delusion, the stark reality of the cycle of appearances is conventional truth. Therefore, it is not *nirvāṇa*. Even so, this *nirvāṇa* as fruition is the true nature of that cycle, the ground of purification. Because the nature of phenomena and phenomena are established from the perspective of their reciprocal determination, they are dependently coarisen. This is the meaning of the

<sup>622</sup> *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*, 56<sub>25</sub>–57<sub>3</sub>: “I pay homage to the authentic teachers. A person who wishes to realize *mahāmudrā* should cultivate [his mind] in this way. Coemergent mind as such is *dharmakāya*, coemergent appearances are the *dharmakāya*'s light. All phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are cultivated as equal in nature; such is the case when one realizes these phenomena as being like space. Rest in the essence of mind as such without mulling over the past, without anticipating the future, and without focusing on anything at present. By settling in this way, the essence of mind as such emerges clearly yet nonconceptually like the center of the pure sky. Don't regard it as a quality if this lasts a long time. Don't consider it a failure if it lasts a short time. Settle at all times undistractedly in precisely this state. When you have cultivated the unborn reality in this way, all phenomena manifest as the genuine state. Phenomena are realized as being of one taste continuously throughout the three times. In this way, rest continually and undistractedly in this reality. The instruction that points out the natural state of suchness, the reality of *mahāmudrā*, this intent of the buddhas of the three times, is realized by the guru-siddhas. May sentient beings thereby be freed from the swamp of *saṃsāra* and, further, may my activity become similar to that of my teacher. This is what he said.” *bla ma dam pa rnams la phyag 'tshal lo | phyag rgya chen po rtogs par 'dod pa'i gang zag gis | 'di ltar bsgom par bya ste | sams nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku || snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od || 'khor 'das chos rnams rang bzhin mnyam par bsgom || nam mkha' lta bu'i chos 'di rtogs na yin || sams nyid kyi ngo bo de 'das pa'i rjes mi bcad || ma 'ongs pa'i mdun mi bsu || da lta ba gang du yang dmigs pa med par bzhag go || de ltar bzhag pas sams nyid kyi ngo bo gsal la rtog pa med pa nam mkha' rnam par dag pa'i dkyil lta bu 'byung ngo || de yang yun ring ba la yon tan du mi blta || thung ba la skyon du mi blta || dus thams cad du de nyid ngang du ma yengs par bzhag go || skye med don la de ltar bsgoms gyur na || chos rnams thams cad gnyug ma'i ngang du 'char || chos rnams ro mnyam dus gsum rgyun par rtogs | de ltar don la ma yengs rgyun par zhog || phyag rgya chen po'i don de kho na nyid rnal du mtshon pa'i man ngag || dus gsum kun gyi sangs rgyas dgongs pa 'di || bla ma grub thob rnams kyi rtogs gyur te || 'gro ba sams can 'khor ba'i 'dam las sgrol gyur cig || bdag kyang phrin las bla ma dang mtshung shog || ces gsungs pa'o ||*

<sup>623</sup> The so-called one essence of the two truths has to be understood from the perspective that they are seen to be not ontologically different, both being empty by nature. As pointed out below, phenomena and the true nature of phenomena exist but as reciprocally determined and therefore merely as mental constructs which belies their empty nature which is, in Karma phrin las pa's words, *not* a nonaffirming negation. This is his way of establishing nonduality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* beyond extremes of identity and difference.

[statement that] “the abiding nature is captivating [only] when not investigated”.  
Because this is the case, it is not a sheer emptiness, a nonaffirming negation.<sup>624</sup>

When the apparent dichotomy between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* within the pseudo-reality of conventional appearance is closely investigated, both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are found to be empty like space and without ontological distinction, like water and waves.<sup>625</sup> In the final analysis, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are both inherently empty and dependently coarisen; this is expressed in the principle of the coemergence of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and of the unity of appearance and emptiness.<sup>626</sup>

As Karma phrin las pa explained in his aforementioned elucidation of the precept that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”, *dharmakāya* in the ground phase is simply the fundamental or enduring mode of appearances or thoughts just as these latter are its expressive energy (*rtsal*) or self-fulgence (*rang gdangs*). This raises the question “what prevents any sentient being from realizing a buddha’s *dharmakāya* which is said to be replete with the ten powers, the

<sup>624</sup> KPdl, *Dri lan dngul dkar me long*, (ca 198–210), 2067–2076: ‘khor ba’i chos ‘di kun rdzob bden pa ste || de yi gnas lugs don dam bden pa’o || bden gnyis ngo bo gcig par bzhed pas na || ‘khor ba’i chos nyid mya ngan ‘das pa dang | mya ngan ‘das pa’i chos can ‘khor ba ste || chos can chos nyid tsam kyi khyad par las || ‘khor ‘das gnyis po dbyer med gcig yin pas || bka’ brgyud rin chen ‘di yi lta ba’i gnad || rnam rtog chos sku zhes byar grags pa yin || ... ‘khrul ngor snang ba’i ‘khor ba’i ‘di ka ni || kun rdzob bden pa yin phyir myang ‘das min || de lta na yang ‘bras bu myang ‘das ‘di || sbyang gzhi ‘khor ba de yi chos nyid yin || chos nyid dang ni chos can phan tshun du || lto nas grub phyir rten cing ‘bral ‘byung ste || ma brtags gcig bur nyams dga’i gnas lugs don | yin phyir stong rkyang med dgag ma yin no zhe’o |

<sup>625</sup> For that analogy see Saraha’s verse: “So long as any [thoughts] proliferate from the mind, they are of the nature of the protector [innate wisdom]. Are water and waves different?” In: *Dmangs dohā’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long*, 78<sub>11–12</sub>: gang zhig sems las rnam ‘phros pa || de srid mgon po’i rang bzhin te || chu dang rlabs dag gzhan yin nam || See also Advayavajra’s *Dohākoṣapañjikā* on DK 72cd: “Are waves and water different? Cyclic existence and peace [share] the nature of being like space.” Advayavajra explains: “Just as the water in a river [is the river, so too] the very [river] itself is a wave, and not anything else. Given the equal purity of [all] cyclic existence, [*saṃsāra*] has the nature of peace [i.e., *nirvāṇa*], the nature of being like space, and nothing else. What is taught by this? Cyclic existence is precisely *nirvāṇa*. This is in accordance with the pith instructions of the genuine guru for those who know. The ignorant ones do not understand, and reify [the two as different] objects.” Tr. Mathes (in print): “Mind and its Coemergent (*sahaja*) Nature in Advayavajra’s Commentary on Saraha’s *Dohākoṣa*” (altered slightly for sake of consistency).

<sup>626</sup> In his commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (AS IV.60), Karma phrin las pa specifies, however, that it is not before the eighth bodhisattva *bhūmi* that one can realize that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are, and have been, inseparable from each other at all times. *Mgon rtog rgyan rtsa ‘grel gyi sbyor ṭika ‘jig rten gsum sgron la ‘jug pa* 574<sub>13–16</sub>: “Given objects of knowledge, cyclic existence and peace are sameness, because from the eighth *bhūmi* onward—by not conceptualizing in a manner of clinging to *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as separate—these two are realized as being inseparable from each other.” *shes bya chos can | srid dang zhi ba mnyam pa nyid yin te | sa bgyad pa yan du ‘khor ba dang mya ngan las ‘das pa dag la tha dad pa nyid du zhen pa’i tshul gyis rnam par mi rtog par de gnyis dbyer med du rtogs pas na’o ||*

four types of fearlessness and the eighteen distinctive qualities?”<sup>627</sup> A strongly innatist view—that beings are already fully awakened buddhas—leaves itself vulnerable to the critique that it absurdly presupposes that sentient beings can attain goal-realization without making the slightest effort. Such innatist views, which are foundational to Tathāgatagarbha and Vajrayāna doctrinal systems, are therefore typically supported by an equally robust account of error and ignorance to account of how this immanent reality habitually goes unrecognized by the benighted. Beings are already buddhas but, because buddhahood is concealed by adventitious stains, they do not recognize it. Karma phrin las pa builds on this basic framework, but insists that sentient beings can pierce the veil of ignorance, recognize their fundamental nature, and elicit all of the latently present qualities of a fully realized buddha. Thus he states in the opening section of his commentary on Saraha’s *People Dohā*:

In the ground phase, the subject-object [duality] that appears due to the power of not directly recognizing that which abides in its natural state as the coemergent unity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is unreal imagining (*abhūtaparikalpa*). It appears as the entities of apprehended [objects] and apprehending [subject]. These are internalized as *mahāmudrā* [via] the path of coemergent unity. Hence the entities of dualistic belief are vanquished. This results in fruition consisting in the unity of the two *kāyas*<sup>628</sup> that fulfil the aims of living beings.<sup>629</sup>

As for the *dharmakāya*, its unborn nature is considered to be inseparable from its unimpeded manifestations which make their presence felt as the manifold self-dynamics of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. In the final analysis, they are not different from one another. They are of “one flavour”; any differentiation is a matter of selective identification: *nirvāṇa* signifies the empty aspect of mind, while *saṃsāra* signifies the lucid aspect of mind. In his commentary to Saraha’s *People Dohā*, Karma phrin las pa explains:

From the dimension of *dharmakāya*, which is the unborn nature, the unimpeded self-expressive energy of its radiance arises as the whole variety, thus appearing as two, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Yet in actuality, these two are inseparable, for the

<sup>627</sup> Regarding a list of the *dharmakāya*’s qualities see for example the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (AS) VIII.1–6 and commentary by Zhwa dmar Dkon mchog yan lag, tr. by Brunnhölzl 2011a, 111–15 or Rang byung rdo rje’s *Snying po bstan pa’i bstan bcos*, English tr. by Brunnhölzl 2009, 355<sup>7–27</sup>.

<sup>628</sup> That is, the *dharmakāya* and two form *kāyas*.

<sup>629</sup> *Dmangs dohā*’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long, 8<sup>17–21</sup>: *de yang | gzhi dus na ’khor ’das lhan cig tu skyes pa zung ’jug gnyug ma’i ngang du gnas pa de nyid rang ngo ma shes pa’i dbang gis gzung ’dzin du snang ba ni yang dag pa ma yin pa’i kun tu rtog pa ste | gnyis ’dzin gyi dngos por snang ba yin la | de dag lam lhan cig skyes pa zung ’jug phyag rgya chen por nyams su blangs pas gnyis ’dzin gyi dngos po bcom nas ’bras bu sku gnyis zung ’jug gis ’gro ba’i don mdzad par ’gyur ba’i don no ||*

*saṃsāra* of existence and the *nirvāṇa* [of] quiescence are imputed as different by conceptual knowledge, but both are of “one flavour” in the dimension of mind as such. For example, it is like space, which has the nature of being empty, without centre or periphery. Hence, the statement that the clear aspect of mind is *saṃsāra* and the empty aspect is *nirvāṇa* means that this unity is only described in terms of difference from the perspective of the mode of appearing.<sup>630</sup>

It may be recalled that for Karma phrin las “unity” refers not to the conjoining of two otherwise separate things but rather to an original condition of undifferentiated wholeness. In answer to a question raised by one of his students, the Ra ti dgon pa gzims khang ba, Karma phrin las pa explains that “unity” signifies that clarity and emptiness are precisely the unity of wisdom, and are distinguished only for descriptive purposes.<sup>631</sup> Karma phrin las offers a nuanced view of unity in one of his *vajra*-songs:

When affirming the view with regard to the mode of abiding, the elaborations of the eight extremes are the eternalist view.<sup>632</sup> The nonaffirming negation of sheer emptiness is the nihilist view. The view of unity is difficult to describe: Appearances which are uncontrived and encompassing, and emptiness which defies expression in thought and language are both primordially inseparable coemergence. That must be seen via personally realized self-awareness. When the seen, seeing and seer are seen in their very nature, there is no differentiation. They are grasped as distinct [due to] the dense, superfluous beliefs in duality. Now, just let them unravel naturally in the state of equality!<sup>633</sup>

<sup>630</sup> *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 78<sub>21</sub>–79<sub>4</sub>; *de yang gshis skye med chos sku'i ngang las mdangs 'gag pa med pa'i rang rtsal sna tshogs su shar bas 'khor 'das gnyis su snang yang | de gnyis po ni don la dbyer med de | srid pa 'khor ba dang mnyam pa nyid myang 'das shes rtog pas tha dad du btags kyang | de gnyis ka sems nyid kyi ngang du ro gcig pa ni | dper na | nam mkha' la mtha' dbus med pa stong pa'i rang bzhin can yin pa bzhin no | des na | sems kyi gsal ba'i cha la 'khor ba dang | stong pa'i cha la myang 'das shes zung 'jug la snang tshul gyi sgo nas ming so sor brjod pa tsam mo ||*

<sup>631</sup> KPdl, 153<sub>6-7</sub>: “Clarity and empti[ness] are precisely the unity of wisdom. This being so, although differentiated in descriptive frameworks, they actually do not contravene their unitary essence.” (tr. Mathes) *gsal dang stong pa ye shes zung 'jug nyid || yin phyir brjod pa'i tshul la tha dad kyang || don gyi ngo bo gcig las ma 'das pas ||*

<sup>632</sup> The eight extremes are arising (*skye*) and ceasing (*'gag*), permanence (*rtag*) and annihilation (*chad*), coming (*'gro*) and going (*'ong*), sameness (*gcig*) and difference (*tha dad*).

<sup>633</sup> KPdg, 79<sub>4-5</sub>: *khyed gnas lugs kyi don la lta bzhed na || mtha' brgyad kyi spros pa rtag pa'i lta || stong rkyang gi med dgag chad pa'i lta || zung 'jug gi lta ba brjod par dka' || ma bcos khyab gdal gyi snang ba dang || smra bsam rjod med kyi stod pa gnyis || ye gdod ma nas dbyer med lhan cig skyes || de so so rang rig tu blta dgos lags || blta bya dang lta byed lta mkhan rnams || rang ngo bo mthong tshe tha dad med || 'phral gnyis 'dzin mthug po so sor gzung || da mnyam nyid kyi ngang du glod la zhog ||*

In his commentary on the People’s Dohā, Karma phrin las pa explains that “on the side of unknowing (*ma rig pa*), appearances are *saṃsāra* and yet their nature, on the side of knowing (*rig pa*), is *nirvāṇa*. Therefore all phenomena that are subsumed under *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are the essence of mind, freedom from elaborations.”<sup>634</sup> As he explains,

The difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* amounts to nothing more than knowing (*rig pa*) and unknowing (*ma rig pa*).<sup>635</sup> Through this self-awareness comes the attainment of *nirvāṇa* that abides neither in existence nor in peace, which [thus] ranks supreme among lower to higher [gradations].<sup>636</sup>

The above observations reinforce Karma phrin las pa’s main point of emphasis: the need to recognize whatever enters the orbit of experience as being no different from mind’s nature, which is free from discursive elaborations based on tenacious beliefs in the extremes of existence and nonexistence. It is precisely because the experiential dimension is nothing whatsoever that it can manifest as anything whatsoever. Hence the inseparability of emptiness and manifestation. Commenting on Saraha’s verse

So long as any [thoughts] proliferate from the mind,  
They are of the nature of the protector [innate wisdom].  
Are water and waves different?<sup>637</sup>

Karma phrin las pa offers the following explanation:

The one and only remedy against the entire spectrum of clinging and grasping is emptiness. Further, so long as there is any grasping whatsoever—the entire range of conceptualizations the mental factors that proliferate from the mind—[and] as long as they are moving and proliferating, all of these are the protector of all sentient beings, being of the nature of wisdom that is coemergent with mind. For example, are water and [its] waves different? Just as water is the wave, so too [all]

<sup>634</sup> *Dmangs dohā’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long*, 44<sub>4-6</sub>: ‘khrul ngor snang ba ‘khor ba dang de’i rang bzhiñ ye shes kyi ngor snang ba myang ‘das te | ‘khor ‘das kyi bsdus pa’i chos thams cad sems kyi ngo bo spros pa dang bral ba nyid yin no || 219, n. 625

<sup>635</sup> In order to bring out the contrast between *ma rig pa* and *rig pa* “knowing” expressed in this verse, we have here translated *ma rig pa* with “unknowing”. We have elsewhere translated it as “ignorance”.

<sup>636</sup> *Dmangs dohā’i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa’i me long*, 45<sub>16-17</sub>: ‘khor ‘das kyi khyad par ni rig ma rig tsam du zad do || rang rig pa des ni thog dman las mchog tu gyur pa srid zhi la mi gnas pa’i mya ngan las ‘das pa thob par ‘gyur ro ||

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, 78<sub>11-12</sub>: gang zhig sems las rnam ‘phros pa || de srid mgon po’i rang bzhiñ te || chu dang rlabs dag gzhan yin nam || For Advayavajra’s commentary on this verse, see above, 219, n. 625.

that proliferates in all its variety from mind as such has arisen from the *dharmakāya*, i.e. the unborn nature of the mind, and dissolves back into it. This is so because it is inseparable from the *dharmakāya*.<sup>638</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In many ways, Karma phrin las pa's life and teachings exemplify the synthesis of extensive learning and dedicated solitary meditation which had become a hallmark of Bka' brgyud masters since the time of Sgam po pa. A scholar of considerable erudition, Karma phrin las had studied with leading figures in both the Bka' brgyud and Sa skya schools and at different points held prestigious positions in various institutions of learning. Yet many of his remarks in his spiritual songs and biographical writings reflect his predilection for the life of a free-spirited yogin determined to internalize through meditative cultivation what he had learned in the course of his studies. The composite portrait we can assemble from these sources is of a prototypical scholar-yogin, one who endeavoured to make a living experience of his scholastic learning with the conviction that only the transformation of the individual through spiritual praxis will lead to genuine wisdom beyond partiality.

Given this background, it is not surprising that Karma phrin las sees learning as a sequential process of [1] understanding intellectually through studying, [2] internalizing what one studies through meditation that takes whatever arises as the path, and [3] allowing the full realization of the nature of mind and reality to dawn in one's mind. On the basis of his core view of Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Yuganaddha emphasizing the unity of *saṃsara* and *nirvāṇa*, of appearance and emptiness, and the harmony of Rang stong and Gzhan stong, he forged a Middle Way that brought the apophatic view that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic essences into harmony with the cataphatic affirmation of their luminous presence and dynamism. For Karma phrin las, realizing the unity of mind's empty essence and radiant nature in its most fundamental expression is tantamount to rediscovering buddhahood itself.

Karma phrin las pa's reaffirmation of Chos grags rgya mtsho's view that Rang stong and Gzhan stong are not contradictory set him apart from many scholars in the incendiary polemical atmosphere of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century who were inclined to either side with one of the two positions or with neither. With few exceptions, such as the hermit Gshong Mkhas btsun bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.) mentioned above, there appear to have been few post-classical exegetes willing to pursue this line of interpretation. It was not until the Non-

<sup>638</sup> *Dmangs dohā'i rnam bshad sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long*, 78<sub>13-18</sub>: *zhen pa dang 'dzin pa mtha' dag gi gnyen po ni | stong pa nyid kho na ste | de yang 'dzin pa gang zhig sems las rnam par 'phros pa'i sems byung gi rnam par rtog pa mtha' dag ji srid du 'gyu zhing 'phro ba de srid du | skye dgu'i mgon por gyur pa sems lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes kyi rang bzhin yin te | dper na | chu dang rlabs dag gzhan yin nam ste chu rlabs chu yin pa bzhin du | sems nyid las sna tshogs su 'phro ba de yang sems kyi gshis skye ba med pa'i chos sku las byung zhing der thim pas na | chos sku dang tha mi dad pa yin no ||*

sectarian (*ris med*) movement initiated in Eastern Tibet in the nineteenth century by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892) and Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) in response to the increasing persecution and marginalization of non-Dge lugs traditions by the Dge lugs pa establishment that the complementarity between Rang stong and Gzhan stong views would once again be taken seriously by Karma Bka' brgyud scholars. By this time, it was seen as playing a vital role in the mission to mitigate factionalism among the different Tibetan sects by promoting the appreciation and preservation of their diverse forms of religious expression.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> Despite the backlash against the *Ris med* movement spearheaded by the Dge lugs master Pha bong kha pa Bde chen snying po (1878–1941) who encouraged the summoning of a violent Dge lugs pa protective deity Rdo rje shugs ldan to assist in the persecution of the rival Tibetan sects, the movement has proved remarkably successful in promoting religious pluralism and cultural preservation and has been strongly endorsed by most modern-day Tibetan religious hierarchs including the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.





MI BSKYOD RDO RJE

## OVERVIEW

The Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje's (1507–1554) discourses on Mahāmudrā and buddha nature build upon a set of thematically interwoven philosophical distinctions between the modes of being of buddhas and sentient beings that he employs in various doctrinal contexts to articulate an account of the Buddhist path emphasizing the disclosive nature of goal-realization. Such distinctions are integral to his attempts to clarify the sense and significance of certain core soteriological ideas concerning buddha nature, the nature of mind, and nature of reality, and to specify the most efficacious means to their attainment. Of special importance are the differentiations between the quintessence versus chaff (*snying po / shun pa*) and *tathāgatagarbha* versus *ālayavijñāna* in the context of discussing buddha nature theories, wisdom versus consciousness (*ye shes / nam shes*) and innate mind versus adventitious mind (*gnyug ma'i sems / glo bur gyi sems*) in the context of Mahāmudrā instructions on recognizing the nature of mind, and phenomena versus the nature of phenomena (*chos can / chos nyid*) in describing the nature of reality.<sup>640</sup> Most of the distinctions the Eighth Karma pa deploys within these three contexts were already well-documented in antecedent Buddhist sources<sup>641</sup> and many had also featured as basic interpretive categories in the works of his coreligionists. We have seen, for instance, the important place that Dol po pa's distinction between all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi nam shes*) and all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*) occupied in Shākya mchog ldan's exegesis and will later have occasion to turn our attention to Mi bskyod rdo rje's criticisms of this great Sa skya master's understanding and application of this distinction.

A leitmotif of the Eighth Karma pa's own interpretation of such distinctions is his unequivocal emphasis both on the radical asymmetry between the terms of the distinctions and on the far-reaching implications of this asymmetry for how one understands and traverses the Buddhist path. For in his view, the central thrust of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings is to clearly differentiate what is essential and enduring from what is merely superfluous and adventitious, both in view (*lta ba*) and meditation (*sgom pa*). To put it simply, one can see things as they truly are, and recognize mind for what it really is, only when one has distinguished these from all that they are not. Hence, a key element in Mi bskyod rdo rje's understanding and use of the distinctions is the proviso that they be treated *conventionally* as discernable disjunctions within the mind-streams of those on the path, even if they are seen *ultimately* to have no autonomous existence (*rang dbang gyi grub med*) in the context of ascertaining the ultimate object (*don dam*) which transcends conceptual distinctions. It is

<sup>640</sup> The author's discussions of these distinctions and their sources are documented in the pages to follow. Here the understanding of *chos can* (*dharmān*) is phenomena that have as their nature the *dharmatā* (*chos nyid*).

<sup>641</sup> These are detailed below. The only distinction among those mentioned here which is unattested in Indian sources is the distinction between *gnyug ma'i sems* and *glo bur gyi sems*, though the former term (< Skt. *nijacitta*) is well-known from the *dohās* of the siddhas and widely employed by their Tibetan interpreters.

because these internal dichotomies are corrigible and because their elimination is the principal function of Buddhist soteriology that their precise identification is considered by Mi bskyod rdo rje to be of the utmost importance. In his view, the Buddhist practitioner needs to clearly recognize, and take the appropriate steps to overcome, the adventitious separation between what is (the abiding condition) and what seems to be (mistaken identifications centred on the false sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’). Soteriological distinctions remain vitally important so long as the aspirant is under the influence of dualistic consciousness and its adventitious constructs. This type of soteriological contextualism sets Mi bskyod rdo rje’s interpretive methodology apart from that of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan who was widely criticized by various post-classical exegetes for converting useful soteriological distinctions into oppositional ontological categories that were then retrospectively embedded in the nature of things in order to reinforce an absolutist ontology.

In Mi bskyod rdo rje’s eyes, the soteriological context is all-important: the individual on the path must learn to distinguish in theory and practice the innate from the adventitious in order to finally arrive at the deeper understanding of a unity in which conceptual dichotomies have fallen away. This contextualism allows him to articulate and defend, alongside his endorsement of robust distinctions, a view emphasizing the fundamental unity (*zung ’jug*), inseparability (*dbyer med*), nonduality (*gnyis med*), and single flavour (*ro gcig*), of the two truths, a view he eventually identified as a shared cornerstone of Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā doctrines. This is emphasized in his commentary to Karma Pakshi’s *Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* that Mi bskyod rdo rje composed in the last years of his life where he defends the inseparability of the two truths, adding the cautionary note that the idea of a shared ‘single ground’ (*gzhi gcig*) is only a conceptual imputation.<sup>642</sup> In other words,

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<sup>642</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 21, 144<sub>3-6</sub>: “According to the Easterner Tsong kha pa, because conventional [phenomena] are established by sources of knowledge [grounded] in customary transactions, they are not individually empty of intrinsic essence. However, the emptiness wherein the mode of subsistence of objects which is not conceptually imputed is empty of truly established intrinsic essence— [i.e., of an] independently existent conventional— is the ultimate reality. [This view] lies outside the sublime Madhyamaka tradition of all those who claim that the ultimate reality and the conventional [share] the same nature, as eloquently discerned by those who appeared in former generations such as the glorious lord Saraha, the noble Nāgārjuna, venerable Śavaripa, the teacher Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti and the master Maitrīpa. Thus, in the same way that the subject of the two realities was ascertained by the lord Maitrīpa and the exalted Atiśa, so it appears to have also been explained by the great Paṇḍit Rong zom chos [kyi] bzang [po].” ***shar tsong ga pa chen pos | kun rdzob tha snyad pa’i tshad mas grub pa’i phyir rang rang ngo bos mi stong yang brtags bzhas min pa’i yul gyi sdod lugs tshugs thub kyi grub pa’i kun rdzob bden grub par rang gi ngo bos stong pa’i stong nyid don dam bden pa yin la | don dam bden pa de dang kun rdzob ngo bo gcig yin par ’dod pa thams cad sngon rabs byon pa’i dpal mgon sa ra ha dang | ’phags pa klu sgrub zhabs dang | rje btsun sha ba ri dang | slob dpon sangs rgyas skyangs dang | zla ba grags pa dang | mnga’ bdag mai tri pa chen po dag gis legs par phyed pa’i dbu ma’i lugs bzang po las phyi rol du gyur pa’o || des na jo bo mai tri pa dang dpal ldan a ti sha de dag gis shes bya bden gnyis ji ltar gtan la dbab pa de ltar paṇḍita chen po rong zom chos bzang gis kyang bshad par snang ste*** | That the single shared ground is not substantially existent (*dnegos por yod pa*) but a mere imputation (*brtags pa tsam gyi gzhi*), i.e., a groundless ground, is discussed at *ibid.*, 141<sub>3-4</sub>.

phenomena are adventitious misapprehensions of ultimate reality and thus wholly parasitic upon it, but *all* phenomena, conventional and ultimate, lack any established foundation, either epistemic or ontological, and are therefore beyond discursive elaborations (*spros bral*).

Like Shākya mchog ldan before him, Mi bskyod rdo rje repudiates both the theory that the two truths are “two delimitations of a single essence” (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*) where it is assumed that the conventional and ultimate truths inhere separately in one and the same object (Dge lugs pa) and the theory that the two truths constitute a “difference that negates sameness” (*gcig pa bkag pa'i tha dad*) where it is assumed that the two truths represent separate spheres or “great kingdoms” (*rgyal khams chen po*) having “nothing to do with each other” (Jo nang pa).<sup>643</sup> Avoiding either extreme, he maintains that the “nonduality of the two realities” is common to both Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka philosophies and that it was advocated by a long line of Indian masters including Saraha, Śavaripa, Nāgārjuna, Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti, Maitrīpa, Atiśa, and also by the Tibetan Rnying ma master Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (1042–1136).<sup>644</sup> For these thinkers, the truth discovered by Buddhist insight and meditation—variously described as ultimate reality, the nature of reality, or nondual wisdom—is entirely free from elaborations including the extremes of existence and nonexistence. In short, despite the Eighth Karma pa’s emphasis on robust distinctions, he at the same time maintains that the ultimate is without any ontological or epistemic grounding, in keeping with his philosophical allegiance to the two antifoundationalist currents of Madhyamaka: the Apratiṣṭhānavāda (“the doctrine that all phenomena are not fixed [in nature and origin]” (*sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda*)) and the \*Prāsaṅgika (“Consequentialist”).

## THE DIFFERENTIATION AND IDENTIFICATION MODELS

In presenting and defending robust distinctions, the Eighth Karma pa followed a certain Indian Buddhist current of thought advocating a strict differentiation between buddha nature or the nature of mind and the *ālayavijñāna*. This differentiation model<sup>645</sup> was emphasized in certain late Mahāyāna classics such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS), *Mahāyānasūtralaṃkāra* (MSA)<sup>646</sup> and *Dharmadhātustava* (DhS), buddha nature works such

<sup>643</sup> For lengthy refutations of the Dge lugs and Jo nang versions of these theories, see *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 276<sub>12</sub> ff. and 292<sub>2</sub> ff. respectively.

<sup>644</sup> See above n. 642. *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 21, 144<sub>3</sub> f. As previously noted, Mi bskyod rdo rje in his later years became a supporter of Rong zom pa’s Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka views, especially those based on “classical texts maintaining the inseparability of the two aspects of reality” (*bden pa rnam pa gnyis dbyer med par 'dod pa'i gzhung*). He cites Rong zom pa six times in this late commentary but not in any previous works. Concerning Rong zom’s endorsement of Apratiṣṭhānavāda and the “inseparability of truth/reality” view which he termed “special Mahāyāna,” see Almogi 2009, 39–42 et passim.

<sup>645</sup> On the differentiation and identification trends vis-à-vis Rnying ma exegesis, see Higgins 2013, 151–60.

<sup>646</sup> MSA 13.18–19.

as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV), and tantras such as the *Kālacakra* (KC). Mi bskyod rdo rje builds on the treatments of distinctions presented in these works and often cites the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's (1284–1339) accounts of such distinctions as his principal authority. On this basis, the Eighth Karma pa defends the differentiation model against various rival views that he saw as having adopted differing versions of an identification model which assumed a basic identity, or at least intermixing, between buddha nature and adventitious phenomena. As previously noted, precedents for this identification model are found in the *Laṅkāvatāra* (LAV) and *Ghanavyūha* (GhV) sūtras which both identify buddha nature with the *ālayavijñāna*.<sup>647</sup> A striking early example of Mi bskyod rdo rje's general rejection of such models is his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*)<sup>648</sup> in which he criticizes the tantric buddha nature theories of 'Gos Lo tsā ba (1392–1481) and Shākya mchog ldan for failing to adequately differentiate between buddha nature and adventitious stains. Central to his criticism is the contention that buddha nature should be equated with 'buddha[hood]' (*sangs rgyas*) since it is simply the latter in its obscured state, whereas adventitious stains are equivalent to 'sentient being' (*sems can*), which he interprets, along the lines of his teacher Karma phrin las, as a cover term for the totality of adventitious factors to be removed in order for buddhahood to be fully revealed.<sup>649</sup> From the standpoint of linguistic conventions, to take 'buddha' as other or more than buddha nature and 'sentient being' as other or more than adventitious stains is based on an inadequate understanding of the conditions sufficient or necessary for the application of such terms. The same logic applies to the identification of *ālayavijñāna* and buddha nature. For Mi bskyod rdo rje, the result mixing these levels of discourse is to increase rather than reduce the semantic indeterminacy of the terms in question. This eventually devolves into a state of affairs which he characterizes as the "collapse of all terminological conventions"<sup>650</sup> wherein words no longer serve their intended soteriological purpose, namely, to distinguish what is to be realized from what is to be relinquished.

On this interpretation, the identification model was considered by Mi bskyod rdo rje to be of provisional meaning (*drang don*) and geared toward certain Cittamātra followers who, on account of their idealist orientation, were predisposed to equating buddha nature with the

<sup>647</sup> See above, 27 and n. 31.

<sup>648</sup> On this important buddha nature treatise, see below, 269 and n. 757.

<sup>649</sup> See *Rgan po'i rlung sman* (MKsb vol. 15, 978<sub>1</sub> f.) where Mi bskyod rdo rje defends thesis that 'sentient beings' *qua* chaff (*shun pa*) do not exist whereas buddha nature (*[bde gshegs] snying po*) does exist against 'Gos lo tsā ba's criticism that such a view absurdly presupposes the existence of something real within something unreal, like a vase within a hare's horn. The Eighth Karma pa's lengthy rebuttal is based on the following two-pronged argument: [1] In positing the quintessence, the existence of the chaff is unnecessary. [2] If [we refer to] the "quintessence of something (*x*)", it is unnecessary [and unwarranted] that *x* = the quintessence of *x*.

<sup>650</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 980<sub>3-4</sub>: "[W]here it necessary, in positing a quintessence and chaff to [include] them in the same class, then it would also be necessary [to include] medicine and poison in the same class. As a consequence, all terminological conventions would collapse."

substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). The Karma pa clearly recognized the phenomenological usefulness of the *ālayavijñāna* model in accounting for problems of causality and continuity on a conventional level and also acknowledged its ineluctable contingent existence for those still in the grip of dualistic consciousness.<sup>651</sup> It is also evident, however, that he regards this model as little more than a heuristic construct for characterizing phenomena that are adventitious, one which has no independent existence apart from the nature of things (*dharmatā*). This latter strain in his thinking helps to explain why, in certain instances, he appears to endorse Candrakīrti's thesis (followed by many Tibetan successors, most notably Tsong kha pa) that the *ālayavijñāna* is untenable, even conventionally.<sup>652</sup> In his *A Trove Containing Myriad Treasures of Profound Mahāmudrā* (*Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*)—an important summation of his views on Mahāmudrā<sup>653</sup>—Mi bskyod rdo rje goes so far as to characterize the “no *ālayavijñāna*” thesis as being “more intellectually refined” in “the context of deeply investigating the ultimate” than accounts accepting the existence of *ālayavijñāna*, which had been endorsed by no less an authority than the Third Karma pa:

When the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, *Madhyamakāvatāra* and other texts explain that the *ālayavijñāna* is untenable, they proceed to explain that mere appearance (*snang tsam*) is [due to] latent tendencies alone. As for the exegesis of both the noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] and Candrakīrti, the reason they did not accept the *ālayavijñāna* is that all phenomena are entirely devoid of any factor that is self-sufficient in terms of function and essence. That being so, since [the *ālayavijñāna*] would have to be an independently existing consciousness capable of serving as the basis of all phenomena, [despite its being] an obscuration that shrouds the *dharmadhātu* [while itself being] indeterminate, [this *ālayavijñāna*] was rightly rejected. Nonetheless, according to some other Ācāryas, the Victorious [Buddha] taught the classifications of *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas* in order to invalidate non-Buddhists' beliefs in a self, a creator and a consumer. In particular, in the case of explanations according special status to the *ālayavijñāna* as discussed in [texts]

<sup>651</sup> See, for example, his *Gnas lugs bdud rtsi'i snying khu*, *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad* vol. 3, 343<sub>3-4</sub> where in answer to the question “whether or not the *manas* and *ālayavijñāna* exist,” the Karma pa replies that these are “very much present conditionally [or contingently]” (*gnas skabs su shin tu yod*). He goes on to distinguish (345–6) the *kun gzhi* [*rnam shes*] which is the aspect of ignorance (*ma rig pa'i cha*) in the condition or state (*gnas skabs*) of sentient beings from the *kun gzhi ye shes*, which is the aspect of awareness (*rig pa'i cha*) which remains (*lus pa*) when the *kun gzhi* mixed with ignorance is purified away through meditation.

<sup>652</sup> The author does not go so far as to say that it is conventionally untenable as Tsong kha pa did in his later writings, though not his earlier *Yid dang kun gzhi'i dka' ba'i gnas rgya cher 'grel pa*. P no. 6149, 173–95 which endorsed the *ālayavijñāna* model. See also *Tsong kha pa gsung 'bum* vol. 27, 356–474. For an annotated translation, see Sparham 1993. Nagao summarizes Tsong kha pa's views on Paramārtha's *amalavijñāna* theory in *Chūkan to Yuishiki*, 419–21.

<sup>653</sup> This is edited and translated in Volume II, translation: 122–34, critical edition: 134–43.

such as the *Laṅkāvatāra*, it is evident that [these texts] explained very eloquently the criteria of cause and effect in the context of establishing appearance as mind. [This account] was also commended by the illustrious Rang byung who followed this later tradition. But for me, in the context of deeply investigating the ultimate, the former tradition appears to be [more] intellectually refined.<sup>654</sup>

To understand the import of this assessment, it is necessary to say something about the divergent hermeneutical paradigms Mi bskyod rdo rje is working with. In the first place, Rang byung rdo rje's alleged espousal of the *ālayavijñāna* has to be understood in light of his endorsement of the aforementioned differentiation model—a model that strongly shaped the Mi bskyod rdo rje's views of mind and buddha nature as well. According to this model, the impure mind, which Rang byung rdo rje had equated with the *ālayavijñāna* and its eight modes of consciousness (*kun gzhi tshogs brgyad*), is sharply distinguished from pure mind or transmundane mind which both Karma pas identify with buddha nature.<sup>655</sup> For the sake of clarification, Rang byung rdo rje added that the term *kun gzhi (ālaya)* when it is used independently of *rnam par shes pa (vijñāna)* is not necessarily a shorthand for *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa (ālayavijñāna)* but “can also refer to suchness” (*tathatā : de bzhin nyid*)<sup>656</sup>, a point later reiterated by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas.<sup>657</sup>

Now, the Eighth Karma pa makes an equivalent distinction in his *Commentary on the “Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas”* (*Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*) when he notes that buddha nature as natural luminosity (*'od gsal ba'i gshegs snying po*) can be designated by the term all-ground (*kun gzhi*)<sup>658</sup> in which case it may be considered the all-pervasive

<sup>654</sup> *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, MKsb vol. 15, 1029<sub>3</sub>–1030<sub>2</sub>; See Volume II, translation: 126; critical edition: 137.

<sup>655</sup> See Mathes 2008, 57–59.

<sup>656</sup> *Zab mo nang don gyi 'grel pa*, RDsb vol. 7, 383.2: *'di yang kun gzhi zhes bya ba la rnam par shes pa'i sgra ma smos na de bzhin nyid la yang kun gzhi brjod du rung ba'i phyir rnam par shes pa smos so ||*

<sup>657</sup> See Kong sprul's *Rnam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos 'grel pa*, 361<sub>21</sub>–361<sub>3</sub>: “Since [the *ālayavijñāna*] constitutes a ground for the arising of all imagined phenomena, it is called ‘all-ground’ (*kun gzhi*). [Query:] Why is [this term *kun gzhi* sometimes] combined with the term ‘consciousness’ (*rnam par shes pa*)? [Reply:] Since there are contexts wherein suchness (*tathatā*) and buddha nature (\**sugatagarbha*) are also described as *kun gzhi*, [the compound is used] in order to demarcate their difference.” *kun tu rtog pa'i chos thams cad 'byung ba'i gzhi gyur pas kun gzhi zhes bya | de la rnam par shes pa'i sgra dang ldan pa ji ltar yin snyam na | de bzhin nyid dam bde gshegs snying po la'ang kun gzhi brjod pa'i skabs yod pas khyad par du 'byed pa'i phyir ro |* See also Dwags ram pa, *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa'i gsal ba'i rgyan*, RDsb vol. 12, 108<sub>5-6</sub>.

<sup>658</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 21, 152<sub>1-4</sub>: “[Query:] What was the reason for positing buddha nature as sentient beings? [Reply:] It was posited in this way on account of the need to establish buddhas in the primal phase or sentient beings deriving from the primal phase in terms of that naturally luminous buddha nature which was designated by the term ‘all-ground’. This is because it is due to the power of [beings] having this *buddhagarbha* cause that there is development into fruition and that, by force of dependence on all the adventitious stains that obscure or obstruct [buddha nature], all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* occur by



source of freedom and bondage, of all pure and impure all-grounds, the latter of which refers to the *ālayavijñāna*. In other words, the Yogācāra *ālayavijñāna*, seen as the source of conditioned phenomena which is itself conditioned, both derives and deviates from a more fundamental common ground (*gzhi*) that is in some cases identified not only with the all-pervasive *dharmadhātu* but also *tathāgatagarbha*.

Returning to Mi bskyod rdo rje's central argument in the above-quoted *Trove* passage, he suggests that the *ālayavijñāna* of Cittamātra can have no autonomous existence apart from this suchness or *dharmadhātu* and is therefore *ultimately* untenable, useful as it may be for describing from a mentalistic viewpoint the locally determined causal events or, more specifically, the causal continuities of consciousness, appearance, and karmic actions that give rise to the perceived unities and continuities of human existence. This point is clarified at the beginning of the *Trove* where Mi bskyod rdo rje identifies the common ground of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, delusion and freedom, with the expanse of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*)<sup>659</sup> which he characterizes as “a state of equality (*mnyam pa nyid*) wherein the whole complex of entailing and entailed [factors] of *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa* and the path does not exist” and wherein “everything that originally assembles as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and eventually [undergoes] the natural dissolution of its formation, is [thus] similar in manner, being of the same flavour.”<sup>660</sup> In the interests of conceptual economy, the Karma pa then proposes that this common ground—the all-pervading *dharmadhātu*—suffices as an explanatory model to account for the arising of all phenomena. On this analysis, the *ālayavijñāna*, and distinctions between separate grounds of error and freedom, are deemed to be superfluous, or at least supplementary, constructs that have limited explanatory value.

The author returns repeatedly to the two kindred problems of determining a common source of all phenomena—comprising *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa* and the path—and specifying the nature of the association between this source to unconditioned buddha nature, *mahāmudrā* and the nature of mind. There is a recurrent tension in his works between two Mantrayāna-based accounts of this relationship [1] one emphasizing the *exclusion* of the sources of all phenomena comprising *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* from unconditioned buddha nature; [2] the other

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way of dependent origination. If this [buddha] nature did not exist, there would be no conventional arising of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, bondage and freedom and so forth.” ’o na de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po la<sup>a</sup> sems can du ’jog pa’i rgyu mtshan ci zhe na | dang po’i dus kyi sangs rgyas sam dang po’i dus nas ’ong ba’i sems can ni kun gzhi’i ming gi btags pa’i rang bzhin gyi ’od gsal ba’i gshegs snying nyid la ’jog dgos pa’i dbang las der bzhang pa yin te | sangs rgyas kyi snying po’i rgyu ’di yod pa’i dbang las | ’bras bu de bskyed pa la sgrib byed dam gegs byed kyi glo bur gyi dri ma thams cad kyang ltos pa’i dbang gis ’khor ’das kyi chos thams cad rten cing ’brel bar ’byung ba’i tshul gyis byung ba’i phyir | snying po ’di med na ’khor ’das ’ching grol sogs tha snyad du’ang ’byung ba med par ’gyur la | <sup>a</sup>MKsb has *la*; the Swayambhu 2012 edition has *las*.

<sup>659</sup> According to MAVBh I.13, *dharma* in *dharmadhātu* refers to buddha qualities, the *dhātu* being their cause. Moreover, emptiness is the *dharmadhātu* in the sense that it is the cause of buddha qualities.

<sup>660</sup> See Volume II, translation: 124, critical edition: 135.

emphasizing the *inclusion* of conditioned sources within the unconditioned by way of an asymmetrical entailment relation such that the unconditioned pervades, but is not itself pervaded by, the conditioned. The *exclusion* view is outlined in the author's *Synopsis of Single Intent Philosophy* (*Dgongs gcig grub mtha'i spyi ching*) where the Karma pa rejects the view that *mahāmudrā* and *tathāgatagarbha* can be identified as the source of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. In doing so, he provides a valuable overview of the different conceptions of the phenomenal and soteriological ground (*kun gzhi : ālaya*) that figure in Bka' brgyud exegesis:

The way in which *mahāmudrā* does *not* function as a basis for the whole of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* requires explanation. In the Mahāyāna system, the presentation of the *ālaya* is explained as having three [features]: [1] [karmic] ripening, [2] [karmic] seeds and [3] the uncorrupted element (*zag med khams*). The first two are said to function as the foundation of *saṃsāra*. The third is the cause of *nirvāṇa*: being the extraordinary distinct set of six cognitive domains<sup>661</sup> which functions as the basis of the unfolded potential and the like, it is described as the natural outflow of *dharmakāya*. The way in which the *ālaya* is a basis of *saṃsāra* [is explained in terms of]: [1] what is based on it by way of [karmic] seeds for any of the [three]

<sup>661</sup> The term “distinct set of six cognitive domains” renders *ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ* (Tib. *skye mched drug gi khyad par*) where the suffix *-viśeṣaḥ* may denote a particular type among a wider class of things. See Tubb and Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Handbook for Students*, 31 and 196. “When words referring to species or particular types of things are glossed, the term *viśeṣa* is placed in compound after a word referring to a wider class of things to make it clear that the word being glossed does not apply to all members of that wider class.” It can also simply mean “kind or variety of” (Ibid., 196) but the stronger sense is more germane in the present case. While *ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ* is presented as a Yogacāra *gotra* concept by Tibetan thinkers such as Karma phrin las (1456–1539), Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and Go rams pa (1429–1489) in the overviews of Indo-Tibetan *tathāgatagarbha/gotra* theories given in their AS commentaries, the Jo nang scholar Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal (1285–1379) identifies it as a Sautrāntika term signifying the ability to eliminate obscurations. See Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 465.

In order to connect this term with his robust interpretation of buddha nature, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains in his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*) that the predicate “distinctive” in the locution “distinct set of six cognitive domains” refers to a transcendent mode of cognition—the “all-ground wisdom” (*kun gzhi ye shes*) [as opposed to all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*)]—that is “distinct from” the six conditioned cognitive domains of sentient beings. MKsb vol. 15, 1005<sub>2-3</sub>: “The meaning of the term “distinct set of six cognitive domains” is not explained as a being a special feature (*khyad chos*) of the “six cognitive domains” — i.e., the object having the special feature (*khyad gzhi*)—because it is explained as something that is distinct from (*khyad par gyi chos shig*), which is to say, “other than,” the six cognitive domains of sentient beings. This has also been designated as the “all-ground wisdom” (*kun gzhi'i ye shes*).” *skye mched drug gi khyad par ba'i don | khyad gzhi skye mched drug gi khyad chos su bshad pa min te | sems can gyi skye mched drug las gzhan du gyur pa'i khyad par gyi chos shig la bshad pa'i phyir dang | 'di nyid la kun gzhi'i ye shes su'ang tha snyad mdzad pa yin no ||* This interpretation is followed by Mi bskyod rdo rje's disciple Zhva dmar V Dkon mchog yan lag (1424–1482) who explains in one of his three *Zab mo nang don* commentaries that ““distinct set of six cognitive domains” refers to six uncorrupted sense fields (*zag pa med pa skye mched*) that are over and above the six sense fields of sentient beings”. *Zab mo nang don g tong thun rab gsal nyi ma'i snying po*, RDsb 294<sub>1-2</sub>: ...*skye mched drug po'i steng du zag pa med pa'i skye mched drug dang shin tu 'dra ba'i skal mnyam gyi rgyu yod pa rnam bstan no |*

realms, as the formations [predispositions] for their emergence; and [2] what is based on it by way of [karmic] ripening as the three [kinds of] suffering of the three realms and so forth. [3] The progressive awakening (*rim gyis sad pa*) of latent tendencies of studying, thinking and meditating and so on as described in terms of the uncorrupted element that is precisely the producer and produced of *nirvāṇa*.

Hence, there are some for whom this *ālaya*, which is presented as the basis for *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* functions [also] as the foundation of *mahāmudrā*. [But] this was not the intent of the Lord of Sages. In Mantra[yāna], the Mahāmudrā, the Tathāgatagarbha of the final turning, and the Prajñāpāramitā of the middle turning and so on are special methods of revealing the single intent. Among these, the *prajñāpāramitā* nature is not a foundation for anything belonging to *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa* because the whole tangle of discursive elaborations such as ‘*saṃsāra*’ and ‘*nirvāṇa*’ has always been independent of this nature.<sup>662</sup>

A concept of seminal importance in the author’s treatment of the non-tantric Mahāyāna analysis of *ālayavijñāna* is the uncorrupted spiritual element (*anāsravadhātu*) which is said to function as a cause of *nirvāṇa*: “being the extraordinary distinct set of six cognitive domains (*ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣa*) which functions as the basis of the unfolded potential (*paripuṣṭagotra*) and the rest, it is described as the natural outflow (*niṣyanda*) of *dharmakāya*.” Here he alludes to a famous passage from *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS) 1.45–48 that accounts for how *dharmakāya* can operate through the *ālayavijñāna* in the form of latent tendencies for studying (*śrūta-vāsana*) and other propensities for spiritual awakening while at the same time remaining apart from it and even functioning as its antidote. Since the purpose of the MS account was to explain the difference between the supramundane mind and *ālayavijñāna*, it provided valuable scriptural support for Rang byung rdo rje’s articulation of the differentiation model.<sup>663</sup> Mi

<sup>662</sup> *Dgongs gcig grub mtha’i spyi ching*, MKsb vol. 4, 256–265: *phyag rgya che des ’khor ’das kun || rten byed min tshul bshad par bya || theg chen lugs la kun gzhi yi || rnam par bzhag pa ’di lta ste || rnam smin sa bon zag med khams || gsum du bshad la dang po gnyis || ’khor ba’i rten gzhi byed par gsungs || gsum pa mya ngan ’das kyi rgyu || rgyas ’gyur rigs sogs rten byed pa’i || skye mched drug po mthun mong ba || min pa’i khyad par chos sku yi || rgyu mthun nyid du gsungs pa yin || kun gzhis ’khor ba rten tshul yang || kun ’byung ’du byed khams gang gi || sa bon tshul gyis brten pa yin || khams gsum sdug bsngal gsum sogs kyi || rnam smin tshul gyis brten pa yin || thos bsam sgom pa la sogs pas || bag chags rim gyis sad pa ni || zag med khams la mya ngan ’das || bskyed bya skyed byed nyid du bstan || des na ’khor ’das brten pa yi || rnam gzhas kun gzhi nyid la gyis || phyag chen rten gzhi byed pa sogs || thub pa’i dbang po’i dgongs pa min || sngags su phyag rgya chen po dang || ’khor lo tha ma’i gshegs snying dang || ’khor lo bar par sher phyin sogs || dgongs gcig ston tshul khyad par yin || de las rang bzhin sher phyin gyis || ’khor ’das gang yang mi brten te || ’khor ’das la sogs spros tshogs kun || rang bzhin gdod nas dben phyir ro ||*

<sup>663</sup> See Mathes 2008, 58–60. Mathes quotes (60) Rang byung rdo rje’s commentary to MS 1.45–48 in his *Zab mo nang don rang ’grel*: “If some think that the unfolded potential has newly arisen, it is not so. The naturally present potential (*rang bzhin gnas pa’i rigs : prakṛtiṣṭagotra*) is the *dharmadhātu*. As for the arrangement of the eight [factors] such as the *ālayavijñāna* therein, they have been implanted by and are distinguished by false imaginings. Likewise, the stainless true essence of the eightfold ensemble [of consciousness] exists as the nature

bskyod rdo rje similarly uses the key points of the MS passage to substantiate the Mantrayāna view that *mahāmudrā*, the *tathāgatagarbha* of the final turning, and *prajñāpāramitā* of the middle turning, cannot be foundations of *saṃsāra* nor *nirvāṇa* because “the whole tangle of discursive elaborations such as ‘*saṃsāra*’ and ‘*nirvāṇa*’ has always been independent of this nature.”

The *inclusion* view emphasizing the pervasion of the conditioned by the unconditioned is outlined in the author’s late *Sku gsum ngo sprod* commentary where he seeks to clarify the tantric view of buddha nature as the common ground (*gzhi*) of all phenomena that comprises both the impure and pure all-grounds (*dag pa ma dag pa’i kun gzhi*). In response to the question as to why sentient beings are said to derive from buddha nature<sup>664</sup>, the Karma pa explains how it is necessary to recognize that buddha nature, understood in the sense of *dharmadhātu*, is the *de facto* common ground of all phenomena—bondage and freedom, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the innate and adventitious, the two truths. However, he warns against viewing this ground as an established basis (*gzhi grub*), which would make it indistinguishable from the self (*ātman*) of Brahmanical speculation: “Even if the ground of all phenomena prevails all-pervadingly and indivisibly in buddhas and sentient beings, there is no need to [make it] an established basis because if there were something established in this way, the fallacy would absurdly follow that this factor and all persons individually endowed with it would be a self and [something] truly established.”<sup>665</sup>

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(*rang bzhin*) of the four wisdoms. In that regard, thanks to the virtuous qualities that have been implanted [in the mind] by proper thought and that are based on the awakening of the buddhas, previous stains are destroyed, and the delusion of the eightfold ensemble [of consciousness] ceases to exist. This, then, has been called the “wisdom of the transformation of the basis.” ...Stainlessness [of mind] is regarded as wisdom, and the [state of ] being mingled with stains [is regarded] as consciousness.” The translation has been altered slightly only for the sake of consistency.

<sup>664</sup> He does not specify a source of this view but it is worth noting that the *Guhyagarbhatantra* (GGT II.15) states “E ma ho! From the \**sugatagarbha* [comes] the manifestation one’s own divisive thoughts and karma.” *e ma’o bde gshegs snying po las || rang gi rnam rtog las kyi sprul ||* See critical edition in Dorje 1987: 188. Interestingly, a similar view is presented in an early Rdzogs chen Sems sde tantra entitled *Byang sems bde ba’i myu gu* (with the near homophone *kyis ’khrul* instead of *kyi sprul*): “From the \**sugatagarbha* [present in] all things, there is error due to divisive thoughts and karma”. *thams cad bde gshegs snying po las || rnam rtog las kyi ’khrul pa la ||* See *Rnying ma rgyud ’bum* Tk vol. 1, 449<sub>7</sub> and Tb vol. 1, 630<sub>6</sub>.

<sup>665</sup> See *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 21, 153<sub>4-5</sub>: “[*Query*:] If the buddha nature is *not* the *ālayavijñāna*, which is of the essence of the mind of adventitious stains, then why has it been described in that way? [*Reply*:] Since that [buddha nature] is the root of *all* phenomena, including the pure and impure all-grounds etc., it is not a contradiction to explain it in that way.” *’o na bde gshegs snying po de glo bur dri ma’i sems kyi ngo bo’i kun gzhi rnam shes ma yin na der brjod pa ci zhe na | ’di la dag pa ma dag pa’i kun gzhi sogs kyi chos thams cad kyi rtsa ba yin pas der brjod pa mi ’gal te |* Mi bskyod rdo rje argues that the stable continuity (*rgyun brtan pa*) of the *ālayavijñāna* which continues up to the ninth bodhisattva level differs from the unchanging buddha nature which is not a stable continuity that can be considered momentary in the sense of being newly produced by causes and conditions. Rather it is momentary in the sense of not being newly produced by causes but remaining just as it is. Thus, despite its all-pervading, ever-prevailing character, it is not a metaphysical entity like the Brahmanical *Ātman*. As he explains (153<sub>1-4</sub>): “This [buddha nature] was posited as the ground of

Viewed in light of one another, the exclusion and inclusion accounts of the relationship between buddha nature and the *ālayavijñāna* commonly emphasize the abiding and fundamental nature of the former and contingent and adventitious nature of the latter. In this sense, they can be seen as two aspects of the differentiation model, the former emphasizing the ‘sublime otherness’ (*gzhan mchog*) of buddha nature and *mahāmudrā*, the latter emphasizing its ‘pervasiveness’ in all sentient beings. Considered in either light, the shared emphasis on the unreality of *ālayavijñāna* can be seen to have significant soteriological implications: for, it is only with the dissolution of the conditioned and conditioning all-ground that nondual wisdom which is free from all elaboration can manifest. As is also detectable in the case of Rnying ma hermeneutics of the ground (*gzhi*) and all-ground (*kun gzhi*)<sup>666</sup>, the Karma Bka’ brgyud characterization of the *ālayavijñāna* as contingent and superfluous fits in with a soteriology dedicated to elucidating the way to its complete elimination, the goal of Buddhist praxis. But far from providing justification for its exclusion from the arena of epistemology, this analysis instead validates its consideration as a legitimate object of investigation—if only as an object of refutation (*dgag bya*) on the conventional level—on the same grounds that the conventional itself is accorded this status.

Indeed, Mi bskyod rdo rje did not hesitate, in various doctrinal contexts, to employ the Yogācāra-Cittamātra model of mind and its eightfold consciousness scheme to elaborate the conditions of possibility of delusion and liberation. It may be concluded from the foregoing passages that the Eighth Karma pa does not reject the Yogācāra-Cittamātra model of mind per se but only its reification of mind into a real entity (*dnegos po*), and its parallel proclivity to conflate the constitutive sources of delusion and awakening, consciousness and wisdom. It here becomes evident why distinctions between pure and impure substrates or grounds (*ālaya* : *kun gzhi*)—between the all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) and all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*), for example—assume the importance that they do in the author’s soteriology. It is important to bear in mind, however, that such distinctions are regarded as facets of a single ground, a unitary continuum or expanse of human reality which remains

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all phenomena comprising bondage and freedom, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the innate and adventitious, and the two truths, on account of it steadily continuing, by neither increasing or decreasing, from sentient being up to buddha. It was declared to be momentary by virtue of its not being newly produced by causes from beginningless time to the present, but this does not mean that it is momentary in the conventional sense of originating through causes and conditions. Even if the ground of all phenomena prevails all-pervadingly and indivisibly in buddhas and sentient beings, there is no need to [make it] an established basis because if there were something established in this way, the fallacy would absurdly follow that this factor and all persons individually endowed with it are selves and truly established.” ...*sems can nas sangs rgyas kyi bar bri gang med pas rgyun brtan pa’i phyir ’ching grol ’khor ’das gnyug ma glo bur bden gnyis kyi chos thams cad kyi gzhi yang ’di nyid ’jog la ’di thog ma med pa nas ’ongs pa las gsar du rgyus ma skyed pas skad gcig ma yin par gsungs kyang tha snyad du rgyu rkyen gyis skyes pa’i skad gcig ma yin pa’i don ni ma yin la | ’o na chos thams cad kyi gzhi sangs rgyas dang sems can ris med pa’i kun khyab tu bzhuks na’ang gzhi grub dgos pa ni ma yin te | de ltar grub pa’i chos shig yod na chos de dang de gang la ldan pa’i gang zag thams cad bdag dang bden grub par thal ba’i skyon du ’gyur ro ||*

<sup>666</sup> See Higgins 2013.

unfixed (*apraṭiṣṭhāna*) or indeterminable in the dual sense of having no fixed characteristics in itself and also no pre-established bedrock or deeper foundation on which it depends.<sup>667</sup>

For the Karma pa, a disclosive path hermeneutic based on robust distinctions opens up a radically affirmative approach to human reality that regards the path of awakening as the progressive revelation of authentic modes of being and awareness that otherwise remain obscured by cognitive and affective distortions. Central to Tathāgatagarbha, Vajrayāna, and Mahāmudrā doctrines is the idea that beings have ‘hidden depths’ awaiting discovery—variously characterized as an “obscured buddha nature” in Tathāgatagarbha discourses, an underlying “causal continuum” (*rgyu rgyud*) in the tantras, or the ever-present though strangely elusive natural or “ordinary awareness” (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in Siddha Mahāmudrā works. Such innatist ideas carried with them the soteriological implication that there is something important to be discovered through spiritual exercises such as study, thinking and meditation which cannot be pre-established in advance. It was in this vein that Mi bskyod rdo rje and other Mahāmudrā exegetes deployed this cluster of innatist ideas in developing powerful soteriological paradigms to account for the disclosive nature of Mahāmudrā doctrine and to underscore its continuity with Indian Tathāgatagarbha and Vajrayāna antecedents.

All this notwithstanding, it is necessary to reconcile the Eighth Karma pa’s emphatic support for the positive appraisal of ultimate reality affirmed in these traditions with his explicit endorsement of the antifoundationalist currents of Madhyamaka thought, such as we have gleaned from his approval of Candrakīrti’s rejection of *ālayavijñāna* from the standpoint of the ultimate. In addition to affiliating himself with the so-called \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka tradition, which many Tibetans associated with Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, Buddhapālita, and Śāntideva, he was also partisan to the Apraṭiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka tradition, particularly as it was codified by Maitrīpa and a number of other relatively late (circa 11<sup>th</sup> century) Indian Mantrayāna-Madhyamaka masters. Both traditions, despite the widely varying opinions about how they were historically or doctrinally related to one another<sup>668</sup>, shared at the very least the central premise that a correct discernment of emptiness destroys all superimpositions and leaves standing no ontological or epistemic foundation or real entity (*dnegos po : vastu*)—be it physical, mental or supernatural—that can withstand critical assessment.

## RECONCILING AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

The Eighth Karma pa’s concern to strike a balance between the disclosive Mantrayāna, Mahāmudrā and Tathāgatagarbha discourses and antifoundationalist Madhyamaka discourses

<sup>667</sup> As noted in the introduction, these are the two main features of the Apraṭiṣṭhāna viewpoint which Mi bskyod rdo rje and several other post-classical Bka’ bryud exegetes advocated.

<sup>668</sup> Some of their diverse views are discussed in the introduction.

by establishing appropriate contexts for their contrasting affirmative and negative modes of discourse proves to be an indispensable key to understanding the thrust of his thinking on a wide range of Buddhist soteriological and philosophical issues. Applying a hermeneutic that we have described as *soteriological contextualism* to the interpretation of Buddhist texts and doctrines allowed the Eighth Karma pa to move freely between different levels of discourse—conventional and ultimate, negating and affirming. In this regard, he could on the one hand advocate the use of robust distinctions within the context of conventional linguistic practices pertaining to the Buddhist path, yet on the other hand deny them any ontological status within the context of ascertaining the ultimate.

To clarify these contrasting perspectives, the Karma pa followed the lead of the Upper 'Brug pa founder Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258) in making a distinction between the negating orientation (*dgag phyogs*) of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka tradition and the affirming orientation (*sgrub phyogs*) of Saraha's Siddha tradition.<sup>669</sup> These orientations relate both to levels of discourse and modes of cognition, the negative (apophatic) style consisting in a de-reifying application of ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*), and the positive (cataphatic) style evoking primordial (prediscursive) modes of knowing (*ye shes*).<sup>670</sup> In his short text entitled *On Dispelling the Error of Explaining Adventitious Stains as Natural Awareness*, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains that these negative and affirmative styles capture the prediscursive emptiness and unceasing dynamism that are both fundamental to buddhas and sentient beings, but adds that both are oppositional constructs of dualistic cognition that find no place within nondual direct perception:

It is said that the instructions of Nāgārjuna<sup>671</sup> were taught from a negating orientation (*bkag phyogs*) whereas those by Saraha were taught from an affirming

<sup>669</sup> For an adaptation of these western philosophical-theological terms to the description of the two currents of Buddhist thought that Schmithausen has distinguished as “positive-mystical” and “negative-intellectualist”, see Seyfort Ruegg 1989, 8 et passim.

<sup>670</sup> The sense in which wisdom is primordial (*gdod ma'i ye shes*) or prediscursive is explained in the author's *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*, MKsb vol. 15, 1032<sub>1-4</sub>: “In short, [the Prajñāpāramitā] explains that all phenomena are only the concomitants of mere names. Thus the mind that evaluates all phenomena in terms of conventional characteristics and so on ad infinitum is led clearly to the ultimate characteristics of all phenomena. Thus, the nature of all phenomena is primordial wisdom (*gdod ma'i ye shes*). That is free from all limitations and discursive elaborations... Since what is simply without nature is precisely the *tathāgata* wisdom itself, it is described as nondual.” *mdor na chos thams cad ming tsam gyi rjes su 'gro ba 'ga' zhig bshad do | des na chos thams cad kun rdzob pa'i mtshan nyid sogs blo thug med kyis gzhal ba ni chos thams cad kyi don dam pa'i mtshan nyid gsal bar 'dren pa'o | des na chos thams cad kyi rang bzhin ni gdod ma'i ye shes nyid yin no | de ni mtha' dang spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'o |... rang bzhin med pa nyid gang yin pa ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes nyid yin pas | gnyis med du smra ba...*

<sup>671</sup> Like many Tibetan scholars, Mi bskyod rdo rje identifies Nāgārjuna as the foremost disciple of Saraha and accepts that he is the same as the author of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK). This identification is widely rejected by Buddhist scholars. It should also be noted that, although the above passage highlights Nāgārjuna's negative orientation, Tibetans also generally accepted that Nāgārjuna was the author of both a reasoning corpus

orientation (*sgrub phyogs*). So it was taught by Bhu dra ba [Rgod tshang pa]<sup>672</sup>. [Query:] What is the meaning which bridges these [approaches]? [Reply:] The abiding condition of all buddhas and sentient beings is empty in essence, luminous in nature and unimpeded in aspects.<sup>673</sup> Though these are correlated in their mode of arising, the awareness that is vitiated by subject and object is described as consciousness (*rnam shes*), awareness that is freed of subject and object as omniscience (*rnam mkhyen*), and the means of becoming free from subject and object as the path knowledge (*lam shes*). In this way, it is precisely the non-delusion of nonconceptual direct perception based on means of correctly<sup>674</sup> seeing the conventional that is described as meditation.<sup>675</sup>

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(*rigs tshogs*) that employed the negative (or apophatic) style (e.g., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) and a hymnic corpus (*bstod tshogs*) that employed the affirmative (cataphatic) style (e.g., *Dharmadhātustava*). On these collections, see Seyfort Ruegg 1971 and 1981, 8 ff. and 31–32. On the Tibetan identification of the reasoning corpus with the *Rang stong* tradition and the hymnic corpus with the *Gzhan stong* tradition, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 77. We may note that Maitrīpa’s combination of Mahāmudrā and Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka views resulted in a synthesis whereby the negation of reifications gives way to an affirmation of nondual luminous mind.

<sup>672</sup> This Bhu dra ba can be identified with Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258), founder of the Upper ‘Brug pa Bka’ brgyud tradition, on the basis of a parallel passage in Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 14<sub>7–10</sub>: “According to the great Rgod tshang pa, father and sons [especially his successor Yang dgon pa], ‘the initiators of this Mahāmudrā teaching are both the Great Brahmin [Saraha] and Nāgārjuna. The Great Brahmin taught from an affirmative orientation and Lord Nāgārjuna taught from a negative orientation.’”  
*rgyal bar god tshang pa chen po yab sras kyis kyang | phyag rgya chen po’i chos ’di mgo ’don mkhan bram ze chen po dang | klu sgrub gnyis yin | bram ze chen pos phyag rgya chen po sgrub phyogs nas bstan | mgon po klus dgag phyogs nas bstan pa yin zhes gsungs so ||*

<sup>673</sup> These three aspects are described, with slight variation, both in Rnying ma Rdzogs chen and Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā sources. For Rang byung rdo rje’s account, see *Zab mo nang gi don* I.7, RDSb vol. 7, 311<sub>1–2</sub>. While Bka’ brgyud texts generally describe the third aspect of the ground (*gzhi*), abiding condition (*gnas lugs*), or wisdom (*ye shes*) as unimpeded characteristics (*mtshan nyid*) or aspects (*rnam pa*), Rdzogs chen texts describe it as unimpeded responsiveness (*thugs rje*), a scheme adopted by Karma phrin las. Rdzogs chen texts also link the essence and nature aspects of the ground not only with emptiness and luminosity but also with original purity (*ka dag*) and spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*). For sources and details concerning these three aspects of the Rdzogs chen ground, see Higgins 2013, especially 211–15.

<sup>674</sup> MKsb has *yang dag pa’i sgo* (“accurate means/gates”); Rnal ’byor rgyud kyi *rnam bshad sogs* ed. of this text (hereafter MKng) has *yangs pa’i sgo* (“vast means/gates”).

<sup>675</sup> *Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa’i nor pa spang ba*, MKsb vol. 15, 1074<sub>5</sub>–1075<sub>2</sub>: *klu sgrub kyis<sup>a</sup> gdams pa ’di bkag phyogs nas bstan la | sa ra ha nyid kyis<sup>b</sup> ni sgrub phyogs nas bstan zhes bla ma bhu dra<sup>c</sup> bas gsungs pa ltar ro | de dag gi nye ba’i don gang zhe na | sangs rgyas dang sems can thams cad kyi gnas lugs ngo bo stong | rang bzhin ’od gsal<sup>d</sup> | rnam pa ’gag tu<sup>e</sup> med | ’char lugs la ’dra’ang | gzung ’dzin gyis bsnyad pa’i shes pa la rnam shes dang | gzung ’dzin dang bral ba’i shes pa la rnam mkhyen dang | gzung ’dzin dang bral ba’i thabs la lam shes su bstan la | de ltar kun rdzob kyi mthong ba yang dag pa’i<sup>g</sup> sgo’i shes pa mngon sum rtog bral gyi<sup>h</sup> ma ’khrul pa’i ’di nyid sgom<sup>i</sup> par gsungs ste | ...<sup>a</sup>MKng: kyi<sup>b</sup>MKng: kyi<sup>c</sup> MKsb: tra<sup>d</sup>M MKsb ’od gsal<sup>e</sup>MKsb om. tu<sup>f</sup>MKsb addit. du om. | (I follow MKng to retain standard distinction between *gnas lugs* and *’char lugs*)<sup>g</sup> MKng *yangs pa’i*<sup>h</sup>MKng *gyis*<sup>i</sup>MKsb *ba*<sup>j</sup>MKsb *bsgom**



To put it simply, the *via negativa* which dispels reifications of subject and object allows the *via positiva* of nondual non-reifying perception of things as they are to disclose itself, but the resulting nondual knowledge of things as they are is without elaboration and thus transcends both negative and positive determinations.

The distinction between these negative and affirmative orientations was used by the modern-day Rnying ma and Karma Bka' brgyud master 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi rgyal mtshan (b. 19<sup>th</sup> c.) in the colophon he appended to Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary to characterize the Eighth Karma pa's distinctive blending of Rang stong and Gzhan stong perspectives in this early text:

It is indeed well-known to all that this extensive commentary by the Eighth Karma pa elucidates [the text] in line with the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka. From the perspective of an affirming orientation, it is also possible to [frame it] like this. However, from the perspective of a negating orientation, not only does [the commentary] not contradict the Rang stong, but it even accords with it in that it comes down to the same essential point of view.<sup>676</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje's intentional juxtaposition of these contrasting discursive styles in order to underscore their reciprocal determination helps to explain the shifting and at times seemingly irreconcilable perspectives that he adopts on a wide range of philosophical and soteriological issues, from buddha nature, to the nature of mind, from the two truths to two modes of emptiness (*rang stong* and *gzhan stong*). He does so on the understanding that the deep chasms between negation and affirmation that run through the entire landscape of Buddhist thought and discourse are best viewed as complementary rather than contradictory.

The Eighth Karma pa's obvious reluctance to subscribe to either extremity on the affirming-negating spectrum often makes it difficult to unequivocally pinpoint a single representative position that he consistently maintains on any given topic. At the same time, his repeated attempts to negotiate a balance between the negative and positive currents attest to his mastery not only of *dialogical thinking*, characterized by the consideration and careful weighing of multiple points of view, but also *dialectical thinking*, which emphasizes the coordination and reconciliation of opposing perspectives.<sup>677</sup> Within the author's philosophical

<sup>676</sup> MKsb vol. 13, 682<sub>5-6</sub>: *karma pa brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rjes kyang rgyas 'grel 'di nyid gzhan stong dbu ma ltar bkral ba yin ces kun la grags mod | sgrub phyogs kyi cha nas de ltar yin du'ang rung zhing | 'on kyang dgag phyogs kyi cha nas rang stong dang 'gal ba med pa tsam du ma zad lta ba'i gnad gcig tu 'bab pa'i mthun phyogs su bzung ste* |... See Brunnhölzl 2010, 74. This author also (on 74–75) refers to the contemporary Mkhan po Skyo brag Dam chos zla ba's (b. 20<sup>th</sup> c.) provocative characterization of Mi bskyod rdo rje's many-sided doxographical viewpoint in the AS commentary as “\*Prāsaṅgika-Gzhan stong Great Madhyamaka” (*thal 'gyur gzhan stong dbu ma chen po*).

<sup>677</sup> Sternberg, Jarvin and Reznitskaya 2008, 47.

writings, the positive and negative idioms he employs are perhaps best regarded as shifting points of orientation rather than one-sided ‘either/or’ positions. They indicate the interpretive parameters within and between which his thinking moves as it seeks a middle course between the kinds of strong ontological commitments that these positions had tended to become associated with in the Tibetan Buddhist intellectual world of his time.

Before proceeding with a more systematic examination of the author’s treatment of the central doctrines of buddha nature, and the nature of reality, mind and the soteriological roles of conceptual and nonconceptual awareness, it may be useful to provide a brief sketch of his life and works, the primary influences that shaped them, and the prominent role he played in the spirited culture of dialogue and debate that defined the post-classical era.

### LIFE, WRITINGS AND INFLUENCES

The recently published twenty-six volume edition of Mi bskyod rdo rje’s collected writings (*gsung ’bum*) reveals a prolific author and prodigious philosopher who critically engaged with many of the leading Tibetan Buddhist thinkers of his time on a wide range of philosophical and soteriological issues.<sup>678</sup> Rising early to prominence in his diverse roles as a Buddhist philosopher, a Karma Bka’ brgyud hierarch, and a spiritual preceptor, Mi bskyod rdo rje’s short life exemplified many of the cultural currents that defined his age: the consolidation of sectarian identities around increasingly powerful monastic institutions sponsored by aristocratic clans, the synthesis and systematization of their representative doctrines, and the vigorous culture of intellectual exchange and intersectarian debate that would soon give way to the hardening of sectarian lines and entrenchment in representative positions that has continued down to the present day. The portrait of the Eighth Karma pa we can assemble from biographical and historical sources as well as his own varied *Instructions* (*man ngag*), *Replies to Questions* (*dris lan*), and *Autobiographies* (*rang [gi] rnam [thar]*)<sup>679</sup> is that of a socially-engaged teacher who was constantly on the move, expounding Buddhist teachings, philosophical clarifications, and spiritual counsel to people from many traditions and walks of life. From his many polemical writings and the responses they provoked, we form the picture of a formidable and often uncompromising opponent of other scholars’ views<sup>680</sup> who did not hesitate to tackle the most powerful adversaries or the thorniest issues.

<sup>678</sup> For a well-documented biography of the eighth Karma pa based on careful analysis of a wide range of primary historical and biographical sources including nine autobiographical works (*rang rnam*), five biographies (*rnam thar*) by his immediate disciples, and three biographies by later scholars, see Rheingans 2008, especially 77–148. Primary sources consulted for the present biographical overview are Mi bskyod rdo rje’s autobiographical *Mi bskyod rdo rje’i spyad pa’i rabs*, in MKsb vol. 1, 350–87 and Gtsug lag phreng ba’s lengthy entry for him in *Mkhas pa ’i dga ’ston*, vol. 2, 1206–1334.

<sup>679</sup> For a synoptic overview of Mi bskyod rdo rje’s nine extant autobiographies, see Rheingans 2008, 82–86.

<sup>680</sup> See for example Williams 1983, Seyfort Rugg 1988 and Broido 1985.

Both in the scope and scrupulousness of his critical engagements, he must surely rank among the most outstanding, and also polemically engaged, thinkers in the history of Buddhist thought.

Mi bskyod rdo rje was born in 1507 in what is today the Chab mdo prefecture of Eastern Tibet in the vicinity of the Ngom chu river. Tradition relates that after only seven days he was recognized as the reincarnation of the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho by Si tu II Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1450–1512).<sup>681</sup> A long and bitter dispute soon ensued over Mi bskyod rdo rje's legitimacy as a reincarnation and heir to the position of Eighth Karma pa since another prospect, the son of a Bla ma A mdo ba in Kong po Brags gsum (west of Lhasa), had also been proposed as a rival candidate for the title.<sup>682</sup> The dispute dragged on for five years (1508–1513), with each side pleading its case, and even going so far as to ply prospective supporters with beer and food. Rheingans observes the role that the patronage of aristocratic clans played both in this dispute and its final outcome:

Sources indicate the rival candidate's party had the political support of the Phag-mo-gru-pa regents (Ngag dbang bKra shis grags pa 1488–1564) and their priests (*yon mchod*), the rGyal-tshab Rin-po-che and mTshur-phu monks, and what is more, the powerful Rin-spungs-pa General, Don-yod-rdo-rje. Thus, the most powerful and wealthy patrons along with the encampment lamas and monks had become partial to the western candidate.<sup>683</sup>

Rheingans also indicates that the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa's (1453–1524) close ties with both the Phag mo gru and Rin spungs pa clans undoubtedly helped secure the victory of Mi bskyod rdo rje as the Eighth Karma pa. Whatever the reasons behind his victory, Mi bskyod rdo rje quickly rose to the challenge, becoming by early adulthood among the most learned and prolific masters in Tibet. It was under his competent and charismatic leadership that the Karma kam tshang tradition's scholastic and philosophical activities were brought to a summit of excellence never equaled before or since.

Mi bskyod rdo rje lived during a time of increasing intersectarian pressures as hierarchs of the ascendant Tibetan Buddhist orders, particularly the Dge lugs pa, Sa skya and the

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<sup>681</sup> These dates are provisional. Hugh Richardson 1980 (377) gives dates for Situ II as 1450–1497 which would make this masters' recognition of the Eighth Karma pa anachronistic. More plausible is the dating of A khu A khra, student and biographer of Mi bskyod rdo rje, who states that Karma Situ (II) died in 1512. The Karma pa is said to have recognized his rebirth (Si tu III) in 1516. For a discussion of the confusion surrounding the dates of the Second and Third Si tu pas, see Rheingans 2008, 96–97 and n. 7.

<sup>682</sup> See Rheingans, 110–11.

<sup>683</sup> Rheingans 2008, 100. (We have made the following corrections in this passage: rGyal-tshab for rGal-tshab and mTshur-phu for mTshur-pu.)

Karma and 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud sects, vied for patronage by powerful Tibetan aristocratic clans<sup>684</sup> to fill the power vacuum left by the final defeat of the Mongol-Chinese Yuan dynasty—whose rulers had been generous patrons of the Karma kaṃ tshang—by the Ming dynasty in 1381.<sup>685</sup> Escalating political tensions and shifting sectarian affiliations undoubtedly exerted a ratchet effect on the polemics of this era as leading scholars from the Bka' brgyud traditions, most notably Mi bskyod rdo rje and the 'Brug pa hierarch Padma dkar po (1527–1592), sought to defend their principal teachings and teachers from charges of philosophical incoherence and contamination by non-Indian views, especially those leveled by Dge lugs pa and Sa skya scholars.

Whatever political-sociological factors may have shaped the substance and tone of the eighth Karma pa's criticisms, it is arguably important not to make too much of them. Aside from the dubiousness of trying to divine hidden political-sociological agendas behind

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<sup>684</sup> The period from 1354 to 1642 is sometimes described as the time of the “three major hegemonies” in reference to the power held by three successive Tibetan clans over central Tibet (Dbus and Gtsang): the Phag mo gru pa (1354–1478), the Rin spungs pa (1478–1565) and the Gtsang pa (1565–1642). The decades preceding Mi bskyod rdo rje's birth saw increasing rivalry between the Phag mo gru pas of Dbus and the Rin spungs pa of Gtsang and shifting power alliances between religious schools and clans. The eighth Karma pa's successors, Zhva dmar IV Chos grags ye shes and Karma pa VII Chos grags rgya mtsho enjoyed unprecedented honour and support from the Rin spungs clan. Increasing clashes between the Rin spungs pa and Dge lugs pas heightened tensions between the latter and the Bka' brgyud hierarchs, to the point that the Seventh Karma pa, during a sojourn in Lhasa vicinity, narrowly escaped death at the hands of Dge lugs pa monks by fleeing to the Jo khang temple. For details of this still poorly documented era of religious-political history, see Shakabpa 1967, 73–91; Jackson, D. 1989 and Rheingans 2008, 49–56.

<sup>685</sup> See Leonard van der Kuijp's research (Van der Kuijp 2004) on the relations of mutual benefit that existed between the Karma bka' brgyud schools and their financial patrons at the Mongol court of the Yuan dynasty (Yuan period: 1276–1368). These royal patrons generally viewed the patronage of Buddhist institutions and their works as means of generating merit and thereby “ensuring the stability and the longevity of the reign of the emperor and the imperial family” (ibid., 4) and the prosperity of the empire as a whole. As Van der Kuijp notes, “[t]he support took on a variety of shapes, but it did ultimately set into motion an unprecedented transfer of imperial wealth to Tibet proper that had many short and long-term consequences, from the construction of new monasteries and, concomitant with the increase in the monastic population, the institution of new monastic curricula, to an increase in book-production and things artistic, and the rise of a new aristocratic class.” (ibid., 4) Among the teachings and rites given by Karma Bka' brgyud hierarchs in exchange for imperial donations, those concerned with the *Kālacakra* tantra were most favoured. As mentioned in the introduction, Sperling notes that a similar donor-patron pattern already existed between the earliest Karma Bka' brgyud hierarchs and the Tangut court in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. On Karma pa IV Rol pa'i rdo rje's (1340–1383) relation to the Mongol court, see Sperling 2004; for the Karma pa V De bzhin gshegs pa's relation to Ming China, see Sperling 1980 and Schuh 1976. On the Mongol period in general see Petech 1990, Schuh 1986, and Everding 2002. It seems that relations between Karma Bka' brgyud hierarchs and the ruling foreign power continued to a limited extent in Mi bskyod rdo rje's time judging from an exchange of letters between him and the Ming emperor Wu Tsung. Richardson 1980 translates a letter sent to invite Mi bskyod rdo rje to the court of the Chinese emperor Wu-tsung “who after a hostile start, gradually became devoted to Buddhism and very indulgent towards Tibetan lamas.” Biographical sources report that the Karma pa declined the invitation on account of inauspicious omens foretelling the emperor's death, which did indeed occur shortly afterwards. See Richardson 1980.

authorial statements<sup>686</sup>, there are good reasons for supposing that Mi bskyod rdo rje's criticisms of rival views turned on more than sectarian rivalries. One consideration that weighs against overestimating the sectarian influence is that some of Mi bskyod rdo rje's chief polemical targets, 'Gos Lo tsā ba and Shākya mchog ldan in particular, had enjoyed close ties with the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition and were both disciples and teachers of some of its leading representatives. 'Gos Lo tsā ba counted among his many teachers three Karma Bka' brgyud hierarchs: Zhwa dmar II Mkha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405), Karma pa V De bzhin gshegs pa (1384–1415), and Zhwa dmar III Chos dpal ye shes (1406–1452). 'Gos lo was, in turn, one of the teachers of Mi bskyod rdo rje's immediate predecessor in the Karma pa reincarnation lineage, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506). Chos grags rgya mtsho, in his turn, became one of Shākya mchog ldan's most important teachers and was credited with converting him to the Karma Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā view, as reflected in three Mahāmudrā works Shākya mchog ldan composed late in his prolific career.<sup>687</sup> Many of the disciples of these influential Bka' brgyud masters were contemporaries of the Eighth Karma pa and he is known to have responded to the questions of Shākya mchog ldan's above-mentioned disciple Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba (a.k.a. Rdo rje rgyal mtshan, b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.).

In trying to understand some of the precipitating conditions behind the frequent and often heated intersectarian exchanges that took place during the post-classical era, it is important to acknowledge that a primary goal of Buddhist polemicism was to establish correct views about the nature and means of goal-realization and repudiate wrong ones by means of traditionally-sanctioned canons of reasoning and argumentation. Other objectives with particular relevance to Madhyamaka polemics were the avoidance of extremes of existence and nonexistence and of one-sided over-evaluations or deprecations of views. Viewed in light of these widely shared concerns, it may be concluded that Mi bskyod rdo rje's doctrinal criticisms were mainly intended, as were many others in the Tibetan post-classical intellectual world, to be therapeutic, whatever other ulterior purposes they may have served. As a rule, Tibetan Buddhist scholars regarded wrong views as having corrosive effects on the spiritual life that reverberated well beyond theoretical sphere. In a culture that regarded views as

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<sup>686</sup> One need not subscribe to the “intentional fallacy”—the view, famously presented by William Wimsat and Monroe Beardsley 1946 in an article bearing this title, that authorial intent is irrelevant to understanding a work of literature—to acknowledge that divining hidden authorial intentions can be a dubious enterprise when it becomes a psychoanalytic interrogation into the unconscious motives of an author. It is enough to say that *unstated* intentions are oftentimes matters of pure conjecture and in any case difficult to substantiate. Needless to say, *explicit* authorial intentions, as typically articulated in statements of intent (*dgos pa*) in the preface of Buddhist text or in colophonic resums, provide valuable clues for discerning the scope and aims of a work and need not arouse undue suspicion. Only the most unrepentant post-modernist would maintain that *all* authorial intentions are inherently deceptive and irrelevant.

<sup>687</sup> For critical editions and translations of these three works, see Volume II, 11–85.

inextricably linked with soteriological praxis<sup>688</sup>, much was at stake in proclaiming, criticizing, or correcting, wrong views. To put it simply, wrong views translate into wrong practices. And wrong practices are by definition nonconducive to goal-realization whether because they are simply ineffective or, in worse cases, positively detrimental, serving to tighten rather than loosen the bonds of error and self-deception. According to this rationale, correcting wrong views is tantamount to removing obstacles on the path to liberation.

If it is a truism to state that the primary role of a Tibetan spiritual preceptor is to dispel wrong views and remove obstacles to liberation, this is nonetheless precisely what Mi bskyod rdo rje announces as his primary objective in many of his works, including one of his most polemical works, the *Nerve Tonic of the Elderly* which was composed at Zing po 'bum pa sgang<sup>689</sup> (*zing po 'bum pa sgang*) in Kong yul (i.e., Kong po, a region in southeastern Tibet) when the author was 26 years of age (1533).<sup>690</sup> Of course, the onus in this case would fall upon the author to argue on the basis of reasoning and scripture where and why his opponents had gone awry and to articulate and defend an account that is deemed to be in accord with authoritative scriptures and canons of reasoning.

Finally, it is worth noting the critical role that the consolidation of sectarian views within the arena of polemical exchange played in the formation of exegetical traditions. In the words of Matthew Kapstein: “The formulation of standard polemical defenses for the position taken by one’s own school and assaults on the positions of others went hand in hand with the formulation of the great scholastic commentarial traditions, and the leading polemicists are in most cases famed exegetes...”<sup>691</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje writings serve as a vivid illustration of the confluence of polemical and exegetical currents of Buddhist discourse.

These considerations aside, the vehemence with which Mi bskyod rdo rje and many of his post-classical coreligionists defended their views and criticized those of others distinguishes their era from the more ecumenical atmosphere of the preceding thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when scholars such as Rang byung rdo rje, Klong chen rab 'byams pa, and 'Ba' ra ba Rgyal mtshan could study, present and defend their traditions' leading doctrines

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<sup>688</sup> The reciprocal relationship between views and meditation is reflected in widely used emic categories used to schematize teachings such as the four successive *dharmas* or disciplines (*yoga* : *rnal 'byor*) of view (*lta ba*), meditation (*sgom pa*), conduct (*spyod pa*) and fruition (*'bras bu*), and the much older schema of three insights (*prajñā* : *shes rab*) of studying (*thos pa*), thinking (*bsam pa*) and meditation (*sgom pa*) that goes back to the Pāli canon.

<sup>689</sup> Zing po is south of modern Lha sa. Zing po 'bum pa sgang is also named as the place where Dpa' bo II Gtsug lag phreng ba at age 29 received teachings from the eighth Karma pa. This coincides with the date of the composition of the *Tonic*.

<sup>690</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, 1024; *mi bskyod rdo rjes rang lo nyer drug pa la kong yul zing po 'bum pa sgang du sbyar bas 'gro ba thams cad 'khrul med kyi rtogs par gyur cig* |

<sup>691</sup> Kapstein 1989, 229.

in a far more intersectorian climate. At the same time, one must acknowledge the extent to which the polemically heated atmosphere that had already begun to gather steam in the latter half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century served as a kind of crucible for philosophical argumentation and intellectual exchange, raising these to levels of acuity and sophistication seldom witnessed in the doctrinal history of Buddhism.

The Eighth Karma pa credited his own mastery of reasoning, argumentation, composition, and spiritual realization, to four principal masters who he identifies in his biographies as “four great venerable ones” (*rje btsun chen po rnam bzhi*).<sup>692</sup> The biographical and historical sources report that he first met two of these teachers, who had both been students of the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), in 1514 when he was eight years of age. On these two, he refers to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa I Bkra shis dpal ’byor (1457–1525), alias the *mahāsiddha* of Gdan ma, as his main Guru (*rtsa ba’i bla ma*). Mi bskyod rdo rje formally became his disciple three years after their first meeting (1516) and spent the following three years learning and practicing Mahāmudrā teachings—including the *Na ro chos drug* and *Ras chung pa* cycles—under his close supervision. Significantly, it is said that Mi bskyod rdo rje gained a direct introduction to the nature of mind, like the flame of one lamp passed to another, with this master before embarking on his scholastic studies.

Sometime not long after the death of Bkra shis dpal ’byor circa 1525, the Eighth Karma pa undertook more systematic studies under the master Bdud mo Bkra shis ’od zer (b. 15th c.; d. circa 1545) who had been educated both in Bka’ brgyud and Dge lugs pa monasteries. The Karma pa received a wide range of teachings from him including explanations of tantras such as the *Cakrasaṃvara* and the Third Karma pa’s brilliant synthesis the *Zab mo nang gi don*, and non-tantric Mahāyāna teachings such as the Five Dharmas of Maitreya, the Prajñāpāramitā, and the Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical systems.<sup>693</sup> For the next decade, Mi bskyod rdo rje continued building a solid foundation in all aspects of Buddhist scholarship, composition and debate under the guidance of this teacher. It was also during this time that he came into his own as a brilliant and innovative interpreter, commentator and teacher of classical Buddhist scriptures.

In his early twenties Mi bskyod rdo rje continued his non-tantric and tantric Buddhist studies under his other two principal masters: mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (b. 15th century) and Karma phrin las I Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539). The Karma pa is said to have met both Chos grub seng ge and Karma phrin las in 1527 when he was 21 years of age. After this meeting, the Karma pa invited both masters to Rnam thos kyi ri bo in Kong po and

<sup>692</sup> On these four teachers and further details concerning the eighth Karma pa’s studies, see Rheingans 2008, 115–35.

<sup>693</sup> Rheingans 2008, 126.

requested full ordination from them which he received on December 3, 1527.<sup>694</sup> In the months to follow, Chos grub seng ge gave him teachings on various tantric cycles including the *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Guhyasamāja*, *Amitāyus*, as well as the *Kālacakra* and related Six Yoga systems. Mi bskyod rdo rje's student and secretary Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566) informs us that Chos grub seng ge also gave the eighth Karma pa various lengthy *gzhan stong* explanations and requested him to uphold this view. “Therefore, he later commented on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* in the tradition of Jo [nang, i.e., Dol po pa] and Zi [lung pa, i.e., Shākya mchog ldan].”<sup>695</sup> These biographical comments must be compared carefully with Mi bskyod rdo rje's early criticisms of the views of Shākya mchog ldan found in his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (composed when he was 26)<sup>696</sup> and his explicit criticisms of the *Gzhan stong* views of both Shākya mchog ldan and Dol po pa in his later commentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MA) entitled *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* which was composed during 1544–45, as well as in his eight-part commentary on the *Single Intent* (*Dgongs pa gcig pa*) doctrine of the 'Bri gung founder 'Jig rten gsum mgon (1143–1217) which was composed in stages between 1536 and 1545<sup>697</sup>, and finally in his four volume commentary on the Second Karma pa Karma Pakshi's (1204–1283) *Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* (*Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam*

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 128–29.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 129. Rheingans 2008 (13) notes that an autobiography of the author (*Pha mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar*) explains that the eighth Karma pa “was motivated to comment in *gzhan stong*-fashion in order to continue the work of his predecessor: the Seventh Karma pa had started this commentary with the agenda of averting the danger of understanding emptiness as nihilism (*chad stong*), but could not complete it.” This autobiography was composed in 1534, predating the author's MA commentary.

<sup>696</sup> In this work he also criticizes 'Gos lo tsā ba for describing buddha nature a subtle self— “[you maintain that] natural luminosity or buddha nature are able to be a basis for karma and results and that they are the extraordinary applicable objects ('jug yul) of the terms ‘self’ and ‘sentient being’”—and for presenting such a buddha nature view as “Great *Gzhan stong*”: “In short, you assert *Gzhan stong* is great (*khyod gzhan stong chen por khas len*) and it appears you have also written a commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (*rgyud bla ma*), but as for the pretense that you are commenting on the intent of the final wheel [i.e., the third *dharmacakra*] by reasoning along the lines of these [foregoing] proclamations—forget about them being a commentary on the final wheel! They are a wrong explanation even of the meaning of the phrase “First, the rejection of demerit!” [from Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka* VIII.15a]. In that regard, even the lower of the philosophical systems, the Vātsīputrīya sect, having falsely asserted there is a personal self that is a substance separate from the psychophysical aggregates and that it is indescribable, could not [bring themselves to] claim absolutely that the self exists substantially. Whereas you, having settled on the knowledge that a subtle sentient being and self constitute buddha nature, repudiate the general doctrinal system of the Buddhists that the psychophysical constituents and so on are nominalized as a ‘self’.” (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*, 996<sub>6</sub>–997<sub>3</sub>.) The Vātsīputrīya school (Tib. *gnas ma bu pa'i sde*) was one of the Personalist (*pudgalavāda*) sects (early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE) of the Sthavira tradition of early Buddhism that is distinguished in Buddhist doxographies from the mainstream proponents of the no self doctrine (*anātmavāda*). For a detailed study of the Vātsīputrīyas and other early Buddhist Personalist schools, see Chāu 1999. The Vātsīputrīya asserted the existence of an “inexpressible self” (*brjod du med pa'i bdag*) which cannot be said to be either the same as, or distinct from, the five skandhas, or as either permanent or impermanent, and so on. This assertion was refuted by other schools, including Dignāga who is said to have once followed this tradition under a teacher named Nagadatta.

<sup>697</sup> Rheingans 2008, 138.



*bshad*) composed in 1548–49. All of these sources, and many shorter works, including several *Replies to Queries* (*dris lan*) texts, reflect his growing ambivalence toward, or even rejection of, the most well-known Gzhan stong and Rang stong views of this period. This is an important matter that we will return to in the pages to follow.

Karma phrin las was already seventy-two when the Karma pa first met him in 1527, having established himself as a great scholar of both Sa skya and Bka' brgyud systems who had tutored many illustrious masters including Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566) and Dwags ram pa Chos rgyal bstan pa (1449–1524). As noted above, he was renowned for his erudition and particularly for his lucid commentaries on the Saraha's *Dohā Trilogy* (*doha skor gsum*), the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, and Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang don*, the only three major works of this author currently extant. Mi bskyod rdo rje studied extensively with this master and received teachings on many tantric and non-tantric Mahāyāna works. Among the many texts studied were the Maitreya treatises such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (AA), Abhidharma treatises such as the *Abhidharmakośa* (AK) and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS), epistemological works such as the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS), *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV), and *Nyāyabindu* (NB), Madhyamaka texts such as the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK), *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MA), tantras such as the *Hevajra* (HT), and Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Rigs gter* and *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.<sup>698</sup> The biographical sources describe this period of comprehensive study with Karma phrin las a formative time in the Karma pa's life during which he consolidated his expertise in debating, teaching and composing treatises on the many subjects he had studied. By his mid-twenties, he had already gained a reputation both as an erudite scholar and dedicated practitioner. One of the biographical sources records that while the Karma pa's earlier training, from the age of ten, emphasised studying and thinking, from his twenty-third year onward, he was not distracted from meditation under any circumstances.<sup>699</sup>

The Eighth Karma pa's adult years were spent teaching, debating, composing works, engaging in meditation and yoga, making pilgrimages to revered sites, and establishing and supervising a large number of monasteries scattered throughout central Tibet. During this time, he also earned considerable renown as a visionary artist, and is credited with establishing one of the major schools of Tibetan thangka painting known as the Karma Gadri (*karma sgar ris*) style. Although a fierce proponent and defender of Karma Bka' brgyud doctrine, he is known to have at times played the role of a mediator in sectarian clashes. On one such occasion, it is reported that he prevented local supporters of the Karma pas from destroying a Dge lugs pa monastery saying “there is no difference between harming a small Dge lugs establishment and cutting [someone's] throat.”<sup>700</sup> During his relatively short life, the Eighth

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>700</sup> Rheingans 2008, 137.

Karma pa attracted a growing throng of students from many backgrounds, including his two main disciples, the Zhwa dmar V Dkon mchog yan lag (1525–1583) and Dpa' bo II Gtug lag phreng ba (1504–1566). In 1953, he sustained a shoulder injury and indicated that his life was soon to end. The Eighth Karma pa died in 1554 at the age of forty-seven.

#### BLENDING MAHĀMUDRĀ AND MADHYAMAKA

We have broadly characterized the Eighth Karma pa's philosophical project as an attempt to balance two divergent lines of discourse: [1] the affirmative-disclosive appraisal of reality favoured in Mahāmudrā, Tathāgatagarbha and Vajrayāna discourses, and [2] the two antifoundationalist \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhānavāda strands of Madhyamaka that he regarded as the summit of Indian philosophical systems (*grub mtha'*) and therefore as ideal preparation for embarking on the paths of Vajrayāna and Mahāmudrā. It may be worth adding here that these Madhyamaka traditions are accorded this lofty status within the Buddhist doxographical universe by Mi bskyod rdo rje on the grounds that they are the most sweeping and unsparing in their critique of ontological and epistemic foundations. Because they dispense with *all* reifications and elaborations, they were thought to offer their practitioners the most effective means to clear the way for an undistorted perception of the way things really are, the ascertainment of *mahāmudrā*, the nature of mind and emptiness.

It is from this perspective that the Karma pa regards all non-Buddhist and Buddhist philosophies up to and including Cittamātra as advocating extreme views (*mu stegs pa : tīrthika*); it is because all in one way or another ground phenomena in some real entity, be it material, mental or supernatural. Here is how he explains the term: “In general, since the term *tīrthika* (*mu stegs pa*) means ‘those who dwell in extremes’ of eternalism or nihilism, it refers not only to non-Buddhists, but to Buddhist *tīrthikas* as well, up to and including the Cittamātra followers. The Mādhyamikas do not receive the epithet *tīrthika* because they have uprooted *all* [metaphysical] views and philosophical tenets.”<sup>701</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje's hard-line inclusion of all Cittamātra followers among the league of adherents to extreme views on account of their belief in mind as a real entity, distinguishes his philosophical view from that of Shākya mchog ldan whose sympathy toward the Alīkākaravāda strand of Cittamātra even led him to style it as a Madhyamaka view. This identification was sharply criticized by Mi bskyod rdo rje in various contexts, perhaps most vehemently in his MA commentary, as will be shown below. A cogent summary of this position is outlined in his *Fifty Precepts on Mahāmudrā* (*Ma hā mu drā'i man ngag lnga bcu pa*) where he offers the following explanation:

<sup>701</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* lc, in MKsb vol. 4, 912–913; *spyir mu stegs bya ba rtag chad kyi mtha' la gnas pa'i don yin pas phyi rol par ma zad sems tsam pa phyin la nang pa'i mu stegs pa zer la* | [interlinear annotation] *dbu ma pa ni lta ba dang grub mtha' 'byin pa'i phyir mu stegs kyi ming mi 'thob bo* |

All subject and object [dichotomies] are in fact only superimposed conceptual constructs and are not established within the mode of abiding of the aware and empty mind. In that regard, however, the Alīkākāravāda Cittamātra adherents maintain that the clear and aware mind itself is not empty of its own-nature. In this context, as it is specified in Madhyamaka instructions (*dbu ma'i man ngag*), when the clear and aware mind as such is ascertained as empty, the concepts of subject and object freely resolve themselves... Then, even the essence of mere awareness, of mere clarity, is unable to manifest. The clinging to the experience of some mere clarity and mere awareness as emptiness is similar to the birth and subsequent death of a child in a dream. Hence, one should not cling to the awareness and clarity as an intrinsic essence and as a mode of being. This is how the so-called “ultimate truth”, “the perfect nature”, which is left over as a remainder (*lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa*)—namely, the wisdom empty of the duality of subject and object [maintained by the] Alīkākāravāda Cittamātras—is ascertained as being beyond discursive elaborations.<sup>702</sup>

By repudiating the Cittamātra assumption that mind is a real entity—one that allegedly remains when superimpositions have been dispelled—the last prop of realist ontology has been removed. Whatever remains is beyond discursive elaborations, so any attempt to take it as an essence or mode of being unavoidably reifies it. It is in this comprehensive dismantling of metaphysical views, and uprooting of the deeply entrenched clinging to reality (*bden 'dzin*) which undergirds them, that Mi bskyod rdo rje finds common ground between Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā approaches. The Eighth Karma pa's understanding of this shared basis is broadly sketched in his *Replies to Queries of the Noble Ne ring pa* (*Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*) in a response to the Ne ring pa's<sup>703</sup> question about whether the three ‘Great Ones’—Great Middle (*dbu ma chen po*), Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*), and Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen po*)—are really no different in meaning, as certain scholars had

<sup>702</sup> *Ma hā mudrā'i man ngag lnga bcu pa*, MKsb vol. 19, 629–630a: *gzung' dzin thams cad yang dag par na sgro btags pa'i rnam rtog tsam yin la | rig stong sems kyi gnas tshul la ma grub mod | de ltar na'ang sems tsam rnam rdzun pas sems gsal rig kho rang ngo bos mi stong par 'dod pa la | 'dir dbu ma'i man ngag khyad par du byas pa ni sems nyid gsal rig de nyid stong par gtan la 'bebs pa'i dus su gzung 'dzin gyi rtog pa rang grol du 'gro bas ... des na rig tsam gsal tsam gyi ngo bo yang skye mi thub ste | rig tsam gsal tsam zhig stong nyid du myong bar zhen pa yang rmi'i lam du bu skyes nas shi ba dang 'dra ba yin pas rig gsal la ngo bo dang gnas tshul du mi 'dzin pa'o | 'di ni sems tsam rnam rdzun pa'i gzung 'dzin gnyis stong gi ye shes lhag mar lus pa'i yongs grub don<sup>a</sup> dam pa'i bden pa zhes bya ba de spros bral du gtan la dbab pa yin no | \*text: do*

<sup>703</sup> This likely refers to Ne ring pa/Ne'u rings pa 'Chi med rab rgyas (dates unknown), a Rnying ma scholar who had close ties with the Dge lugs pa school and to whom biographies of Tsong kha pa are credited. There is another short *dris lan* text entitled *Ne'u rings rin po che ba'i dris lan* composed by Zhwa dmar IV Chos grags ye shes in Yangs pa can in 1512. See *Chos grags ye shes gsung 'bum* vol. 6, 483–86. That the Ne ring pa of the Eighth Karma pa's *dris lan* and Ne'u rings pa of the Fourth Zhwa dmar's *dris lan* are the same is suggested by the fact that both address certain questions regarding both the Dge ldan and Rdzogs chen traditions.

maintained. The Karma pa replies that “both the Great Seal tradition of Unsurpassed Mantra and the Middle Way of that [Mantrayāna]<sup>704</sup> have the same meaning because this Great Seal posits the freedom from the limits of discursive elaboration as the Middle Way. Both the Madhyamaka of the Perfections Vehicle (Pāramitāyāna) and the Mahāmudrā have the same meaning only where selflessness is concerned, but they do not have the same meaning in terms of [how] comprehensive [they are] in scope.<sup>705</sup> I have not heard that there exist two Madhyamaka traditions—a greater and a lesser.”<sup>706</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje recognized that this “freedom from elaboration” (*spros bral : niṣprapañca*) advocated by Madhyamaka is precisely the name given to the second yoga of Sgam po pa’s Four Yogas (*rnal ’byor bzhi*); and it is this yoga which paves the way for the third yoga that realizes the “single flavour” (*ro gcig*) of all phenomena and the fourth yoga that realizes “no-meditation” (*sgom med*), the juncture at which contemplative realization has become a continuous process ranging over day and night. He also maintained that this freedom from discursive elaborations was the key point of Buddhist teachings on “mental nonengagement” (*vid la mi byed pa : amanasikāra*) that were taught not only by siddhas such as Saraha and Śavaripa, as well as Maitrīpa who had codified these in his *amanasikāra* cycle (*vid la mi byed pa’i skor*),<sup>707</sup> but also by a number of Mādhyamikas such as Atiśa and Bhavya II (who seems to have been a grand-disciple of Saraha)<sup>708</sup>. In this way, the Eighth Karma pa could once again cite the *amanasikāra* teachings of non-elaboration as a shared framework linking Madhyamaka, Mahāmudrā and Mantrayāna traditions.<sup>709</sup>

<sup>704</sup> It take the “that” (*de pa*) in the phrase *de pa’i dbu ma* to refer to the Mantrayāna because the author goes on to discuss the Middle Way of the Perfections (*phar phyin theg pa’i dbu ma : pāramitāyāna-madhyamaka*)

<sup>705</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje here follows the commonly accepted Tibetan view that sūtric discourses treat main topics in a condensed way whereas tantric discourses treat them in an extensive way.

<sup>706</sup> *Ne ring pa ’phags pa’i dris lan, Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung ’bum*, vol. 3, 325<sub>5-6</sub>: *sngags bla med kyi phyag rgya chen po lugs de pa’i dbu ma gnyis don gcig pa yod de | phyag rgya chen po de nyid spros pa’i mtha’ dang bral ba la dbu mar bzhas pa’i phyir | phar phyin theg pa’i dbu ma dang phyag rgya chen po gnyis ni | bdag med tsam du don gcig kyang | phyogs yongs su rdzogs par don gcig pa ma yin | dbu ma la che chung gnyis yod par nges kyes ma thos |*

<sup>707</sup> These *amanasikāra* views are given detailed treatment below, 325 f. For Padma dkar po’s views on the subject, see below, 401 f.

<sup>708</sup> On Bhavya II’s interpretation, see below, 409–10.

<sup>709</sup> See for example his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 22, 360<sub>6</sub>–369<sub>6</sub> where he links the Mahāmudrā *amanasikāra* teachings of siddhas such as Śavaripa, Nāropa ec., along with their subsequent elaborations by Maitrīpa in his *Amanasikāra* cycle and by Tibetan Bka’ brgyud proponents such as Mar pa, with sūtra *amanasikāra* teachings of definitive meaning outlined in Prajñāpāramitā discourses and the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇi* and other non-tantric sources. The author proceeds to critically assess the associations Sa paṇ, Tsong kha pa, Bo dong pa and their follows had drawn between the *amanasikāra* teachings of the Bka’ brgyud and Heshang Moheyan traditions, and their further confusion of these with Rdzogs chen and Bon traditions of view and meditation. He finds these to be unwarranted and unsubstantiated. Many of these issues are discussed by Padma dkar po (chapter four).

Taking a synoptic view of the Eighth Karma pa's philosophical reflections on reality, knowledge, and emptiness, we can detect a persistent attempt to reconcile affirmative and negative idioms of Buddhist thought and discourse. And these contrasting idioms, in turn, reflect an elemental tension, discernable within the continuum of human reality, between appearance and emptiness<sup>710</sup>, a disjunction whose attempted resolution is the path of awakening itself. We previously noted that the author's dialectical train of thought can make it difficult to assign to him any univocal or unequivocal position when assessing his treatments of central problems such as truth, emptiness and knowledge. It may therefore be useful to bear in mind that his primary philosophical affiliations set the parameters within which his thinking developed on a broad range of soteriological issues and also framed his wide-ranging criticisms of the views of his coreligionists such as Dol po pa, Tsong kha pa and Shākya mchog ldan.

Given his combined Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā affinities, it becomes understandable why Mi bskyod rdo rje wished to chart a middle course between the Scylla and Charybdis of existence and nonexistence and their affirmative and negative idioms. As much as affirmative discourses of Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā draw attention to the originary dynamism of human reality, the negative discourses of Madhyamaka underscore its empty and non-discursive nature. Put simply, the two perspectives reveal the inseparability of appearance and emptiness. The Eighth Karma pa's growing reticence to gravitate too strongly toward either side of this spectrum are a direct reflection of this philosophical middle way. Viewed in this light, the author's rationale for employing robust distinctions on the path also becomes clear: it is only by clearly identifying and negating all that *mahāmudrā* is not that one can properly discover and affirm what it is.

## EMPTINESS AND HERMENEUTICS OF THE THREE TURNINGS

Mi bskyod rdo rje's concern to ply a middle course between one-sided positions is strikingly evident both in his hermeneutics of the three turnings of the *dharmacakra* and the closely related Tibetan controversies between Rang stong (empty of own-nature) and Gzhan stong (empty of other) discourses. In his *Kun mkhyen rab tu 'bar ba'i phung po bskal me 'jig byed*, an explanation of *Single Intent* (*Dgongs gcig*) teachings given to the 'Bri gung lineage holder Rin chen nam rgyal Chos grags rgyal mtshan (1519–1576), the Eighth Karma pa claims that “all three turnings, while ranging in scope from lesser to greater in their teachings on the causes of ascertaining emptiness”—in accordance with the increasingly subtle obscurations to be removed—“are fully in accord when it comes to their respective views of

<sup>710</sup> A similar tension between presencing (being) and openness (time) is articulated in Heidegger's later philosophy. See *On Time and Being* (Heidegger 1977).

emptiness. This is because although the full range of phenomena which are found to be empty cannot be established in terms of intrinsic essence, [this emptiness is nonetheless] posited as a mere exclusion (*rnam par sel tsam*), not being amenable to conceptual superimpositions.”<sup>711</sup> The characterization of emptiness as a mere exclusion—insofar as it cannot be framed conceptually—needs to be understood in the context of the author’s view that the disclosure of buddha nature goes hand in hand with the complete elimination of reifications, which leaves behind no conceptual residue.

The middle and final turnings are generally regarded by the Eighth Karma pa as being of definitive meaning and without contradiction. In some cases, he argues that the middle turning teachings on emptiness and selflessness serve as a precondition for the final turning teachings on buddha nature which, when correctly understood as transcending causes and conditions, is nothing other than complete freedom from elaboration. Reflecting on the complementarity between the middle and final turnings, the author states in the *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ic that Bka’ brgyud masters “having in mind the subject matter of the middle turning, conventionally spoke of ‘understanding cause and effect (*rgyu ’bras*) in terms of emptiness,’ while having in mind the subject matter of the third turning, [spoke of] ‘emptiness manifesting in terms of cause and effect’.”<sup>712</sup>

To understand the sense of this statement, it is helpful to bear in mind that Mi bskyod rdo rje argued that discourses on buddha nature that variously describe it as a “cause” (e.g., a seed, a potential, an element) or an “effect” (a goal, a fruit, a result) should be seen as a concession by the Buddha to those under the influence of ordinary consciousness who are predisposed to thinking of buddha nature in causal and teleological terms. Such discourses are therefore deemed to be of merely provisional meaning, i.e., requiring further interpretation. This point helps to explain why the Karma pa in some cases claims that whereas the middle turning discourses on emptiness are generally of definitive meaning, the final turning discourses on buddha nature also combine teachings on definitive meaning with teachings of provisional meaning in order to make buddha nature acceptable and intelligible

<sup>711</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ic, MKsb vol. 4, 1089<sub>6</sub>–1090<sub>1</sub>: *spyir ’khor lo gsum du stong pa nyid du gtan la dbab rgyu’i chos rgya che chung yod kyang stong pa nyid rang gi ’dod tshul mthun pa yin te | chos gang dang gang stong nyid du song ba de rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis ma grub kyang | rtog pas btags mi rung ba rnam par bsal tsam zhig la ’jog pa’i phyir* | Elsewhere in his *Single Intent* works, Mi bskyod rdo rje characterizes the three dharmacakras antidotes that successively remove the increasingly subtle objects to be relinquished (*spang bya*) that are present in those to be trained (*gdul bya*) ranging from coarse (*rags pa*), to subtle (*phra ba*) to most subtle (*ches phra ba*). In support of this interpretation of the three turnings, the author quotes *Catuhśataka* VIII.15. This stanza from the chapter on “The Conduct of the Student” reads “Wise is the one who understands, first, the rejection of demerit; next, the rejection of the self; and finally, the rejection of all [things].” For a translation of this passage with critical editions of Sanskrit and Tibetan, see Candrakīrti 2003 (tr. Karen Lang), 82–83.

<sup>712</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ic, MKsb vol 4, 1089<sub>5</sub>–6: *brgyud pa rin po che ’di pa ’khor lo bar ba’i bstan bya la dgongs nas rgyu ’bras stong nyid du rtogs pa dang | tha ma’i bstan bya la dgongs nas stong nyid rgyu ’bras su shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad do* |

to those whose minds are not yet freed from the categories of causal-teleological reasoning. As he explains in his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*):

Now, the point of speaking in some cases of a cause of buddhahood and in others of a result [viz., effect] of buddhahood is this. On the part of those trainees who are under the influence of [ordinary] consciousness, the [buddha] nature at the time when it seemed to become separated from the chaff, appeared as though it were a “result of emancipation” (*bral 'bras*).<sup>713</sup> Bearing this in mind, [the buddha] spoke of it as a ‘result’. And the quintessence at the time when it appeared to be together with the chaff, appeared as though it were a cause, namely, the cause leading to the result of emancipation from that [chaff]. With this in mind, [the buddha] spoke of it as a cause, a potential, and an element. From the perspective of [ordinary] consciousness, because the mind is mistaken concerning a quintessence which is unchanging and unwavering, it cannot deeply penetrate these concepts, so sometimes [the quintessence] is mistaken for a cause, and sometimes it is mistaken for a result. However, the quintessence is not established in any way as a cause and result. With this in mind, it was stated [in RGVV 26<sub>3</sub>] that:

Because “result” was metaphorically ascribed to the buddha potential...<sup>714</sup>

<sup>713</sup> ‘Result of emancipation’—i.e., pure wisdom and the truth of cessation—is one of six kinds of result classified in AK ch. 2. Mi bskyod rdo rje here alludes to a nontantric Mahāyāna paradigm of the Buddhist path comprising [1] the ground of emancipation (*bral gzhi*), [2] causes of emancipation (*bral rgyu*), [3] result of emancipation (*bral 'bras*), and [4] objects to be emancipated from (*bral bya*). In the context of Mantrayāna, these are described in terms of a process of purification or clearing rather than emancipation. According to Klong chen pa, “In our account, one should understand there are four [phases]: [1] the ground where emancipation occurs (*bral gzhi*), [2] the causes of emancipation (*bral rgyu*), [3] the result of emancipation (*bral 'bras*), and [4] the objects to be emancipated from (*bral bya*). [1] The emancipation ground is our spiritual potential, the \**sugatagarbha*; [2] the causes of emancipation are the facets that comprise the path, those virtuous actions conducive to liberation that clear away the defilements accreted on this [quintessence]; [3] the result of emancipation is the disclosure of qualities once the \**sugatagarbha* has been freed from the plethora of defilements; and [4] the objects to be emancipated from comprise the eightfold ensemble [of cognitions] that are founded on the all-ground of myriad latent tendencies (*bag chags sna tshogs kyi kun gzhi*) as well as the latent tendencies [themselves]. In the Mantrayāna, these phases are declared to be [1] the ground where clearing occurs, [2] the clearing process itself, [3] the goal where obscurations have been cleared away, and [4] the objects to be cleared way. Although the names used are different, their meaning is the same.” See Klong chen rab 'byams pa's *Sems nyid ngal gso 'grel* vol. 1, 273<sub>1</sub> f.: *skabs 'dir bral gzhi | bral rgyu | bral 'bras | bral bya dang bzhir shes par bya'o | de la bral gzhi ni khams sam snying po'o | bral rgyu ni de'i steng gi dri ma sbyong byed thar pa cha mthun dge ba lam ldan gyi rnam pa'o | bral 'bras ni bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po dri ma mtha' dag dang bral nas yon tan mngon du gyur pa'o | bral bya ni bag chags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi la brten pa'i tshogs brgyad bag chags dang bcas pa'o | 'di dag gsang sngags ltar na | sbyang gzhi | sbyong byed | sbyangs 'bras | sbyang bya dang bzhir grags pas ming la tha dad kyang don la gcig go ||*

<sup>714</sup> RGVV, 26<sub>3</sub>: *baudthe gotre tatphalasyopacārād* | This passage from the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* is quoted in order to defend the claim that buddha nature is only provisionally and metaphorically (*nye [bar] btags [pa] = upacāra*) posited as a result [literally “fruit”] for the benefit of those habituated to causal-teleological modes of thought and explanation, buddha nature being itself beyond causes and results. As Mathes 2008 has noted, the

In a similar vein, the author also considers provisional those Buddhist soteriological models that construe buddhahood as the result of causal production or of transformation (*gnas 'gyur* : *āśraya-parāvṛtti*, °-*parivṛtti* ) where this latter is based on the (psychologistic) assumption that goal-realization consists in an altered state of consciousness, specifically the transformation of ordinary consciousness, or even ignorance, *into* wisdom. By contrast, he maintains that buddhahood transcends causal production, arguing that interpretations of buddha nature in terms of cause or effect must be considered provisional, heuristic fictions—half truths or ‘white lies’ geared to accommodating minds accustomed to thinking in terms of cause and effect. On this understanding, buddhahood is said to be revealed upon the complete elimination, not transformation, of ordinary consciousness.<sup>715</sup>

In his efforts to show the complementarity between the last two turnings, the Eighth Karma pa at the same time seeks to avoid two extreme viewpoints: [1] an ‘ontologizing’ view (associated with the Jo nang tradition) that privileges the third turning within a Gzhan stong perspective—reifying the ultimate and downgrading the conventional—and [2] a ‘relativizing’ view (attributed to the Dge lugs tradition) that privileges the second turning from a Rang stong standpoint—downgrading the ultimate and reifying the conventional.<sup>716</sup> On this basis, Mi bskyod rdo rje explicitly rejects the view attributed to Dol po pa that the final turning should be regarded as “vastly superior to the middle turning”. According to the Jo nang view, as the Karma pa summarizes it in his *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* V, the middle turning is deemed to be of merely provisional meaning inasmuch as it taught emptiness in the sense of being unreal (*bden med*) and empty of intrinsic essence (*rang stong*) which is “coreless” like a banana tree<sup>717</sup> and therefore lacking anything to be revealed. By contrast, the third turning is of definitive meaning inasmuch as it taught emptiness as something truly established (*bden*

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Jo nang scholar Mati Panchen is able to read this passage as affirming the existence of buddha nature in its concealed and unconcealed “fruition” phases in light of a version of the root text (which he corrected on the basis of the Sanskrit) that has *nye bar spyod pa* (“enjoy”) instead of *nye bar btags pa* (“apply metaphorically”); hence, “All beings possess the ultimate buddha nature because... the potential [or] buddha element, which will be established as buddhahood, exists and is enjoyed as something that is not different from the *dharmakāya*—the fruit[result] that is free of stains—even in a state when [the potential] is mingled with obscurations”. See Mathes 2008, 89–91. (Quotation altered slightly for sake of consistency).

<sup>715</sup> On the difference between replacement and elimination models of transformation, see Sakuma 1990.

<sup>716</sup> On Padma dkar po’s similar criticisms, see below, 394 f.

<sup>717</sup> Banana (and related plantain) plants are often mistaken for trees and were evidently considered to be such by Indians and Tibetans. What appears to be their trunk is in fact a false stem or pseudostem, consisting of tightly packed sheaths, which dies after fruiting. For Rang byung rdo rje’s illuminating interpretation of the analogy, see Mathes 2008, 53.



*grub*) and empty of other (*gzhan stong*), which is liberation as a permanent entity and therefore does have something to be revealed.<sup>718</sup>

Were the Jo nang assessment of the middle turning correct, he argues, “it would absurdly follow that the meditative equipoise properly cultivated by bodhisattvas through conjoining skillful means and insight in line with the methods taught in the middle turning could not bring attainment of the noble Paths of Seeing and Meditation and the rest because the emptiness explained in that way is essenceless like a plantain and unable to reveal [anything]. This would also mean that the lucid descriptions of the middle turning that Maitreya called ‘the *dharmacakra* that fully matures’ and that Nāgārjuna and his spiritual heirs called ‘the *dharmacakra* that taught selflessness and self-overcoming’ would be mere words having no sense.”<sup>719</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje here proposes that the middle turning teachings on emptiness are indeed soteriologically efficacious, having the capacity to reveal selflessness and emptiness which are widely regarded as cornerstones of spiritual awakening.

The Karma pa goes on to reject the hypostatization of the ultimate as equivalent to the Brahmanical belief in a metaphysical absolute. “If it was the case that the final turning discourses taught that liberation is a permanent entity and that emptiness is truly established, then it would absurdly follow that even the Buddha was a false friend (*log pa’i bshes gnyen*) because he had clearly distinguished non-Buddhists who propounded liberation not as the truth of cessation but rather as a permanent entity from the perennial tradition (*ring lugs*)<sup>720</sup> [of Buddhists for whom] emptiness in the sense of something truly established and so forth constitutes a view of self (*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*) that is imputed to phenomena.”<sup>721</sup> We are now in a

<sup>718</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* V, ‘*Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* vol. 80, 141<sub>6</sub>–142<sub>2</sub>: “[For] some Tibetans, in the middle turning, since that emptiness has been shown to be unreal and self-empty, it is essenceless like a banana, and therefore lacks something to be revealed. Thus it is of provisional meaning. However, in the final turning, since [emptiness] is shown to be truly established and other-empty, [the state of] liberation is a permanent real entity and hence exists as something to be revealed. Thus it is of definitive meaning. Therefore, the final turning is proclaimed [by them] to be far superior to middle turning.” *bod kha cig | ’khor lo bar par ni stong nyid de rang stong bden med du bstan pas de ni chu shing bzhin snying po med pas mngon du byar med pas drang don yin la | ’khor lo tha mar ni gzhan stong bden grub bstan pas de ni thar pa rtag pa’i dngos po nyid yin pas mngon du byar yod pas nges pa’i don yin pas ’khor lo bar pa las tha ma ches mchog tu gyur pa yin no zhes smra bar byed do |*

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 142<sub>2-5</sub>: *des na ’khor lo bar par bstan pa’i zab mo stong pa nyid kyi tshul de la byang chub sems dpa’ dag gis mnyam par bzhag ste thabs shes ’brel ba legs par bsgoms kyang | mthong bsgom sogs ’phags lam mi thob par thal | der bshad pa’i stong nyid de mngon du byar mi rung ba chu shing lta bu’i snying med de yin pa’i phyir dang | ’dod na ’khor lo bar pa de la mgon po byams pas rab tu smin pa’i chos kyi ’khor lo zhes pa dang | ’phags pa yab sras kyi bdag med bstan pa dang bdag bzlog gi chos kyi ’khor lo zhes gsal bar gsungs pa de’ang tshig tsam las don la mi gnas par ’gyur ba dang |*

<sup>720</sup> On the term *ring lugs*, see Karmay 1988, 77 and Tucci 1986, 366–67, n. 2.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 24<sub>1-4</sub>: *’khor lo tha mas thar pa rtag dngos dang stong nyid bden grub bstan na sangs rgyas kyang log pa’i bshes gnyen du ’gyur te | phyi rol pa ltar thar pa ’gog bden du mi ston par rtag dngos su ston cing stong nyid bden grub sogs chos la kun btags pa’i bdag tu lta ba’i ring lugs chen po dbye bar mdzad pa’i phyir |*

position to understand why Mi bskyod rdo rje deems it important to understand the complementarity of the content of the last two turnings: understanding that all phenomena are empty undermines the belief in eternal existence *a parte ante* (*rtag*) while understanding that all phenomena are dependently arisen undercuts the belief in eternal nonexistence *a parte post* (*chad*). Their unity thus transcends the extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

This avoidance of extreme positions helps explain Mi bskyod rdo rje's somewhat ambivalent stance toward Rang stong and Gzhan stong views which is already noticeable in his early "moderate Gzhan stong" period but becomes more pronounced in his later works. His first major scholastic work, a commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (AA) was completed when the author was twenty four (1531), recently discussed and partially translated by Karl Brunnhölzl<sup>722</sup>, records in fascinating detail a probing mind's shifting perspectives on the Rang stong and Gzhan stong positions as it struggles to specify their sense and relevance within shifting contexts of Buddhist soteriology. At one point, Mi bskyod rdo rje even maintains, following a standard Tibetan line of interpretation typically associated with the Jo nang founder Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, that dependent and imagined phenomena are empty of own natures, whereas the perfect nature is not found to be empty of own nature but rather is the "emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects" (*sarvākāravopetāsūnyatā*).<sup>723</sup> This explicit endorsement of a standard Gzhan stong view seems less surprising when it is recalled that the Karma pa's teacher Chos grub seng ge is said to have instructed him to uphold the Gzhan stong view and that his AA commentary was thus regarded as an attempt to present the Gzhan stong views of Jo nang and Shākya mchog ldan.<sup>724</sup> However, his early engagement with these views must be squared with his later, more ambivalent stance, in various texts and doctrinal contexts, toward Gzhan stong theories in general, and especially those attributed to these two masters.

At another point in his AA commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje further explains that, according to the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, a so-called "sentient being" does not possess the *dharmadhātu* as "sentient being" is understood to be a cover term for the adventitious stains that occur due to the false imaginings which deviate from the *dharmadhātu*. It

<sup>722</sup> See Brunnhölzl 2010.

<sup>723</sup> *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i lung chos mtha' dag*, MKsb vol. 12, 410<sub>6</sub>–411<sub>2</sub>: "If the nature of all imagined and relative phenomena such as the aggregates are analyzed, they are empty of own nature, as in the example of a coreless banana tree. However, regarding the perfect [nature], viz., the 'emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects,' in general, it is not amenable to analysis and, no matter how it is analyzed, it does not become like that, i.e., empty of own nature." ...*phung po sogs kun brtags<sup>a</sup> pa dang | gzhan dbang gi chos thams cad rang gi ngo bo la rnam par dpyad pa na | rang gi ngo bo stong pa nyid de | dper na chu shing snying po med pa bzhin yin la | yongs grub rnam pa kun gyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong nyid de ni spyir dpyad mi nus pa dang | ji ltar dpyad kyang rang gi ngo bos stong pa de ltar 'gyur ba ma yin te | de lta bu'i ye shes mchog de nyid las gzhan du mi 'gyur ba'i phyir zhes gsung ngo* | <sup>a</sup>MKsb: *btags* For English translation of passage, see Brunnhölzl 2010, 146.

<sup>724</sup> See above, 248–49.

is, rather, the pure mind, buddha nature, which possesses the mode of being inseparable from buddha qualities.<sup>725</sup> Hence, sentient beings do not develop into bodhisattvas and then into buddhas. Rather, as the true mode of being manifests, the superfluous, delusive structures vanish until these beings are “sentient beings” no more but, rather, “buddhas”. It is with this understanding that the author likens sentient beings qua adventitious stains to clouds in the sky, where the sky signifies buddha nature in its open expanse, free from centre or periphery. Thus, clouds dissolve and the clear blue sky is revealed, without anything of the sky being obtained or removed.

Elsewhere in the commentary, however, Mi bskyod rdo rje concedes that *gzhan stong* must also be *rang stong* because the adventitious which it is empty of is inherently empty. The adventitious, which is equated with conventional truth, does not subsist even for an instant.<sup>726</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje further argues that the fundamental freedom from elaboration (*spros bral*) which constitutes the goal of Buddhist soteriology relativizes all perspectives of self-emptiness and other-emptiness. As he explains, the basis, i.e., the true nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*), is in reality neither *gzhan stong* nor *rang stong* because it has the nature of utter peace, freedom from all discursive elaborations of emptiness and non-emptiness. This is why in terms of this freedom from discursive elaborations, neither self-emptiness nor other-emptiness apply, even if they can be distinguished within the framework of discursive elaborations. This issue receives its most penetrating treatment in the author’s consideration of the problem of the remainder which is examined toward the end of this chapter. In the context of discursive conventions, the *Gzhan stong* view is acknowledged to be superior to *Rang stong* in terms of its relational priority. The reason is that a correct understanding of other-emptiness is only possible once self-emptiness is known, whereas self-emptiness *can* be understood without knowing other-emptiness.<sup>727</sup>

<sup>725</sup> See Mathes 2008, 63.

<sup>726</sup> *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i lung chos mtha' dag*, MKsb vol. 12, 348<sub>1-3</sub>: *chos can glo bur ba gzhan gyis stong bzhin pa'i gzhan stong de chos can | gzhi las gzhan pa glo bur dri ma de rang gi ngo bo skad cig tu mi sdod par stong bzhin pa can yin te | chos cad kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin pa'i phyir | rgyu mtshan des na gzhan stong yin pa la rang stong yin pas khyab pa zhig nges par khas len dgos la | rang stong du khas len pa'i stong nyid de stong nyid go chod du khas len na ni rang stong las gzhan pa'i gzhan stong khas len par mi rung ngo |* See also Brunnhölzl 2010, 135.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, 348<sub>3-6</sub>: *'o na chos nyid kyi gzhi de gzhan stong dang rang stong gnyis ka ma yin pa'i rgyu mtshan ni | de rang dang gzhan gyis stong mi stong gi khyad par du ma byas pa'i stong nyid tsam du yang mi rung ste | stong pa dang mi stong pa'i spros pa thams cad nye bar zhi ba'i bdag nyid can yin pa'i phyir | des na spros pa dang bral ba'i ngor chos nyid kyi gzhi de la rang gzhan gyis stong pa'i mtshan ma gang yang mi 'byung ba yin no | spros pa dang bcas pa'i ngor ni rang dang gzhan gyis stong pa'i stong nyid gnyis po la gzhan stong mchog yin cing rang stong dman pa yin la | de'i rgyu mtshan rang stong gi gnas tshul ji lta bar ma rtogs na | gzhan stong gi gnas tshul mi rtogs pa'am mi dpogs pa yin no | rang stong go zhing dpogs pa la ni gzhan stong gi gnas tshul ma go yang rang stong gi go ba dpogs pa ni bde blag tu 'grub bo |* See also the translation by Brunnhölzl 2004, 514.

Mi bskyod rdo rje further explains that the *rang stong* / *gzhan stong* distinction pertains to the conventional level only, wherein the ultimate is designated by means of concepts, but that neither a nonaffirming (*med dgag*) nor an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*) is adequate to realize *dharmatā*.<sup>728</sup> In his short text *Replies to Queries About Buddha Nature and Dharma-kāya* (*Bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku'i dris lan*), the author proposes that the account “that establishes *saṃsāra* to be false and the ultimate truth to be true [applies only] in the context of characterizing the representational ultimate (*rnam grang pa'i don dam*) but not in the context of the nonrepresentational ultimate.”<sup>729</sup> He goes on to contend, following Candrakīrti, that the absolute *nirvāṇa* which remains when *saṃsāra* vanishes also lacks any ultimate status because it does not transcend the conditioned, and that therefore, in the final analysis, even a single truth is not found:

In Śrī Candrakīrti's tradition, “the case of positing conventional as ‘truth’ is possible neither conditionally nor absolutely. In conditional terms, only the ultimate is posited as ‘truth’ and in that instance, its basis of characterization is the one truth, *nirvāṇa*.” He also says that, ultimately, even *nirvāṇa* is not the authentic ultimate because that does not transcend the conditioned. So, in the final analysis, even a single truth is not found. Even that ultimate nonduality of bliss and emptiness of Mantra scriptures and nonduality of bliss and emptiness explained as *mahāmudrā* signify the inseparability, i.e., “unity” (*yuganaddha*), of bliss and emptiness within the single taste [in which are blended] the bliss of conventional *bodhicitta*—the nonreferential caring in the mind-streams up to the exalted mind-streams of Vajrayāna—and the emptiness of ultimate *bodhicitta*—the freedom from discursive elaborations.<sup>730</sup>

On this reading, the distinction between *gzhan stong* and *rang stong*, like other Buddhist soteriological distinctions, finds its proper place within the domain of conventional, discursive practices, but has no place in the ascertainment of the ultimate. When used to define philosophical views, these terms can all-too easily ossify into rigid doxographical constructs.

<sup>728</sup> See Brunnhölzl 2010, 134 f. and Brunnhölzl 2011a, 172 f.

<sup>729</sup> *Bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku'i dris lan*, MKsb vol. 3, 305<sub>4-5</sub>: 'khor ba rdzun pa dang don dam bden par 'jog pa 'di yang rnam grangs min pa'i don dam pa'i skabs su ma yin gyi | rnam grangs pa'i don dam khas len pa'i skabs su yin te |

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., 305<sub>5</sub>–306<sub>3</sub>: dpal ldan zla ba'i rang lugs la kun rdzob bden par 'jog pa'i skabs ni gnas skabs mthar thug gnyis kar mi srid la | gnas skabs su ni don dam nyid bden par 'jog cing de'i tshe de'i mtshan gzhi ni | mya ngan 'das pa bden gcig pu || zhe gsungs kyang mthar thug myang 'das kyang don dam mtshan nyid pa min te | de ni 'dus byas las ma 'das pa'i phyir des na mthar ni bden pa gcig pa'ang rnyed pa ma yin | sngags gzhung mthar thug gi bde stong gnyis med phyag chen du bshad pa'i bde stong gnyis med de'ang rdo rje theg pa'i 'phags rgyud yan chad kyi thugs rgyud dmigs med kyi brtse ba kun rdzob byang sems kyi bde ba dang spros bral don dam byang sems stong nyid du ro gcig pa la bde stong zung 'jug bya ba dbyer med kyi don to ||

It is only within the unity (*zung 'jug*) or inseparability (*dbyer med*) of bliss and emptiness—the single taste in which the bliss of conventional *bodhicitta* of impartial caring mingles with the emptiness of the ultimate *bodhicitta* of freedom from elaboration—that such oppositions are left behind.

A similarly ambivalent position regarding Gzhan stong and Rang stong views is elaborated in other *Replies to Queries* (*dris lan*) texts. Two of these contain pertinent insights that warrant our consideration here. In the *Replies to the Queries of the Eminent Ne ring pa* (*Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*), Ne ring pa 'Chi med rab rgyas<sup>731</sup> poses a series of four questions concerning *gzhan stong*:

Concerning Rang stong and Gzhan stong, [1] there is a statement that the pure nature of all phenomena is *rang stong* whereas [their] being pure of adventitious phenomena is *gzhan stong*—is this really so? [2] How do the claims of Zi lung pa [Shākya mchog ldan] and the all-knowing Dol phu pa [Dol po pa] [compare with] your own intent? [3] And, in general, did the designations *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* exist in India or not? [4] How are the claims that Gzhan stong is profound maintained?<sup>732</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje's terse replies to these queries, handled in a slightly different order than they were posed, offer a revealing sketch of how he understood the *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* positions and their Indian sources. They also reflect some of his reservations about the Tibetan doxographical positions based on them:

[3] Since twenty or eighteen or sixteen kinds of emptiness which included intrinsic and extrinsic (*rang gzhan*) [types] were mentioned in the Land of the Conqueror [India] and elsewhere, it is correct to say that such designations existed in India.

[1] As for methods of commenting on the purport of the [statements like] “phenomena are all empty of intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bos stong pa*) and are empty of extrinsic essence (*gzhan gyi ngo bos stong pa*)” amongst the Mother [Prajñāpāramitā] and other [texts]: [A] Cittamātra scholars explained the mind of dependent (*gzhan dbang*) phenomena as emptiness that is naturally luminous, whereas all phenomena that are imagined (*kun tu brtags pa*) due to subject-object [dualism] from forms up to omniscience are each empty of intrinsic essence. [B] Madhya-

<sup>731</sup> On this little-known figure, see above, 251 n. 703.

<sup>732</sup> *Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*, MKsb vol. 3, 324<sub>2-4</sub>: *yang rang stong gzhan stong la chos thams cad kyi rang bzhin rnam par dag pa rang stong | chos chos can glo bur gyi dri mas dag pa 'di gzhan stong zer ba 'di yin lags sam | zi lung pa dang | kun mkhyen dol phu pa'i 'dod pa rje rang gi dgongs pa ji ltar yin pa dang | spyir rang stong gzhan stong gi tha snyad rgya gar na yod med | gzhan stong zab par bzhed 'dug pa ji ltar lags |*

maka scholars explain that all phenomena from forms up to omniscience are *rang stong* in the sense that each is in itself empty of intrinsic essence and *gzhan stong* in the sense that each is in itself empty of extrinsic essence.

[2] Zi lung pa [Shākya mchog ldan] teaches according to the Cittamātra. The Jo nang pas, taking buddha nature to be other and supreme, construe the “intrinsic” as referring to adventitious stains and claim that [buddha nature] is empty of these.

[4] As for the assertion that *gzhan stong* is profound: Nowadays, this has been much emphasized by Lcang ra rab 'byams pa<sup>733</sup> and others. They therefore [consider it to be] great, but I don't find that [their] understanding regarding the profound tradition of that [*gzhan stong*] to be so great. I uphold the tradition of how things were discerned by the founders of the exegetical traditions. Apart from this, how can it be acceptable for me to endorse a non-authoritative theory?<sup>734</sup>

The author's reservations about assenting to either of these oppositional views is further explained in a lengthy response (composed in meter) to Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal, a student of Shākya mchog ldan, who had asked about the role of *gzhan stong* in meditative equipoise. This reply may have been composed in response to a dialogue that is reported to have taken place between Mi bskyod rdo rje and Paṇ chen dor rgyal in 1536 at 'Bri khung monastery in Central Tibet (*dbus*)<sup>735</sup> when the Karma pa was twenty-nine years old:

In Tibet, a bogus tradition [called] “Alīkākāra Madhyamaka” was claimed [by Shākya mchog ldan] to be the tradition of the Indian Asaṅga and brother [Vasuban-

<sup>733</sup> Little is known about this master. The name Lcang ra [ba] suggests a possible association with the Dge lugs pa monastery of Lcang ra dgon in Gtsang which was founded by Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438) who is often referred to by Mi bskyod rdo rje as Lcang ra dge legs. One Lcang ra ba was also the addressee of an epistle by Mi bskyod rdo rje resolving doubts on the topic of profound emptiness (*zab mo stong pa nyid*) as understood in the *Dge lugs pa* tradition and other matters. The work in question is the *Chos rje lcang ra ba la dogs dpyod du stsal ba'i spring yig*, in MKsb vol. 3, 6–15.

<sup>734</sup> *Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan*, MKsb vol. 3, 324–325: *rgyal ba'i yul la sogs par rang gzhan gyi stong tshul nyi shu dang | bco brgyad | bcu drug sogs gsungs pas | de'i mtha' snyad rgya gar na 'os yod | yum sogs las | chos gang zhig rang gi ngo bos stong pa dang | chos gang zhig gzhan gyi ngo bos stong pa'i dgongs pa 'grel tshul la | sems tsam pa'i slob dpon rnams kyis ni | chos can gzhan dbang gi sems rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba'i stong nyid la | gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar gyi gzung 'dzin gyis kun tu brtags pa'i chos thams cad rang rang gi ngo bos stong par 'chad | dbu ma pa'i slob dpon rnams kyis | gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar gyi chos thams cad | rang la rang gis ngo bos stong pa rang stong dang | rang la gzhan gyi ngo bos stong pa gzhan stong du 'chad la | zi lung pas ni sems tsam pa dang rjes su mthun par smra zhing | jo nang pas ni bde gshegs snying po gzhan mchog tu byas nas | glo bur gyi dri ma la rang sgra sbyar nas des stong par 'dod zer | gzhan stong zab par bzhed pa ni | deng sang lcang ra rab 'byams pa sogs rtsal 'don du byed pas | kho pa rgyus che zhing | nged de'i zab lugs la go ba cher ma mnyed | nged ni shing rta'i srol 'byed rnams kyis ji ltar phyed pa'i lugs bskyar ba ma gtogs | nges kyis 'dod pa zur pa bzhaq ga la rung |*

<sup>735</sup> See Rheingans 2008, 137–38.

dhu]. One should think carefully about [why such] a clamor was made. When it was explained [by Dol po pa] that the *gzhan stong* of a permanent entity (*rtag dngos gzhan stong*) is superior whereas the *rang stong* of freedom from elaboration (*spros bral rang stong*) is inferior, regarding such conceptual differentiations themselves, these distinctions [pertain] to the phase of distinction in the post-meditation state (*rjes thob*) but not to the phase of transcendence in meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhaḡ*). [Now,] when the phase of transcendence in equipoise was not [properly] investigated, then the profound permanent entity of your *gzhan stong* [was deemed] consistent with [*post hoc*] explanations of what was experienced by meditators. [But] by whom among them would [this] permanent [nature] constitute transcendence? In mediative equipoise when there is transcendence and [unmediated] experience, no such distinctions are actually found. This is because at the time when the stains to be relinquished are uprooted in the transcendent meditative equipoise, one is able to sever the elaborations of [such] distinctions, but a transcendent equipoise which is unable to uproot [them] is unable to [effect] the necessary clearing away of obscurations. Even the transcendent meditative experience, for those who desire liberation, is devoid of any indispensables (*nyer mkho*).<sup>736</sup>

The Karma pa explains that Dol po pa made the mistake of reifying analytical distinctions between *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* in the post-meditation state and taking them to constitute deep features of reality—“indispensables” (*nyer mkho*)—that are allegedly discovered in meditative equipoise. Hence the “true” emptiness becomes for him “a permanent entity having causal efficacy” (*stong nyid rtag pa'i don byed can*) resulting in the aggrandizement of something non-empty into something empty (*mi stong pa zhig stong par rlom pa yin*). For the Karma pa, it is an error to ontologize such *post hoc* observations by embedding them in the nature of things and using them to support an absolutist ontology. The Karma pa ends a lengthy criticism of opposing *Gzhan stong* and *Rang stong* positions by saying “as for me, I don’t subscribe to these extreme positions and [therefore] don’t proclaim either *rang*

<sup>736</sup> *Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba'i legs bshad*, MKsb vol. 3, 252<sub>3-6</sub>: *bod du zlos pa'i rnam rdzun dbu ma'i lugs || 'phags yul thogs med mched kyi lugs yin ces || klag cor byed la legs par bsam par gyis || rtag dngos gzhan stong mchog tu bshad pa dang || spros bral rang stong dman par bshad nas ni || rnam par dbye ba'i spros pa de nyid la || 'di yi rnam dbye rjes thob shan 'byed dus || yin gyi mnyam bzhaḡ la zlo'i dus min zer || mnyam gzhaḡ la bzla'i dus la mi dpyod na || khyod kyi gzhan stong rtag dngos zab mo ni || sgom pas nyams su myong bar bshad dang 'gal || rtag pa la ni la zhig su yis bzla || bzla zhing nyams su myong na mnyam gzhaḡ la || shan 'byed pa yang don gyis ci ma grub || mnyam gzhaḡ la bzlas spang bya'i dri ma rnams || drungs 'byin dus na shan 'byed spros gcod nus || drungs 'byin mi nus mnyam gzhaḡ la bzla yang || sgrib pa spongs la dgos nus med pa'i phyir || la bzla sgom pa'i nyams myong bya ba yang || thar 'dod rnams la nyer mkho gang yang med || ...*

*stong* or *gzhan stong*.<sup>737</sup> He concludes with an aspiration to follow the advice of his root teacher Bkra shis dpal 'byor (1457–1525) “to relinquish views and destroy all tenets in the spirit of the illustrious Dwags po Bka' brgyud lineage.”<sup>738</sup>

This strikingly noncommittal disposition toward Rang stong and Gzhan stong traditions, which becomes increasingly conspicuous in Mi bskyod rdo rje's later works, stands in stark contrast to his earlier struggles to make sense of the terms and work out their appropriate contexts. But even in his early *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly*, the Karma pa had already repudiated the 'Pudgalavāda-style' Gzhan stong of 'Gos Lo tsā ba as having identified buddha nature with a subtle self (an identification he attributes to the influence of Tsong kha pa's tenets).<sup>739</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje had along similar lines criticized the 'Cittamātra-style' Gzhan stong of Shākya mchog ldan for reifying the “factor of the inward-looking clear and knowing cognition (*gsal rig*)” and elevating it to the status of wisdom. There are strong indications, reflected in the foregoing quotations, that the increasingly polemical post-classical deployments of the terms *gzhan stong* and *rang stong* as doxographical constructs with which virtually any teacher, teaching or tradition could be retrospectively labelled, eventually led Mi bskyod rdo rje (and many of his contemporaries) to the conclusion that such constructs were simply more trouble than they were worth.

At this stage, it is reasonable to ask: did the Eighth Karma pa entirely abandon the compatibilist view of Rang stong and Gzhan stong advocated by the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho and Karma phrin las pa who were two of his major influences? In fact, we can find traces of this reconciliatory view in Mi bskyod rdo rje's Mahāmudrā writings. An example is a passage in his *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum* where he states that one's own mind in its mode of arising nakedly as stainless awareness is empty in two ways: it is other-empty from the standpoint of phenomena (*chos can*) and self-empty from the standpoint of the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*).<sup>740</sup> But such statements are relatively rare in Mi bskyod

<sup>737</sup> *Paṇ chen rdo rgyal ba'i legs bshad*, MKsb vol. 3, 256<sub>4-5</sub>: *bdag ni mtha' rnam phyogs la mi zhugs shing || rang stong gzhan stong gang yang mi smra bar ||*

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 257<sub>1-2</sub>: *dpal ldan dwags po'i brgyud pa dngos bzhin du || lta ba dor zhing grub mtha' kun zhig pa ||*

<sup>739</sup> See above, 248 n. 696. 'Gos lo tsā ba's *Rgyud gsum gsang ba* is unfortunately not currently available to confirm or disconfirm this identification but 'Gos lo tsā ba does, in his more mature *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, treat the perfection of [quality of] self (*ātmapāramitā*) of the *dharmakāya* in the context of RGV I.35 ff. which discusses the four perfections of qualities (*guṇapāramitās*) of buddha nature, namely, its being eternal (*nītya*), blissful (*sukha*), self (*ātman*), and pure (*śubha*). The point for 'Gos lo tsā ba is that it is quite correct to see the *dharmakāya* as *ātman* but this *ātman* is not a personal self. What Mi bskyod rdo rje seems to reject is the idea of a personal(ized) buddha nature or *dharmakāya*, which results in a personal *ātmapāramitā*, and hence risks confusing buddha nature or *dharmakāya* with a personal self. We plan to investigate this matter in detail in our proposed project on the buddha nature theories of Mi bskyod rdo rje.

<sup>740</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum* (*Skya brag bshad grwa legs bshad gling: Thos pa dga' rtsom sgrig khang in Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i bang mdzod* series, n.d.), 54<sub>3-9</sub>: “Thus, among the sūtras and tantras of the Bhagavān, one's own mind in the mode of arising nakedly as awareness is Other-empty from the standpoint of



rdo rje's writings; it would seem that this compatibilist view, hinted at in his Mahāmudrā instructions on recognizing the empty yet luminous nature of mind, is overshadowed in his doctrinal exegesis where, we have seen, there is ample evidence that Rang stong and Gzhan stong were generally viewed as doxographical constructs designating mutually exclusive positions that are best avoided by any follower of a Mahāmudrā of the Middle Way.

## CORE SOTERIOLOGICAL IDEAS AND THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISTINCTIONS

It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that the Eighth Karma pa's views of Mahāmudrā and buddha nature have as their doctrinal nucleus a cluster of interlocking distinctions between conditioned and unconditioned modes of being and awareness. These distinctions were based to a large extent on Indian Buddhist prototypes but reflected a high degree of subsequent elucidation and elaboration by their Tibetan interpreters. They may be broadly categorized in terms of four overlapping constellations of core soteriological ideas that dominated Bka' brgyud doctrinal exegesis during the classical and post-classical eras: [1] the nature of mind, [2] buddha nature, [3] the nature of reality and [4] emptiness. We have previously indicated the seminal role these families of distinctions played in the development of Tibetan doctrinal systems from the earliest stages of assimilation of Indian Buddhism onward. The four families of distinctions were integral to the Karma Bka' brgyud understanding of Mahāmudrā, but the distinctions of the first two kinds in particular—mind and buddha nature—formed the philosophical basis for the Eighth Karma pa's critiques of rival buddha nature theories advanced in his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (1533), in his commentaries on the MA (composed 1544–45), *Single Intent* (*Dgongs gcig*) (1536–45) and *Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* (*Sku gsum ngo sprod*) (1548–49), as well as in a number of shorter works. It may therefore be useful to provide an overview of some principal distinctions relating to buddha nature, and then turn to parallel distinctions pertaining to the nature of mind and reality. This will provide a basis for proceeding in the final section to assess how these views shaped his Mahāmudrā approach to perennial Buddhist debates over the status of the ultimate, the problem of the remainder, and the relative efficacy of conceptual and nonconceptual modes of cognition in soteriology.

As a prelude to considering this family of distinctions, it may be useful to begin by examining a section in his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* wherein he argues for the indispensability of soteriological distinctions on the basis of the fourfold tantric hermeneutic of the path that comprises: [1] the ground of the clearing process, [2] the objects to be cleared, [3]

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phenomena (*chos can*), and self-empty from the standpoint of the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*). Thus, its emptiness is of two kinds." *des na bcom ldan 'das kyi mdo rgyud rnam las | chos can gyi cha nas rang sems rig pa dri med gcer bur thon tshul la gzhan stong dang | chos nyid kyi cha nas rig pa dri med gcer bur thon tshul la rang stong ste de'i stong pa nyid gnyis pa'o* | We are thankful to Klaus-Dieter Mathes for drawing our attention to this important passage which he discusses in a forthcoming paper.

the clearing process and [4] the result of the clearing process.<sup>741</sup> Significantly, he defines the ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*) as “the “ground” that remains (*lhag ma*) when what [is to be cleared] has been cleared away.”<sup>742</sup> His explanation of this scheme is worth sketching in rough strokes as it provides the background needed to understand the types of identification models prevalent among some of his contemporaries which he considered to be fundamentally misguided. First of all, Mi bskyod rdo rje uses the scheme to clarify the sense with which Rang byung rdo rje in his *Hevajra* commentary had stated that “the spiritual potential (*rigs*) consists in aspects of sentient beings’ body, speech and mind (*lus ngag yid*) that are similar to (*’dra ba’i cha*) tathāgatas’ body, speech and mind (*sku gsung thugs*)”. More specifically, he uses it to structure an argument for why a buddha’s body, speech and mind (*sku gsung thugs*) can only be considered “numerically similar” to those of a sentient being and should otherwise be considered wholly different. His philosophical adversary in this argument is ’Gos lo tsā who, in his (currently unavailable) *Kālacakra* commentary, is alleged to have taken Rang byung rdo rje’s statement as scriptural validation for his own view that sentient beings do not possess buddha[hood] but only something typologically similar to it. As the Karma pa puts it:

For you, when the quintessence of buddha [is said to] be present in all sentient beings, it is not buddha that is present. Rather, it is something typologically similar to the buddha that is present.<sup>743</sup> As for what is [allegedly] similar, it is the “distinct set of six cognitive domains”<sup>744</sup> [advanced in Yogācāra *gotra* theory]. Thus declaring that “something like this exists in sentient beings,” you cite as scriptural support the glorious Karma pa Rang byung [rdo rje]. But this is not justified because the inadmissibility of introducing a dichotomy between a ‘bud-dha’ and ‘its nature’ has already been shown above.<sup>745</sup> Likewise, it has been shown<sup>746</sup> that fixed ideas about [something conditioned] being typologically similar (*rigs ’dra*

<sup>741</sup> On these four phases of the clearing process, see Volume II, translation: 105–6; critical edition: 109–10.

<sup>742</sup> See Volume II, translation: 106.

<sup>743</sup> See Mathes 2008, 321.

<sup>744</sup> The term “distinct set of six cognitive domains” renders *ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ* (Tib. *skye mched drug gi khyad par*) where the suffix *-viśeṣaḥ* may denote a particular type among a wider class of things. On this important concept, see above, 234 n. 661. Later in the present text, Mi bskyod rdo rje defines the predicate “distinctive” in the locution “distinct set of six cognitive domains” as specifying a transcendent mode of cognition—namely, viz. the “all-ground wisdom” (*kun gzhi ye shes*), as opposed to all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*)—that is “distinct from” the six conditioned sense fields of a sentient being.

<sup>745</sup> The extended argument he alludes to is discussed below, 271 f.

<sup>746</sup> See, for example, the eighth Karma pa’s teacher Karma phrin las pa’s “A Delimitation of Buddha Nature Doctrines [in India and Tibet]” (*bde gshegs pa’i snying po’i mtha’ bcad pa*) which forms a subsection of his *Zab mo nang don rnam bshad snying po*: 331–384. For a summary of this passage, see above, 185 f.

ba) to the uncorrupted<sup>747</sup> is unfounded. Since what counts as a “distinct set of six sense fields” is not [properly] identified, you have a mistaken idea [about it].<sup>748</sup>

In the following summary of this section (translated, and critically edited in Volume II<sup>749</sup>), our focus is confined to the author’s explanation of the importance of robust distinctions in light of the fourfold tantric hermeneutic.

Within this fourfold schema, the tantric Buddhist path is framed as a process of clearing (*sbyang byed*) or purification (*dag byed*) by means of the four empowerments (*dbang bskur*) and subsequent Generation Stage (*bskyed rim*) and Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*). These all work together to dispel the shroud of adventitious obscurations, like the sun dispersing clouds<sup>750</sup>, and to thereby disclose the ground or buddha nature which, once purified of all defilements, is nothing other than the goal, buddhahood itself.

The Karma pa begins by explaining that although things to be relinquished and their antidotes initially appear to the Buddhist aspirant as homologous instances (similar)<sup>751</sup> inasmuch as they are conceptual dyads which stand in a relation of reciprocal determination to one another (each requiring the other for its instantiation), they must eventually be directly recognized as heterologous instances (different) so that one can complete the abandonment of

<sup>747</sup> On the idea of uncorruptability vis-à-vis *gotra* theories, see Karma phrin las pa’s *Zab mo nang don rnam bshad snying po* (33<sub>5-6</sub>) where he quotes the *Abhidharmakośaṭīka* of Yaśomitra: “What the Sautrāntikas call *gotra* refers to the germinal capacity of mind (*sems kyi sa bon nus pa : cittabījaśākti*). When this causal seed (*sa bon rgyu : bījahetu*) having the nature of being thoroughly corrupted exists in the phases of ordinary individuals and learners (*śikṣa/śaikṣa*), they are known as ‘those possessing the potential (*gotra*) that has the nature of being thoroughly corrupted’.” Karma phrin las interprets this passage to mean that “the seed of mind refers to the capacity that makes possible the arising of uncorrupted wisdom.” (33<sub>6</sub>)

<sup>748</sup> *Rgan po’i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1003<sub>3-5</sub>: *khyod kyi sems can thams cad la sangs rgyas kyi snying po gnas pa’i tshe | sangs rgyas de gnas pa min | sangs rgyas de’i rigs dang ’dra ba zhig gnas pa yin | ’dra ba de la skye mched drug gi khyad par ba yin pas ’di lta bu zhig sems can la yod pa yin zer nas | dpal ka rma pa rang byung gi lung drangs mod | ’di mi ’thad pa la | sangs rgyas dang snying po’i dbye ’byed mi ’thad pa gong du bstan zin la | de bzhin zag med dang rigs ’dra ba’i blo rtse gtad pa la khungs med par bstan | skye mched drug gi khyad par ngos ma zin pas nongs |*

<sup>749</sup> See Volume II, translation: 105–6, critical edition: 109–10.

<sup>750</sup> See *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* IV, MKsb vol. 5, 703<sub>5-6</sub>.

<sup>751</sup> According to Dharmakīrti, the terms “similar” and “dissimilar instances” (*sapakṣa/vipakṣa*) are synonymous with the “homologous” and “heterologous examples” (*sādharmyadrṣṭānta/vaidharmyadrṣṭānta*) on the basis of which pervasion/entailment relations (*vyāpti*) of concordance/copresence (*anvaya*) and difference/coabsence (*vyatireka*) are established. See Tillemans 1999, 90 f. Shōryū Katsura explains the way these relations are specified in Indian logic: “when an item is present (*anvaya*) in instances similar (*sapakṣa*) to what is to be inferred (*anumeya*) and is absent (*vyatireka*) from instances dissimilar (*vipakṣa*) to what is to be inferred, it is a valid inferential mark, provided that it is present in the object of inference (*pakṣa*). Since smoke is present where there is a fire and absent where there is no fire, we can establish a special relationship between smoke and fire. Smoke is a valid inferential mark that causes us to know the presence of an unperceived fire, that is, what is to be inferred.” Siderits, Tillemans and Chakrabarti 2011 (eds.), 128–29.

the former and the activation of the latter. He then adds that from the standpoint of the clearing process itself, things to be cleared and the ground of the clearing process are finally seen to be dissimilar insofar as the former (which are superfluous) need to be relinquished for the latter (which is fundamental) to fully manifest. This complex sequence neatly captures the author's view that conceptual differentiations (homologous only in the sense of being reciprocally determined) are necessary fictions in the context of soteriology where the goal is to make manifest what is radically other than the familiar, but delusive, phenomena that constitute the conventional or 'pseudo' reality.

Clarifying the meaning of *Hevajratantra* II.ii.45, the author goes on to argue that even superficial similarities (numerical and formal) between the body, speech and mind of a buddha (or visualized deity) and sentient being no longer obtain when the ordinary latent tendencies are cleared away and the adamant body, speech and mind of buddhahood come to the fore. Mi bskyod rdo rje here follows Kāṇha's commentary on this passage which says of the Generation Stage meditation that "The idea here is that the cultivation of the deity's body is performed in order to relinquish ["the latent tendencies within an ordinary body"], and in order to strengthen the latent tendencies of the undefiled aggregates."<sup>752</sup> It is important to recall that this asymmetrical priority relation between the abiding mode of being of a buddha and the ordinary mode of being of sentient being is central to the Karma pa's disclosive path hermeneutic. On this view, the distinction between the abiding nature and the adventitious ultimately ceases to exist only because the latter dissolves back into its abiding source at the time of realization, like waves into water.

The author's excursus on tantric path hermeneutics reveals just how germane the underlying interpretation of the path as a clearing process is to his own view of goal-realization. It is an interpretation supported by robust distinctions that serve to clarify the asymmetrical priority relations among the hierarchically layered phenomena constituting human reality. In a lengthy discussion of the tantric hermeneutical scheme in the fourth, tantric section of his *Single Intent* cycle, Mi bskyod rdo rje says "in general, it amounts to an exegetical error (*'khrul bshad*) to not adequately differentiate between taking the ground of

<sup>752</sup> The full passage in Kāṇha's commentary on HT II.ii.45 reads: "If the world is suffused by buddha[hood]—it having the nature of existence and nonexistence—then why perform the cultivation of the form of the deity? Good question! [cites HT II.ii.45] [Here, the line "It being a locus of] arms, face and colour" means "it being similar to a [human] body." Then is its cultivation meaningless? The answer is "On the contrary, [[it is meaningful] because of [the problem of] ordinary latent tendencies]". This signifies, it should be added, the latent tendencies within an ordinary body. The idea here is that the cultivation of the deity's body is performed in order to relinquish [these], and in order to strengthen the latent tendencies of the undefiled *skandhas*." *Yogatantratnamālā* (HVY), ed. by Tripathi and Negi, 117: *yādi buddhamayaṃ jagat bhāvābhāvasvarūpatvāt tathāpi kasmāt devatākārabhāvanā kriyate ity āha satyam uktam | devatetyādi bhuja mukhetīyādi dehasāmānyādi ity arthaḥ | tato vyarthā bhāvanā syāt | kin tv ityādi prākṛtasya dehāntarasya tatra vāsaneti śeṣaḥ | tatra prahāṇārthaṃ anāsravaskandhāvāsanāparipuṣṭaye devatādehabhāvanā kriyate iti bhāvaḥ |*

the clearing process as one's basis and taking the objects to be cleared as one's basis".<sup>753</sup> He is quick to add, however, that taking buddhahood, the result of emancipation, as a permanent, eternal nature existing in sentient beings—a position he attributes to the Jo nang pa tradition (*jo nang pa'i lugs*)—has been strongly repudiated within the views and tenets of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition.<sup>754</sup>

Here again, it becomes clear that Mi bskyod rdo rje wants, on the one hand, to underscore the important clarificatory role that philosophical distinctions play in differentiating what is to be relinquished from what is to be realized during the path, on the other hand, to caution against giving such distinctions any ontological weight. It is a mistake, in his eyes, to allow a useful model of reality slide into the reality of the model, to confuse soteriology with ontology. The distinctions at best reflect how things work in shifting soteriological contexts, not how things *really* are. For the Karma pa, the way things are is free from all discursive elaborations, being beyond positive and negative determinations of existence and nonexistence. Nonetheless, a disclosive path hermeneutic based on strong conventionally valid distinctions offers a potent stratagem for traversing the Buddhist path, one that enables the aspirant to integrate the key points of buddha nature, Vajrayāna and Mahāmudrā doctrine. Let us now turn to an examination of the author's views on the buddha nature, the nature of reality, and nature of mind in light of the core distinctions pertaining to each.

## BUDDHA NATURE

The Eighth Karma pa's early views on buddha nature are well-represented by two early treatises<sup>755</sup> he composed on the subject: *A Lamp that Eloquently Elucidates the Tradition of the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka Proponents*<sup>756</sup> and *A Nerve Tonic for the Elderly: An Analysis of both "The Secrets of the Three Continua" by Rje Yid bzang rtse ba and "An Explanation of Cakrasaṃvara" by Paṇ chen Shākya mchog [ldan]*<sup>757</sup>. While the *Lamp* clarifies what buddha

<sup>753</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* IV, in MKsb vol. 5, 715<sub>2-3</sub>: *spyir sbyang gzhi la gzhir byas pa dang | sbyang bya'i gzhir byas pa ma phyed pa'i 'khrul bshad du zad la | khyad par bral 'bras kyi sangs rgyas rtag pa sems can la yod pa ni jo nang pa'i lugs yin la |*

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*, 715<sub>4</sub>: *jo nang ba 'di dwags po bka' brgyud kyi lta grub la sun ci phyin rab tu rgol lugs...*

<sup>755</sup> Translations and critical editions of these will be included in a forthcoming monograph by the authors of the present work.

<sup>756</sup> Its full title is *The Lamp that Eloquently Elucidates the Tradition of the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka Proponents* (*Dbu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*). The work is hereafter referred to by the abbreviated title *Lamp*.

<sup>757</sup> This work is more commonly known by the short title *The Sublime Fragrance of Nectar* (*bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*). Like many Tibetan commentaries and treatises, the text bears a long explanatory title followed by a short ornamental title. We have here adopted the ornamental title *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*rgan po'i rlung sman*) that was used by the author himself in a bibliography of his own works he included in his spiritual memoirs (*spyad pa'i rabs*) composed at the age of forty, i.e., six to seven years before his death. The three editions of the

nature is, the *Tonic* explains what it is not. In terms of content, the *Lamp* is primarily an exposition and appraisal of buddha nature according to the tradition of Asaṅga and Maitreya, while the *Tonic* is a critical review of the buddha nature theories presented in two tantric commentaries that were composed shortly before the author's lifetime: the *Secrets of the Three Continua* (*Rgyud gsum gsang ba*)<sup>758</sup>, a *Kālacakratantra* commentary by 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481) and the *Commentary on the Cakrasaṃvara* (*Bde mchog rnam bshad*)<sup>759</sup> by Shākya mchog ldan (1423–1507). In short, the *Tonic* offers a critical review of two influential Tibetan tantric theories of buddha nature that Mi bskyod rdo rje saw as having misrepresented in crucial ways their sūtric and tantric sources. As previously noted, the colophon of the *Tonic* informs us that the work was composed at Zing po 'bum pa sgang<sup>760</sup> in Kong yul when the author was 26 years of age (1533).<sup>761</sup> The text is listed among the Karma pa's own bibliography of his works included in one of his spiritual memoirs that he composed at age forty (1547)<sup>762</sup>, seven years before his death.

A short synopsis of Mi bskyod rdo rje's critique of 'Gos lo's tantric buddha nature theory in the *Tonic* makes a good starting point for our analysis of his views of buddha nature since it contains some of his more cogent arguments on why he considers strong distinctions to be indispensable to correctly discerning buddha nature and the path to its realization. He begins by arguing for the acceptability of an unequivocal distinction between buddha nature and adventitious stains—referred to by the short-hand terms 'quintessence' or 'kernel' (*snying po*) and 'chaff' (*shun pa*)—while at the same time outlining the many undesired consequences that follow from not doing so. Looking at the thematic organization of the *Tonic*, we can see that the arguments directed toward 'Gos Lo tsā ba's buddha nature theory are structured

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text consulted for this study and a later bibliography of his student and biographer Zhwa dmar IV Chos grags ye shes, bear the amended ornamental title *Sublime Fragrance of Nectar* (*bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*). The full title used in the collections is *Rje yid bzang rtse pa'i rgyud gsum gsang ba dang | paṇ chen shakya mchog ldan gyi bde mchog rnam bshad gnyis kyi mthar thug gi 'bras bu gzhi dus gnas lugs | lam dus kyi rnal 'byor rnam la dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog ces bya ba bzhu*gs. References, unless otherwise specified, are to the edition contained in the MKsb vol. 15, 975–1024. This text is hereafter referred to by the abbreviated title *Tonic*.

<sup>758</sup> The 'Bras spungs dkar chag (vol. 1, p. 3, *phyi ka*, no. 12) lists the work *Dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i rgyud bshad pa la 'jug pa rgyud gsum gyi gsang ba rnam par phyed ba*. This work unfortunately remains available at the time of preparing this book. It is hereafter referred to by the abbreviated title *Rgyud gsum gsang ba* or the English rendering *Secrets of the Three Continua*.

<sup>759</sup> The text referred to is found under the combined title '*Khor lo sdom pa la rgyun chags kyi sdeb sbyor gyi sgo nas bstod pa dang || Bde mchog rnam bshad dpal dang po'i sangs rgyas rab tu grub pa* in *The Complete Works* (*gsung 'bum*) of Gser-mdog Paṇ chen Shākya mchog ldan. 24 vols. Delhi: Nagwang Topgyel, 1995, vol. 8, 1–193. The text is hereafter referred to as *Bde mchog rnam bshad* or *Explanation of Cakrasaṃvara*.

<sup>760</sup> On the location of Zing po, see above 246, n. 689.

<sup>761</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1024. See above, 246, n. 690.

<sup>762</sup> *Mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs*, MKsb vol. 1, 387; *karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje zhes bgyi bas rang lo bzhi bcu yan du rnam dkar dang 'brel ba'i bya ba las brtsams* ...

around three thematically intersecting buddha nature distinctions that are central to the author's exposition of his own standpoint and his repudiation of his opponent's. Taken in sequence they are the distinctions between [1] buddha nature and adventitious stains, [2] buddha and sentient being, and [3] buddha nature and buddha. A brief résumé of the three will allow us to see how the author employs a set of related distinction to structure his arguments for distinguishing between abiding and adventitious modes of being. We shall then focus on the last of these as an illustration of his disclosive, distinction-based path hermeneutic.

[1] As mentioned previously, the first distinction is referred to throughout the *Tonic* by the short-hand “kernel and chaff” and this dyad is used by the author to underscore the need to distinguish what is enduring and fundamental from what is merely adventitious and superfluous. The metaphor is appropriate: separating the soteriological wheat from the chaff is a prerequisite for cultivating the path. It is only by clearly understanding the distinction, the author argues, that one will be able to discern buddha nature from the reifications that obscure it and avoid confusing or conflating the two. But such discernment itself depends on a clear recognition of the priority relations between buddha nature and the adventitious mental and affective factors that conceal it.

[2] Building on the first distinction, the second distinction is used to clarify the difference between a buddha and sentient being. For Mi bskyod rdo rje, the key to such clarification is to understand that the conventional label “sentient being” (*sems can*) was traditionally defined in contrast to, and therefore as an antonym of, “buddha”. The term “sentient being” is in this sense taken to be synonymous with adventitious stains, these being the sum total of what separates and prevents a person from being a buddha. At the same time, the term “sentient being” is shown to be akin to the term “self” (*bdag : ātman*), both being abstract collection-universals (umbrella terms) for what is in reality a composite and heterogeneous flux of ever-changing psychophysical constituents that, through a complex web of self-identifications, forms the basis of the false sense of self. Arguing from a Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka standpoint, the Karma pa states that both the designation ‘self’ and the basis of designation—the collection of constituents—are mere universals, lacking any intrinsic nature. By way of contrast, the author posits buddha[hood] as the ‘particular’ (*rang gi mtshan nyid : svalakṣana*), that which withstands critical assessment and remains when what is superfluous, the ‘universal’ (abstraction), has been destroyed. These terminological clarifications furnish the Karma pa with the philosophical correctives needed to counter, and prove absurd, the proclivity to regard buddha nature as a kind of subtle sentient being or self that is identified as the very agent of karma and saṃsāric suffering, a view he ascribes to ‘Gos Lo tsā ba and traces to Tsong kha pa’s notion of a subtle self.

[3] The third distinction concerns the much-debated relationship between buddha and buddha nature. Mi bskyod rdo rje here reasons that sharp differentiations between the first

pairs of distinctions—between buddha nature and adventitious stains, and between buddhas and sentient beings—lead one to ascertain the identity, and not merely similarity, between buddha and buddha nature. Buddha nature is buddha *simpliciter*, and not just an approximation of it, though it is embedded in, and obscured by, a conditioned medium, the constellation of adventitious psychophysical aggregates that make up human existence. This crucial point undergirds his argument that the realization of buddha nature involves the disclosure of a mode of being that itself remains unchanging and unmixed (*ma 'dres pa*) with the adventitious obscurations.

Let us now look more closely at the author's discussion of the third distinction which provides a paradigmatic instance of his distinction-based hermeneutic of disclosure. The discussion takes the form of a critical response to the following statement attributed to 'Gos lo: "Although that which exists in sentient beings is the authentic (*mtshan nyid pa*) quintessence [i.e., buddha nature], there are nonetheless two parts, one that is *tathāgata* and one that is not. Having this in mind, it has been explained that 'the quintessence is presented as [existing in] three states'." The Karma pa objects that this claim presupposes a dichotomy between buddha[hood] and buddha nature and implies that buddha nature mixes with, and is fundamentally influenced and altered by, adventitious stains to varying degrees. This follows from the opponent's contention that sentient beings have buddha nature but do not have buddha[hood]; or, stated otherwise, buddha nature exists in sentient beings, but buddha[hood] does not.

The Karma pa begins his response by contending that the three "states" of buddha nature—impure, partly pure, and completely pure—that are said in RGV I.47 to characterize the modes of being of sentient beings, bodhisattvas and buddhas respectively—constitute "a classification made with the intention to distinguish the three-fold [gradation of] thick, thin and cleansed on the part of [ordinary] consciousness—i.e., that aspect involving deluded perceptions of phenomena." Hence, they should *not* be interpreted as "three states of buddha nature [according to how much this] essence is itself adulterated or unadulterated with the influence of the impurities."<sup>763</sup> Rather the three phases should be seen as conventional rubrics used to describe the progressive thinning of the accreted stains that are applicable until unchanging buddha nature is fully disclosed, at which point such distinctions no longer obtain. Rejecting the interpretation that the three phases represent stages of adulteration or mixing of buddha nature with the stains—where the stains are viewed as influencing or modifying buddha nature itself—the author contends that buddha nature simply *is* buddha[hood] in its temporarily shrouded condition, and not just something similar to it. Buddha nature is *immanent* buddhahood. In keeping with linguistic convention, buddhahood is referred to as buddha nature only so long as it remains ensconced in adventitious impurities. One may here

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<sup>763</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1024.



recall that for Mi bskyod rdo rje, the term “quintessence” (*snying po* : *garbha*) is defined in opposition to the adventitious “husk” (*shun pa* : *tuṣa*, *tvac*)<sup>764</sup> that covers it. The kernel itself is not changed at all when its husk is removed and it thereby becomes fully perceptible.

From the author’s disclosive perspective, buddhahood becomes increasingly evident to the aspirant without itself changing or being changed in any way simply as a result of the progressive thinning of the adventitious defilements that had concealed it. But he is emphatic that these defilements in no way influence or adulterate immanent buddhahood, any more than clouds can be said to influence the sun which they seem to obscure from the standpoint of someone on earth. Obscuration, as this analogy suggests, is a localized, temporary and perspectival event. The author concludes his argument by specifying certain undesirable consequences that follow from denying that buddhahood is buddha nature:

In your view, buddha nature in the impure phase is *not* a buddha. Since it only *becomes* a buddha in the pure phase, the quintessence does not possess any autonomy and the impurities have assumed greater efficacy (*nus pa*)<sup>765</sup> than buddha nature itself! In general, your buddha nature possessing two-fold purity posited from the standpoint of wisdom and your quintessence free from adventitious stains posited from the standpoint of [ordinary] consciousness are reckoned to be one and the same [only] from a conceptual standpoint. But it is because of this that mistakes like the [above ones] occur. Moreover, when it comes to identifying the ultimate quintessence<sup>766</sup> as it is associated with the phase of stains, you have not understood it. The ultimate quintessence does not consist of states and [therefore] cannot be compartmentalized, so by subdividing it into three states you have gone astray from the intent of the noble father and son [Maitreya and Aśaṅga].<sup>767</sup>

<sup>764</sup> The term *shun pa* renders the two Sanskrit terms *tuṣa* meaning husk or chaff (of grain, corn or rice) and *tvac* meaning bark, rind, peel, cover, skin (of men, serpents etc.), hide (goats, cows etc.), surface (of the earth). The English word “chaff” shares with *shun pa* both [1] the literal meaning of husks of corn, seeds etc. that are separated by winnowing and [2] the figurative meaning of anything worthless, dispensable or superfluous that must be discarded to derive what is essential. See Negi 1993–2005 s.v. *shun pa* and Monier-Williams 1956 and Böhrtlingk 1998 s.v. *tuṣa* and *tvac*.

<sup>765</sup> On this view, the impurities have greater power, capacity or efficacy (*nus pa*) than buddha nature because their absence or presence is what determines the existence or nonexistence of buddha nature.

<sup>766</sup> “Ultimate quintessence” (*mthar thug gi snying po*) refers to buddha nature as it is fully disclosed in the final (*mthar thug*) stage of the path.

<sup>767</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 988<sub>5</sub>–989<sub>2</sub> *khyod ltar ma dag pa'i gnas skabs su sangs rgyas kyi snying po sangs rgyas min | dag pa'i gnas skabs su de sangs rgyas yin par song bas snying po rang dbang can ma yin pa dang | snying po las ma dag pa nus pa che bar song ba yin no || spyir yang khyod kyi ye shes kyi ngo nas bzhaḡ pa'i dag pa gnyis ldan gyi sangs rgyas kyi snying po dang | rnam shes kyi ngo nas bzhaḡ pa'i glo [989] bur dri bral gyi snying po gnyis rtoḡ ngor gcig tu go bas kyang nor pa 'di lta bu byung ba yin no || gzhan yang dri ma gnas skabs dang bcas pa'i mthar thug gi snying po ngos bzung ba la | khyod kyis de ha ma go bar | mthar thug gi snying*

In soteriological terms, to deny that the obscured buddha nature remains identical with buddhahood is tantamount to according autonomy and soteriological efficacy not to this buddha nature but to the defilements that obscure it. This follows from the rival's logic that buddha nature (*buddhagarbha*) exists in sentient beings whereas buddha[hood] does not. For it presupposes that the very existence or nonexistence of buddhahood in an aspirant depends on whether or not the adventitious factors—such as deluded perceptions—exist! With this assumption, the Karma pa's rival implicitly attributes to these impurities an autonomous existence as well as the capacity to determine whether buddhahood exists for the aspirant. Consequently, goal-realization depends on the adventitious factors and *not* on buddhahood which, on the opponent's account, doesn't even exist for those on the path. As Mi bskyod rdo rje argues, this account reverses the *Ratnagotravibhāga*'s construal of buddha nature as ever-present immanent buddhahood which is sharply distinguished from the adventitious defilements which are seen as superfluous and unreal. One problem his account does not address, however, is how adventitious stains can co-exist with the soteriologically efficacious buddha nature replete with its ten strengths and so on without being immediately dissolved by it.

In any case, the Eighth Karma pa pursues a similar line of argumentation when he turns his attention to Shākya mchog ldan's tantric buddha nature theory in the second part of his *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly*. There he rejects this master's distinction between conventional and ultimate buddha nature as presented in his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* (*Bde mchog rnam bshad*), but also in his major treatises on buddha nature.<sup>768</sup> As Mi bskyod rdo rje's understands it, there is only one unchanging and undifferentiated buddha nature, which is obscured to varying degrees by adventitious stains, just as it is a single white conch which appears in various shades of yellow to those with jaundiced vision.<sup>769</sup> On these grounds, and in view of his objections to 'Gos Lo tsā ba's three-stage model of buddha nature, we can assume that the author would also reject Shākya mchog ldan's Rngog Blo ldan shes rab-based interpretation of the RGV's three phases of buddha nature according to which sentient beings of the impure phase do not possess buddha nature at all but only a *gotra* that is different from buddha nature, while bodhisattvas of the partly pure-partly impure phase have only a *part* of a buddha nature, and buddhas alone have it completely.<sup>770</sup> The Eighth Karma pa's disclosive paradigm of a full-

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*po gnas skabs su ma gyur ba dang dbye ma nus pa de la gnas skabs gsum du 'byed pas rje btsun yab sras kyi dgongs pa dang phyin ci log tu song ba yin no ||*

<sup>768</sup> On these works, see Komarovsky 2006 and 2010.

<sup>769</sup> Medical evidence to the contrary, there is a widespread traditional belief in Indian and European thought that jaundice not only makes one (and the whites of one's eyes) 'look' yellow but also makes one 'see' yellow. See below, 352 n. 1014.

<sup>770</sup> See Komarovsky 2006, 521.

fledged, though temporarily obscured, buddha nature, would seem to leave no room for a model of incremental possession of buddha nature.

In short, it is with the aim of highlighting the primacy of buddha nature—its “supreme otherness” (*gzhan mchog*) from the adventitious—that Mi bskyod rdo rje employs various soteriological distinctions to structure his presentations of Mahāmudrā and buddha nature and his criticisms of the views of these held by others. In his view, such distinctions play an indispensable role, on the conventional level of conceptual clarification during the traversal of the Buddhist path, in helping the aspirant to separate what is essential from what is superfluous, the genuine from the contrived. By thus separating the soteriological wheat from the chaff, the aspirant learns to directly discern what is to be realized while clearly distinguishing it from what is to be abandoned. Within a broad range of literary genres including treatises, commentaries, songs, poems, hymns, instructions, letters, epistles and oral and written responses to questions, the Eighth Karma pa draws attention to the autonomy and efficacy of buddha nature from this disclosive standpoint.

#### NATURE OF REALITY

Mi bskyod rdo rje employs a wide range of Buddhist terms from sūtric and tantric discourses to clarify his tradition’s conceptions of ultimate reality—the goal of Buddhist soteriology—and of the path to its realization. Following non-tantric Mahāyāna discourses, the ultimate is identified as the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid* : *dharmatā*) or expanse of phenomena (*chos [kyi] dbyings*) as contrasted with phenomena (*chos can* : *dharma*, *dharmā*). It is also described as *dharmakāya* or *dharmatākāya* which the author claims can in some contexts be identified with resultant buddha nature (*’bras bu’i bde gshegs snying po*), but not in any circumstances with causal buddha nature (*rgyu’i bde gshegs snying po*). This point is argued in a short text entitled *Replies to Queries About Buddha Nature and Dharmakāya* (*bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku’i dris lan*) in which he responds to G.yung bya bral’s questions concerning the relationship between *tathāgatagarbha* and *dharmakāya*:

Although there are cases where resultant buddha nature and the “embodiment of the true reality” (*chos nyid kyi sku* : *dharmatākāya*) are of the same nature, the causal buddha nature is not *dharmakāya*. For the *dharmakāya* has completed the two accumulations, has finished clearing away the two obscurations, and is free from the obscurations of the five aggregates, twelve cognitive domains and eighteen elements. It is endowed with the three embodiments (*sku gsum*), five wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*) and buddha-activities [stemming] from the fundamental transformation

of the eightfold cognitive ensemble. It is in reference to this set of meanings that the name *dharmakāya* (*chos kyi sku*) is used.<sup>771</sup>

The author proceeds to explain that this resultant buddha nature comprises both [1] the ultimate *svābhāvikakāya* (*ngo bo nyid kyi sku*) and [2] conventional *rupakāya* (*gzugs kyi sku*): “[1] The cause that is the *svābhāvikakāya*, being primordially pure by nature in the mind streams of all sentient beings, does not abide as the nature of obscuration. As for its names, it is called ‘buddha nature in the continuity phase’ (*rgyud dus kyi bder gshegs snying po*) and the ‘naturally present potential’ (*rang bzhin gnas pa’i rigs : prakṛtisthagotra*). And in Mantra texts, it is called ‘primal buddha’ (*dang po’i sangs rgyas*) and ‘ground Hevajra’ (*gzhi kye rdo rje*) and the like.”<sup>772</sup> In the context of tantric path hermeneutics, it is further described as the ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*)<sup>773</sup>, the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*)<sup>774</sup>, and Mahāmudrā as the fourth of the tantric seals. In nongradual Mahāmudrā discourses, it is specified as ground *mahāmudrā* (*gzhi phyag rgya chen po*)<sup>775</sup> or the actual mode of abiding [of the ground] (*[gzhi] dngos po’i gnas lugs*), which may be equated with the “all-ground causal continuum” (*kun gzhi rgyu rgyud*) mentioned in certain Tibetan tantric traditions such as the Sa skya Lam ’bras system.<sup>776</sup>

As regards distinctions concerning the nature of reality, it may be noted that the differentiation between phenomena or “that which possesses [the nature of] phenomena” (*dharmal/*

<sup>771</sup> *Bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku’i dris lan*, MKsb vol. 3, 305<sub>1-3</sub>: ‘bras bu bde gshegs snying po dang chos nyid kyi sku rang bzhin gcig pa’i skabs yod kyang | rgyu bde gshegs snying po ni chos kyi sku ma yin la chos kyi sku ni tshogs gnyis rdzogs | sgrub gnyis sbyangs pa mthar thug tu byas pa | phung po lnga skye mched bcu gnyis khams bco brgyad kyi sgrub pa bral ba | rnam shes tshogs brgyad gnas gyur gyi sku gsum ye shes lnga phrin las dang bcas pa de yi tshogs don zhiig la chos sku zhes sgra sbyar ba yin |

<sup>772</sup> See below, 381.

<sup>773</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* IV, MKsb vol. 5, 700<sub>6</sub> f. See in particular 702<sub>5</sub>.

<sup>774</sup> On the related Tibetan neologism *kun gzhi rgyu rgyud* introduced in Lam ’bras exegesis of the Sa skya school, see the following note.

<sup>775</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI, MKsb vol. 6, 132<sub>1-3</sub>: “Hence, this causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*) is called the “all-ground causal continuum” (*kun gzhi rgyu rgyud*) in the Lam ’bras and other [traditions] and the “actual abiding nature of the ground” (*gzhi dngos po’i gnas lugs*) in the cycle of instructions of Lord [Mar pa] the translator. Regarding the continuum of ground *mahāmudrā* coemergent as body and mind, because it is that which is posited as the *dharmadhātu*, it is not also contradictory to posit it as “actual”. Since it is established as ground *mahāmudrā*, it is realized also as joy.” *des na ’di’i rgyu rgyud la lam ’bras sogs nas kun gzhi rgyu rgyud dang | rje lo tsā ba’i gdams skor nas gzhi dngos po’i gnas lugs zhes lhan skyes kyi lus sems phyag rgya chen po gzhi’i rgyud la | chos dbyings su ’jog pa nyid kyi phyir chos dbyings de dngos por bzhag kyang mi ’gal zhiing gzhi phyag chen du grub pas dge bar yang grub bo ||* On Mi bskyod rdo rje’s criticism of Lam ’bras authors who confuse this unconditioned *kun gzhi rgyu rgyud* with the conditioned *ālayavijñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam shes*), see below 279.

<sup>776</sup> See *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* IV, in MKsb vol. 5, 703<sub>1-2</sub> which clarifies relationship of this actual mode of abiding to buddha nature and to causal coemergence [immanence] of body and mind (*lus sems kyi rgyu’i lhan cig skyes pa*). See also previous note. On the nature and development of the idea of *dngos po’i gzhi kyi gnas lugs*, see chapter four.

*dharmā* : *chos/chos can*) and the “nature of phenomena” (*dharmatā* : *chos nyid*)—a doctrinal hallmark of the Maitreya treatises, especially the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (DhDhV)—plays a central role in Bka’ brgyud doctrine. This has been well-documented elsewhere<sup>777</sup> and need not be considered here. Also, the difference between phenomena and its basic nature are typically identified as the respective spheres of mind and the nature of mind respectively.<sup>778</sup> This is epitomized by the term of art “mind of reality” (*chos nyid kyi sems* : *dharmatācitta*), described in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (MSA) 19.13 as being luminous (*prabhāsvara*) in contrast to the ordinary mind (*citta*) which is not. The close affiliation between these descriptors of mind and reality are the basis for the often-quoted *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS) distinction between *dharmadhātu* and impure mind which is commented on by Rang byung rdo rje and many of his successors.

## NATURE OF MIND

The Eighth Karma pa’s views regarding wisdom (*ye shes*) and the nature of mind (*sems nyid*, *sems kyi rang bzhin*) and how they differ from consciousness (*rnam shes*) and dualistic mind (*sems*) are deeply indebted to the works of his Karma kaṃ tshang predecessors, most notably the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. In general, Bka’ brgyud exegetes deployed a varied repertoire of distinctions between mind and the nature of mind that were drawn from a diverse body of texts and commentaries belonging to Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and Siddha genres. Tibetan terms variously used to describe the nature of mind—some of which were translations of Indic terms, others Tibetan neologisms<sup>779</sup>—include mind as such (*sems nyid*),

<sup>777</sup> See Mathes 1996.

<sup>778</sup> See, for example, Dwags ram pa Chos rgyal bstan pa’s (1449–1524) *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa’i gsal ba’i rgyan* (1356–1361) where the author states that the first chapter of the *Zab mo nang don* “explains the actual nature of mind (*sems dngos po’i gnas lugs*) in terms of [1] two minds of phenomena and the nature of phenomena (*chos can dang chos nyid kyi sems gnyis*), [2] two minds of nature and modification (*rang bzhin dang rnam ’gyur gyi sems gnyis*) and [3] two minds of consciousness and wisdom (*rnam shes dang ye shes kyi sems gnyis*).”

<sup>779</sup> Some of these are included in a list of synonyms (*ming gi rnam grangs*) for the beginningless nature of mind (*sems nyid thog med*) given by Karma phrin las pa in his *Zab mo nang don nyin byed ’od kyi phreng ba*, 176–182: “As for its quasi-synonyms, which are said to be limitless, they include natural awareness, fresh mind, innate mind, Mahāmudrā, supreme bliss, *nāda*, invincible *hūṃ*, space-pervading space *vajra*, *tathāgatagarbha*, energy current of wisdom, central channel of wisdom, invincible seminal nucleus and Prajñāpāramitā [goddess] from the standpoint of the perfections.” *de la ming gi rnam grangs su ni | tha mal gyi shes pa | sems so ma | gnyug ma’i yid dang | phyag rgya chen po dang | bde ba chen po dang | nā da dang | gzhom med kyi hūṃ | mkha’ khyab mkha’i rdo rje dang | de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po | ye shes kyi rlung dang | ye shes kyi rtsa dbu ma dang | gzhom med kyi thig le dang | pha rol tu phyin pa’i phyogs las shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin ma zhes sogs rnam grangs mtha’ yas pa gsungs so ||* Dwags ram pa adds to the list these synonyms, many of which are found in the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Laghukālacakratāntra*: supremely unchanging bliss supreme (*mchog tu mi ’gyur ba’i bde ba chen po*), coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes sbyor pa’i ye shes*), great compassion (*snying rje chen po*), primal buddha (*dang po’i sangs rgyas*), original protector (*thog ma’i mgon po*), \**sugatagarbha* (*bde bar gshegs pa’i*

natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*)<sup>780</sup>, natural mind (*rang bzhin gyi sems*), beginningless nature of mind (*thog ma'i sems nyid*), innate mind (*gnyug ma'i yid*), wisdom (*ye shes*), nondual wisdom (*gnyis med kyi ye shes*), naked awareness (*rjen pa'i shes pa*) and coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*). Bka' brgyud exegetes used such terms not only to characterize the enduring, nondual character of mind but also to emphasize its primacy, and its distinction from ordinary dualistic mind (*sems*), mentality (*yid*), cognition (*shes pa*) or consciousness (*rnam shes*). These latter terms commonly describe delusive objectifying and subjectivizing forms of cognition that Buddhist insight and practices aim to transcend. Mi bskyod rdo rje often registers his concern about the lack of clarity regarding the proper use of such distinctions, taking the term *sems nyid* as a case in point. The particle *nyid*, he argues, denotes a basic nature (*chos nyid*) of the phenomenon (*chos can*)<sup>781</sup> mind, and is used “in the sense of an ineliminable distinctive feature” (*khyad chos mi spong bar don*) which should never be confused with the conventional condition or characteristics of ordinary mind.

Regarding terms such as *sems nyid* etc., *sems nyid* [combines] a term denoting a phenomenon (*chos can : dharmin*) [i.e., mind] and a term that denotes its basic nature (*chos nyid : dharmatā*), viz., a distinctive feature (*khyad par gyi chos*) [i.e., the nature of mind]. Here, the term denoting a phenomenon [mind] is qualified in the sense of an ineliminable distinctive feature. In general, this abiding mode<sup>782</sup> of mind (*sems kyi gnas lugs*) is presented both as a conventional mode or characteristic or an ultimate mode or characteristic. Among these [two], mere cognition and mere clarity (*rig tsam gsal tsam*) are the conventional mode. Consequently, although there are many people here in Tibet for whom it is the real abiding mode (*don gyi gnas lugs*) and [who thus] take it as their view and meditation, this is an insuperable error!<sup>783</sup>

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*snying po*), great seminal nucleus (*thig le chen po*), de *kho na nyid* (thusness), utterly pure mind (*rnam par dag pa'i sems*). See *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa'i gsal ba'i rgyan*, RDsb vol. 12, 45<sub>6</sub>–47<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>780</sup> On this important Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā term, see above, 36, 59, 153, 162, 175, 177, 186 and n. 534, 283, 338 et passim.

<sup>781</sup> The author here understands the term *chos can*, phenomena, to refer to that which possesses the nature of phenomena.

<sup>782</sup> The term *gnas lugs* renders various Sanskrit terms including [1] *vyṛta* (appearance, occurred, become, turned, matter, incident, issue, mode of life, state, as e.g., *vastuvṛta : dngos po'i gnas lugs*, nature of things); [2] *sthiti* (abiding, staying, situation, state, abode, remaining or being in any state or condition); [3] *saṃniveśa* (assembly, situation, open place, foundation); and [4] *saṃsthāna* (being, standing, abiding, standing still or firm, abode, dwelling-place, nature, essence, there-being (Dasein), condition. In the present context, it refers to the prevailing mode or state of mind, as indicated by the alternative defining characteristic (*mnyam nyid*). For a more detailed analysis of *gnas lugs*, see below, 359 f.

<sup>783</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* Ic, in MKsb vol. 4, 1087<sub>6</sub>–1088<sub>3</sub>: *sems nyid ces bya ba zhes sogs la | sems nyid ni chos can brjod pa'i sgra dang | de'i chos nyid ni khyad par gyi chos brjod pa'i sgra yin pas 'dir chos can brjod pa'i sgras khyad chos mi spong bar don la brjod pa yin no || spyir sems kyi gnas lugs 'di la kun rdzob kyi gnas lugs*

Mi bskyod rdo rje accorded considerable importance to a distinction between pure mind and impure mind introduced by Karma pa III Rang byung rdo rje on the basis of Mahāmudrā and the Maitreya texts. The Third Karma pa had maintained that “the general discourses of all vehicles refer to mind as such (*sems nyid*) but this should be known to be two-fold: possessing purity and being impure.”<sup>784</sup> Mind possessing purity, he variously equates with [1] mind as such (*sems nyid*) as described in Saraha’s *Dohākoṣagīti* 43<sup>785</sup> as the seed of all of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, [2] the buddha quintessence (*buddhagarbha*) as described in *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.55–57<sup>786</sup> by analogy with space which supports the other elements but is itself unsupported by any, and [3] mind’s luminous nature (*’od gsal ba’i sems*) as described in *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* 5b.1–2<sup>787</sup>. His commentators further identify the pure mind with the tantric hermeneutical categories of the ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*), first of the four aspects of the clearing process and the continuum (*rgyud : tantra*) of the ground or causal phase, first of the three continuities (*rgyud gsum*) whose *locus classicus* is said to be the supplemental tantra (*uttaratantra*) of the *Guhyasamāja*.<sup>788</sup> Such identifications reveal the extent to which Rang byung rdo rje and his successors looked for doctrinal common ground among Buddhist discourses on the nature of mind found in the sūtras, tantras and Siddha works in order to highlight areas of shared soteriological concern.

Rang byung rdo rje equates the impure mind with the *ālayavijñāna*, which is taken, following texts such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and *Mahāyānasamgraha*, to refer to the source of all obscurations but not of *buddhajñāna* which, conversely, is identified as what

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*sam mtshan nyid dang | don dam gyi gnas lugs sam mtshan nyid gnyis yod pa las | rig tsam gsal tsam ni kun rdzob kyi gnas lugs yin pas de don gyi gnas lugs yin par bod ’dir lta sgom byed pa mang du yod kyang nor ba bla na med pa yin no ||* In Higgins 2013, it is argued that *sems nyid* was a specialized rendering of *citta* (sometimes also *caitanya*) in cases where the original referred to the nature of mind and not dualistic mind. This along with *ye shes*, one of several terms used to render the Sanskrit *jñāna*, reflect the Tibetan penchant for translating single Indian terms by various Tibetan ones according to context for the sake of greater conceptual precision.

<sup>784</sup> *Zab mo nang don rang ’grel*, 381<sub>3-4</sub>: *theg pa thams cad kyi spyi skad la sems nyid ces gsungs kyang | dag pa dang bcas pa dang | ma dag pa gnyis su shes par bya |* For a lucid summary of this distinction, see Mathes 2008, 57–59.

<sup>785</sup> Note that the original (ed. Shahidullah 1928, 140) has *citta* while Tibetan Bstan ’gyur editions generally have *sems nyid* (not just *sems* as one might expect). The *nyid* may have originally been added for metrical reasons.

<sup>786</sup> For a translation and discussion of this passage in relation to Rang byung rdo rje’s interpretation in Mathes 2008, 57.

<sup>787</sup> “That Mind is not [dualistic] mind; Mind’s nature is luminous.” The corresponding passage from the Sanskrit is given in Schmithausen 1977, 41 as lines E.b.1–2 *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā ||*.

<sup>788</sup> According to colophonic information appended to this text in different editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud ’bum*, the *Guhyasamāja mūlatantra* (GST) was translated by Vimalamitra and Ska ba dpal brtsegs circa 8<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the appended *uttaratantra* (Ch. 18) known in Tibetan as *Gsang ’dus rgyud phyi ma* (“Later *Guhyasamāja*”) was translated later by Buddhaguhya and ’Brog mi dpal ye shes. See Mayer 2004, 130 n. 4.

vanquishes the *ālayavijñāna*.<sup>789</sup> Rang byung rdo rje's Rnying ma colleague Klong chen rab 'byams pa had drawn a similar distinction between pure mind (*sems dag pa*) and impure mind (*sems ma dag pa*) and further subdivided pure mind into pure mind as such (*sems nyid dag pa*) and pure mind (*sems dag pa*) in order to underscore how the 'pure' applications of ordinary mind—ethical and contemplative—that are conducive to goal-realization differ from the primordially pure nature of mind that is the state of realization itself. Rang byung rdo rje had also advocated a key distinction between supramundane mind (*'jigs rten las 'das pa'i sems : lokottaracitta*) and mundane mind—the *ālayavijñāna* with its eightfold consciousness (*kun gzhi tshogs brgyad*)—both in his *Zab mo nang don* with reference to *Mahāyānasamgraha* 1.45–48<sup>790</sup> and in his *Dharmadhātustava* commentary to stanza 46ab which states that mind is observed to have two aspects, the mundane and transmudane.<sup>791</sup> The idea that there is a mode of consciousness more fundamental than *ālayavijñāna* was implicit in the distinction between *ālayavijñāna* and supramundane mind that was famously elaborated in *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS) 1.45–48.<sup>792</sup> Sthiramati had drawn a similar distinction between *ālayavijñāna* and the supramundane *jñāna* (*lokottarajñāna : jigs rten las 'das pa'i ye shes*) which overturns or replaces (*parāvṛtti*) it in his commentary on *Triṃśikā* 29–30.<sup>793</sup> Building on Rang byung rdo rje's distinction between pure and impure minds, his commentator Dwags ram pa Chos rgyal bstan pa (1449–1524) had reaffirmed that the so-called pure mind (*dag pa'i sems*) which is identified as the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*) of tantrism and pure all-ground wisdom (*dag pa kun gzhi ye shes*) is to be differentiated from the *ālayavijñāna* which constitutes impure mind (*sems ma dag pa'i kun gzhi rnam shes*).<sup>794</sup> Citing MS 1.45–48 in support of this view, he further notes that “this MS text specifically characterizes the *ālayavijñāna* as the basis of sentient being (*sems can gyi gnas*) but says it is *not* the cause of *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyu*).”<sup>795</sup> But if this is the case, what does produce the qualities of purification (*rnam par byang ba'i chos : vyavadānadharma*)? To this rejoinder Dwags ram pa answers that “the entire range of qualities of purification depend on the all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye*

<sup>789</sup> *Zab mo nang don rang 'grel*, 382<sub>4-5</sub>: ...sgrib pa thams cad kyi rtsa ba sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyis gzhom par bya ba yin no |

<sup>790</sup> *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (VMS), p. 44; Davidson 1985, 218 and n. 28 and Mathes 2008, 58.

<sup>791</sup> *Chos dbyings bstod pa'i 'grel pa*, 61<sub>1</sub> ff. which comments on *Dharmadhātustava* 46ab: *sems nyid rnam pa gnyis su mthong | ci ltar 'jig rten 'jig rten 'das ||* For translation, see Brunnhölzl 2009, 252.

<sup>792</sup> Davidson 1985, 215 and Mathes 2008, 58.

<sup>793</sup> *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (VMS), p. 44; see Davidson 1985, 218 and n. 28.

<sup>794</sup> *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa'i gsal ba'i rgyan*, MKsb vol. 12, 107<sub>1</sub>–108<sub>1</sub> et passim.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 111<sub>5-6</sub>: *theg bsdus kyi gzhung 'dis kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa ni sems can gyi gnas khyad par can du brjod la | mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyu ni ma yin par brjod do |* Dwags ram pa goes on to “Some



shes), the aforementioned pure mind.”<sup>796</sup> He goes on to criticize certain Sa skya Lam ’bras followers who, having neither seen nor heard the above-cited MS passages, assert that the *ālayavijñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) is the “all-ground causal continuum” (*kun gzhi rgyu rgyud*), thus putting on display their own hidden flaws.<sup>797</sup>

It is in light of such developments that one can assess Mi bskyod rdo rje’s own interpretations of Rang byung rdo rje’s distinction between pure and impure minds. A striking example is his *Two Minds in One Person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma kham pa* (*Bla ma kham pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*) where he builds upon Rang byung rdo rje’s distinction to clarify and validate his own differentiation between innate or genuine mind (*gnyug ma’i sems*) and adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*).<sup>798</sup> This short text (edited and translated in Volume II<sup>799</sup>) offers a lucid summary of the Eighth Karma pa’s views in support of “a certain [unspecified] person’s assertion that two minds exist separately and nonconvergently within every sentient being”<sup>800</sup>. We can detect in the Karma pa’s affirmative answer—he deems this assertion to be fully “in accord with the enlightened intent of all the buddhas of the three times”—his characteristic blending of the key distinctions concerning buddha nature and the nature of mind that are integral elements of his interpretative standpoint.

To abridge the main points, Mi bskyod rdo rje begins by noting that Rang byung rdo rje had explained in his *Zab mo nang don* auto-commentary that mind has both pure and impure modes and that this is described in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV I.47) according to the three phases of impure, pure-impure and completely pure. As the Eighth Karma pa explains, the pure mode refers to self-aware wisdom free from obscurations (*sgrib bral rang rig pa’i ye shes*) whereas the “impure” refers to mundane consciousness that is deluded ignorance along with its obscurations (*sgrib bcas rmongs pa ma rig pa’i rnam par shes pa*). To sharpen the contrast between pure and impure modes of consciousness, he redeploys a distinction that was widely used by realist Buddhist philosophical schools: “when these are [taken] metaphorically as different ‘entities’, the former is the substantially existing entity (*rdzas yod kyi dngos po : dravyasat vastu*)<sup>801</sup> whereas the latter is a nominally existing entity

<sup>796</sup> Ibid., 111<sub>6</sub>–112<sub>1</sub>: *rnam par byang ba’i chos ji snyed pa ni sngar brjod pa’i dag pa’i sems kun gzhi ye shes la brten pa ste |*

<sup>797</sup> Ibid., 114<sub>3–4</sub>.

<sup>798</sup> Rheingans 2008 contains a short discussion of this text (220–21). The identity of the Bla ma kham pa is unknown, the colophon mentioning only that the text was composed in reply to a question by Bla ru bla ma, uncle and nephew (*bla ru bla ma khu dbon*) (Rheingans 2008, 219 n. 9).

<sup>799</sup> See Volume II, translation: 117–20, critical edition: 120–21.

<sup>800</sup> *Bla ma kham pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 220<sub>1–2</sub>: *’o na sems can thams cad la sems gnyis ma ’dres par so sor yod pa de su zhig gis bzhed snyam na...*

<sup>801</sup> In Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma philosophy, substantially existing entities are ultimate simples, anything that cannot be reduced either physically or conceptually into smaller units, such as indivisible particles of matter and indivisible moments of time. By contrast, nominally existing entities are anything physically or conceptually

(*btags yod kyi dngos po : prajñāptisat vastu*). This is because the former is buddha nature—innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded, whereas the latter is the chaff [i.e., superfluous] part—adventitious defilement, innately deluded, and saṃsāric.”

In line with this linguistic convention, he goes on to say that when the sun of non-deluded wisdom which is substantially existent dawns, the dark shroud of the deluded nominally existent consciousness is dispelled. The Karma pa concludes that those who want to awaken to unsurpassed, complete and perfect buddhahood must accept innate mind and reject adventitious mind without mixing or confusing the two. “This is so,” he maintains, “because the goal of complete purification is not attained by any path apart from that and because when one takes as a cause what is not a cause,<sup>802</sup> despite one’s exertions, there is only exhaustion that is fruitless [i.e., has no result].”<sup>803</sup>

Now, in regard to the innate mind that is buddha nature in the mind-streams of sentient beings, the author describes it as a “boundless whole that is indivisible into the categories of ‘consciousness’ and ‘wisdom’.”<sup>804</sup> On the other hand, he continues, “the mind of adventitious stains may have been arbitrarily described using the terms ‘wisdom’ or ‘consciousness’: extensively, as the eightfold ensemble (Yogācāra); more concisely as the sixfold ensemble (non-Yogācāra) and, most succinctly, as nothing more than a single constellation because it is a limited cognition that sees a limited object of knowledge.”<sup>805</sup>

At this point, a question unavoidably arises: if the innate and adventitious minds exist separately and nonconvergently in the continuum of a single individual, doesn’t this contradict [Sgam po pa’s] precept that ‘thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*’?<sup>806</sup> In other words, if ordinary thoughts are fundamentally distinct from *dharmakāya*—as would appear to follow from the sharp distinctions drawn between innate and adventitious mind, and between buddha nature and adventitious stains—this would appear to refute Sgam po pa’s assertion that

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constructed that are therefore imputed and reducible to smaller units. The former are dharmas and possess intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The latter are not dharmas, being without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*). See Hayes, AK 6.4. On this view, only momentary entities are substantially real, whereas the temporal series formed by them (*santāna*) are only nominally existing. See A. Rospatt 1995, 97; Hayes 2001, 113. It is worth noting that in Madhyamaka philosophy, all dharmas are nominally existent and none are substantially existent.

<sup>802</sup> That is, if one takes the adventitious mind as the cause or basis of awakening,

<sup>803</sup> *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 221s: ...rgyu min la rgyur bzung nas 'bad kyang ngal ba 'bras bu med pa nyid kyi phyir |

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 221s: ...rnam shes dang ye shes kyi ris su bye ba med pa tshogs mtha' yas...

<sup>805</sup> Ibid., 221s–222s: glo bur dri ma'i sems ni ye shes sam rnam shes ming gang rung du brjod kyang rung | mang na tshogs brgyad dang nyung na tshogs drug dang | ches bsdud na tshogs gcig las 'da' ba med de | shes bya nyi tshe mthong ba'i shes pa nyi tshe ba yin pa'i phyir ||

<sup>806</sup> Ibid., 222s: 'o na gang zag gcig gi rgyud la gnyug ma dang glo bur gyi sems gnyis ma 'dres par so sor yod na rnam rtog chos skur smra ba dang 'gal<sup>a</sup> lo zhes na | <sup>a</sup>text: 'ga'

thoughts are in essence not different from *dharmakāya*. The implications of this question are far-reaching. For if these two central doctrines turn out to be mutually contradictory, does it not point to a fundamental incompatibility, or even incommensurability, between the differentiation and identification models of goal-realization? The Karma pa's response, concise though it is, gives important clues about the specific type of unity (*yuganaddha*) model he endorses and how it can resolve the apparent inconsistencies: "There is no contradiction," he replies, "because the thoughts of adventitious mind do not exist as fundamentally different from the *dharmakāya* of innate mind, but that mind which exists only as conceptual superimposition therefore has no independent existence, even *conventionally*, apart from *dharmakāya*. Hence 'thoughts themselves are indeed *dharmakāya*'."<sup>807</sup> The author further clarifies this doctrine in his MA commentary: "When this Madhyamaka view [of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā] is born in one's mind-stream, it is called "eliciting natural awareness" (*tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad*) or "directly realizing *dharmakāya*" (*chos sku mngon sum du byas*). When it is realized that the phenomenal (*chos can*), such a sprout and the thoughts [about it], are not established [as anything] apart from their nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*), this was termed the "arising of thoughts as *dharmakāya*".<sup>808</sup> Put simply, thoughts are *dharmakāya* because they are phenomena (*chos can*) that possess the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*).

Returning to the dialogue, Bla ma Khams pa next asks what is meant by "innate mind," to which the Karma pa answers that it is natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in one's own mind-stream in the present moment. In response to the ensuing question of whether the 'two minds' thesis renders problematic claims (in tantric and Siddha discourses) about the inseparability (*dbyer med*) or equality (*mnyam nyid*) of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, he replies "this is not a problem because both phenomena of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds are conventionally alike in being separate and nonconvergent" and yet they are inseparable inasmuch as "the very nature of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds is ultimately present as a great openness and equality, inseparable in their freedom from discursive elaborations." To summarize, Mi bskyod rdo rje advocates a model of unity (*yuganaddha*) characterized by an asymmetrical priority relation between the terms of the relation: adventitious mind is inseparable from innate mind insofar as it exists only nominally, that is, as a superfluous superimposition or epiphenomenon that resolves into the innate mind—i.e., its very nature,

<sup>807</sup> Ibid., 222<sub>1-3</sub>: ...*mi 'gal te | glo bur gyi sems rnam rtog de gnyug ma'i sems chos sku las rdzas gzhan du med cing rtog pas btags pa tsam du yod pa'i sems de ni chos sku las gzhan tha snyad du'ang rang dbang pa min pa'i phyir | rnam rtog nyid chos skur gyur to ||*

<sup>808</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 12<sub>2-6</sub>: '*di'i dbu ma'i lta ba rgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang | chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang | chos can myu gu dang rnam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas |...*

*dharmakāya*—at the time of goal-realization. Until such time, these two modes are present concurrently but nonconvergently in the mind-streams of sentient beings.

The Eighth Karma pa elsewhere consecrates considerable attention to another key distinction, between consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), which had played a central role in the Third Karma pa’s tantric and non-tantric Mahāyāna exegesis. The sixth chapter of Rang byung rdo rje’s *Zab mo nang gi don*, a detailed exposition on body, mind and cosmos according to the Highest Yoga tantras (*bla na med pa’i rnal ’byor gyi rgyud*), is devoted to clarifying the complex relationship between *rnam shes* and *ye shes* and the transition between them.<sup>809</sup> The distinction is further clarified in his *Treatise on Distinguishing Consciousness and Wisdom* (*rnam shes ye shes ’byed pa’i bstan bcos*)<sup>810</sup> which details the fundamental transformation of the eightfold consciousness into the four modes of wisdom as elaborated in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* IX.67 f. (and IX.42 f.)<sup>811</sup> which was expanded to five wisdoms in the *Kālacakra* and other Higher Yoga tantras.<sup>812</sup>

The distinction between *vijñāna* (*rnam shes*) and *jñāna* (*ye shes*) has a long history in Indian Buddhism, an early and influential example being its occurrence as the fourth of four “recourses” (*pratisaraṇa* : *rton pa*) of textual hermeneutics—namely, “to rely on wisdom, not on consciousness”—which were outlined in the *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra* and widely quoted from the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* onward.<sup>813</sup> In this regard, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* comments that the four truths are not understood merely through discursive knowledge (*vijñāna*) gained by study and reflection but through direct knowledge (*jñāna*) based on meditation.<sup>814</sup> Mention should also be made of Candrakīrti’s distinction in the *Prasannapadā* (on MMK XXV.16) between *jñāna* (*ye shes*) and *vijñāna* (*rnam shes*) which La Valleé Poussin, in his critical

<sup>809</sup> See RDsb vol. 7, 355 f.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 269–76. For a translation of this treatise along with Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas’ commentary, see Brunnhölzl 2009.

<sup>811</sup> The classification of four states of mind—waking, dreaming, deep sleep and the fourth state—can be traced to the Upaniṣads, and is a major theme of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. It has been suggested that the *Kālacakra*’s association of the first three states with the three *guṇas/doṣas* of Brahmanical Sāṃkhya and Ayurvedic systems—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* respectively—represents one of its many striking similarities with Indian non-Buddhist systems, especially nondual Kāśmīr Śaivaite tantrism. A crucial difference, however, is that the Śaivaite tantras portray the fourth state of self-realization in which one realizes the essential Self (*ātman*) and thereby transcends ignorance, whereas the *Kālacakra* specifies that the fourth state, although nondual at the time of sexual emission, is still tainted by latent tendencies of ignorance, and must therefore be eliminated in order to attain wisdom (*jñāna*) and supreme bliss (*mahāsukha*). See Wallace 2001, 36–8, 156–57 et passim.

<sup>812</sup> See Mathes 1996, 262 f.

<sup>813</sup> The classic study of these four principles, literally “recourses” (*pratisaraṇa* : *rton pa*), is Lamotte 1985. He there renders *vijñāna* as ‘discursive consciousness’ and *jñāna* as ‘direct knowledge’. The fourth recourse was said to encompass the first three: [1] rely on the teachings, not the person; [2] rely on the meanings, not the words; [3] rely on definitive meanings, not provisional meanings.

<sup>814</sup> This paraphrases the passage from *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh, 257) as translated in Lamotte 1985, 24 n. 43.

edition of MMK, glosses as ‘intuitif’ and ‘discursif’ respectively.<sup>815</sup> However, as with parallel distinctions between *sems/sems nyid*, *sems/ye shes* and *sems/rig pa* that are also extensively developed in Rnying ma exegesis, the search for Indian antecedents typically turns up only scattered references and seldom the kind of rigorous philosophical treatment that such distinctions received in the hands of their Tibetan interpreters, especially those in the Bka’ brgyud and Rnying ma schools.

In a number of exegetical contexts, Mi bskyod rdo rje protests that the distinction between ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes* : *vijñāna*) and wisdom (*ye shes* : *jñāna*) was not always adequately drawn in Indian texts and regarded this to be a source of significant confusion. A case in point is his objection in his MA commentary against the tendency he observes in classical Yogācāra-Cittamātra texts (unfortunately these are not specified) to confuse the definitions of consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*) and thereby blur the difference between them. He hints that this tradition’s lack of terminological specificity and vagueness regarding the criteria that are sufficient or necessary for the application of terms referring to dualistic and nondualistic modes of cognition may be attributed to its proclivity to treat mind as a real entity. Of the Alikākāravāda Cittamātra thinkers he says “since you did not grasp the essential and specific properties<sup>816</sup> of what is meant by “apprehended-apprehending” and thus took [it] as the meaning of “consciousness” (*rnam shes*) or “awareness” (*rig pa*), you imputed that which is only [ordinary] knowledge (*shes pa*) to “wisdom” (*ye shes*) and proceeded to aggrandize it to [the status of] a truly established ultimate.”<sup>817</sup> The author proceeds to offer a genealogical analysis of the roots of this lack of terminological specificity in Indian Cittamātra works and relates this to the problems faced by Tibetan translators of Buddhist terms for cognition:

Thus, there are limitless terms in Cittamātra texts for [nondual knowledge], some calling it nondual knowing (*gnyis med kyi shes pa*), some calling it nondual wisdom (*gnyis med kyi ye shes*), some calling it mere knowledge without duality (*gnyis su med pa’i shes pa tsam*) and some [others] calling it nondual mind and awareness (*gnyis med kyi blo dang rig pa*). Should one think “what is the point of such occurrences?”, the verbal root *jñā* was rendered as knowledge (*shes pa*) or restricted to transcendent knowledge (*mkhyen pa*)<sup>818</sup>, while the terms *saṃjñāna* and *vijñāna* [etc.], were rendered according to context as correct knowledge (*yang dag*

<sup>815</sup> MMK, 533.8–17. We thank Dr. Anne MacDonald for first drawing our attention to this passage. See MacDonald 2009, 163–64.

<sup>816</sup> We have taken *ngo khyad* as a coordinative compound for *ngo bo dang khyad par*.

<sup>817</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 331–3: *gzung ’dzin gyi don gyi ngo khyad ’dzin pa med pas rnam shes sam rig pa’i don la zhugs pas shes tsam de la ye shes su btags nas de don dam bden grub tu rlom pa...*

<sup>818</sup> *Mkhyen pa* is the honorific of *shes pa* and it refers to the special knowledge of a realized *arhant* or *buddha*.

*par shes pa*), thorough knowledge (*kun nas shes pa*), elevated knowledge (*rab tu shes pa*), consciousness (*rnam par shes pa*), wisdom (*ye shes*) and so forth. Apart from [such cases], neither the classical scriptures nor the grammatical [treatises] etc. [said] anything at all about the need to lexically delimit cases where ‘mind’ or ‘cognition’ in Cittamātra accounts referred to [ordinary] consciousness (*rnam shes*) and where ‘mind’ or ‘cognition’ in Madhyamaka accounts referred to ‘wisdom’ (*ye shes*). Therefore, since ‘consciousness’ could have the sense of the term ‘wisdom’, while ‘wisdom’ could have the sense of the term ‘consciousness’, it was not [observed] that the applications of these two definitions are completely incompatible [with one another].<sup>819</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje here identifies semantic vagueness, specifically criterial vagueness, as a source of certain basic category errors pertaining to the nature and structure of human cognition.<sup>820</sup> His student and secretary Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566) adds to this assessment his own observation that early Tibetan translators (during the Royal Dynastic Period) found it necessary to variously render *jñāna* as *shes pa* (“cognition”) or *rnam shes* (“consciousness”) when describing the cognition of a sentient being, and as *ye shes* (literally “primordial knowing”) when describing the cognition of a buddha, there being no such difference conspicuous in the original term:

In general, there were imperial decrees requiring scholar-translators to translate the term *jñāna* as *rnam shes* or *shes pa* when referring to the cognition of a sentient

<sup>819</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 34<sub>1–13</sub>; *des na sems tsam gyi gzhung la lar gnyis med kyi shes pa dang | la lar gnyis med kyi ye shes dang | la lar gnyis su med pa'i shes pa dang | la lar gnyis med kyi blo dang rig pa zhes sogs mtha' klas par 'byung la | de ltar 'byung ba'i gnad ci snyam na | jñā zhes pa shes pa'am mkhyen pa tsam la 'jog pa dang | sam jñā na dang bi jñā na zhes 'byung ba yang dag par shes pa dang | kun nas shes pa dang | rab tu shes pa dang | rnam par shes pa dang | ye shes sogs skabs thob kyis sbyar ba ma gtogs sems tsam pa 'dod pa'i sems sam shes pa la rnam shes zhes nges bzung gi sgra sbyor dgos pa dang | dbu ma pa 'dod pa'i sems sam shes pa la ye shes kyi sgra sbyor dgos pa'i nges bzung gsung rab dang sgra rig sogs 'gar yang med do | des na rnam shes kyang ye shes sgra don can yin la | ye shes kyang rnam shes kyi sgra don can yin pas | de gnyis sgra don 'jug pa gtan 'gal ba ni ma yin no ||*

<sup>820</sup> As Philip Devos argues, semantic vagueness is an inherent semantic language phenomenon. That is, it is a *language* phenomenon, and not an extra-linguistic one, given that vagueness cannot be imputed to objects or the world. And it is a *semantic* phenomenon, not a pragmatic one (i.e., the intentional use of semantic vagueness, e.g. “collateral damage” as a euphemism for state-sanctioned manslaughter). See Devos 2003, 123–24. Words are vague when their semantic scope is unclear. This happens in at least these two ways: [1] *vagueness in criteria*—the inherent indeterminacy or uncertainty regarding the criteria used in the application of a word. E.g., what activities are included in ‘sport’. [2] *vagueness in degree*—the degree or extent that determines when we can or cannot apply words. E.g., when does one become ‘old’?; how close does someone have to live to be a ‘neighbour’? Ibid., 124–25. Buddhist terms for cognition are characterized by criterial vagueness which is a function not only of their polysemy (multiple possible meanings of a single term) but also their semantic indeterminacy, “a phenomenon in which one single word meaning refers to a segment of reality which is further cognitively divisible and specifiable into smaller and clearer segments” Ibid., 130.

being or as *ye shes* when referring to the cognition of a buddha, despite there being no [such] distinction [specified] in the original term... Hence, the debate over whether or not buddhas have *jñāna* is a parochial way of thinking. From the standpoint of the *pratyavekṣaṇa*[*jñāna*], they cannot be imputed as *not* having it, while from the standpoint of the *dharmadhātujñāna*, they cannot be imputed as having it.<sup>821</sup>

In other words, the early Tibetan translators recognized that the polysemy of Indian Buddhist terms for cognition presented early Tibetan translators with a significant problem for translation and understanding so long as the semantic ranges of specific uses of terms were not carefully drawn and the criteria sufficient and necessary for using such terms consistently applied. One way that early translators therefore sought to ameliorate this type of semantic indeterminacy was by introducing a number of Tibetan renderings of a single Sanskrit term (*jñāna*, *vidyā* etc.) and employing these variants in translating the terms according to the specific contexts in which they had been used.

For the Eighth Karma pa, the distinction between wisdom and consciousness is as central to a correct understanding of buddha nature as is the parallel distinction between buddha nature and its adventitious stains. This is the main thrust of his critique of the tantric buddha nature theory outlined in Shākya mchog ldan's *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* (*Bde mchog rnam bshad*) which forms the second part of the Karma pa's *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly*. Whereas the first part of the critique had faulted 'Gos lo's view of buddha nature with blurring the distinction between buddha nature and adventitious stains, the second part takes aim at Shākya mchog ldan's epistemology, focusing specifically on his tendency to blur the distinction between consciousness and wisdom. By initially pointing out this structural weakness in the author's epistemological system, Mi bskyod rdo rje proceeds to demonstrate how the entire edifice of Shākya mchog ldan's buddha nature theory collapses under its own weight. In comparing this critique with Shākya mchog ldan's extant commentary and a number of his other writings<sup>822</sup>, and taking stock of other criticisms of Shākya mchog ldan by Mi bskyod rdo rje in his MA commentary and one of his *Replies to Questions* (*dris lan*) texts, it is possible to provide a balanced, if necessarily concise, appraisal of the eighth Karma pa's critique and the particular views it targets.

<sup>821</sup> *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i rnam par bshad pa*, 764.5 f.: ...*spyir dznya na'i sgras sems can gyi shes pa brjod tshe shes pa'am rnam shes dang sangs rgyas kyi shes pa brjod tshe ye shes su bsgyur dgos par lo pan gyis bka' sa bcad pa yin gyi skad dod tha dad med la* |...

<sup>822</sup> Shākya mchog ldan's *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* was among the last of his works dealing with the topic of buddha nature. A most useful listing of more than twenty texts of different genres by the author that discuss buddha nature is given by Komarovski 2006. This article also includes translations of two important texts specifically on buddha nature, the *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, SCsb vol. 13, 121–132<sub>6</sub> and *Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad mdo rgyud snying po*, SCsb vol. 13, 132<sub>6</sub>–146<sub>5</sub>.

Mi bskyod rdo rje focuses the first part of his criticism of Shākya mchog ldan's buddha nature theory on a passage from the latter's *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* which first distinguishes between “the aspect of dual appearances [of] looking outward through the sense-gates at substances or characteristics and the aspect of the [ordinary] clear and knowing [cognition] (*gsal rig*) looking inward” and then proceeds to identify the first as “conventional *saṃsāra*, the aspect of the stains that are posited as *saṃsāra* and the apprehended aspects of consciousness, the knowable objects” and the latter with “the ultimate *saṃsāra*, natural *nirvāṇa*, the apprehending aspect, and that which bears the name ‘wisdom’.” On this basis, Shākya mchog ldan concludes that these together comprise the abiding condition of all conventional phenomena and that they are pervaded by buddha nature which is also called a “continuum” (*rgyud*) and is the ultimate Guhyasamāja maṇḍala. The relevant passage from Shākya mchog ldan's *Bde mchog rnam bshad* reads as follows:

Hence, it is determined that saṃsāric phenomena are mere appearances before consciousness and that nirvāṇic phenomena are the experienced objects of wisdom. Among these, the latter do not need to be analyzed at this stage. Among the two factors of consciousness—i.e., [1] the factor of dual appearances [of] looking outward through the sense-gates at substances or characteristics and [2] the factor of the clear and knowing [cognition] (*gsal rig*) looking inward, [1] the first is [defined as] conventional *saṃsāra*, the factor consisting in the stains that are posited as *saṃsāra* and the apprehended aspects of consciousness, the knowable objects. [2] The latter is defined as the ultimate *saṃsāra*, natural *nirvāṇa*, the apprehending aspect, and that which is designated as ‘wisdom’.<sup>823</sup> Since the abiding nature of all conventional phenomena does not exist apart from just these, it is impossible for them not to be pervaded by buddha nature that is called continuum (*tantra*) and is the ultimate [Guhya]samāja maṇḍala (*don dam pa'i 'dus dkyil*) of all phenomena<sup>824</sup>. As has been stated [*Hevajratantra* I.viii.41cd]:

By me is this all pervaded.

<sup>823</sup> See, for example, *Bde mchog rnam bshad*, 15<sub>6</sub>–16<sub>1</sub> where Shākya mchog ldan states the following: “Generally, in these scriptures of the Unsurpassed Mantra, the entire range of conditional knowable objects are [classified in terms of] the conventional and ultimate, the *dharmin* and *dharmatā*, and the object-possessor (*yul can*) is subdivided into [ordinary] consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*). Thus, ultimately, the object (*yul*) is only the ultimate and suchness, and the object-possessor (*yul can*) is not explained as other than wisdom itself.” *spyir sngags bla med kyi gzhung dag na gnas skabs su yul shes bya mtha' dag la kun rdzob dang don dam gnyis su dang | chos can dang chos nyid dag tu dang | yul can la rnam shes dang | ye shes dag tu so sor phye nas | mthar thug yul don dam dang de bzhin nyid kho na dang | yul can ye shes nyid las gzhan du mi 'chad do ||*

<sup>824</sup> We have read '*dus dkyil* as an abbreviation of *gsang 'dus [kyi] dkyil 'khor* (*guhyasamājamaṇḍala*).



This world is seen as nothing else.<sup>825</sup>

And, as noted by the venerable Ghaṇṭapāda<sup>826</sup>:

All these beings are the naturally accomplished *maṇḍala*  
That is nondual.<sup>827 828</sup>

On the Eighth Karma pa's reading, this passage contains all the epistemological weaknesses needed to bring down the entire edifice of Shākya mchog ldan's buddha nature theory. What the Karma pa finds particularly vulnerable is the Sa skya scholar's identification of clear and knowing cognition—the subjective, inward-looking part of consciousness—with nondual wisdom, and the alignment of these object and subject poles of consciousness with the two truths, the conventional and ultimate respectively. This equation is attributed to the Sa skya master's endorsement of an Alīkākāravāda<sup>829</sup> Cittamātra stance that identifies the apprehending aspect of cognition with nondual wisdom. The problem from the Karma pa's perspective is that the explanatory force of the demarcation between consciousness and wisdom, which serves as an essential, and often highly illuminating, leitmotif, in Shākya mchog ldan's doctrinal system, is irremediably weakened by linking the subject pole of consciousness with wisdom and drawing further correlations based on this identification. As Mi bskyod rdo rje

<sup>825</sup> HT part I, VIII.41b: *madvyāpitam idaṃ sarvaṃ nānyam ayaṃ dr̥ṣṭam jagat* | Tib. HT part I, VIII.41cd: *nga yis 'di kun khyab ste* | 'gro ba'i rang bzhin gzhan ma mthong || See Snellgrove pt. 2, 30–31. Note that the meaning of *jagat* ('gro ba) is “world” or “wandering (i.e., transmigrating) beings”.

<sup>826</sup> Ghaṇṭapāda (Tib. Dril bu zhabs; aka. Vajraghaṇṭa : Tib. Rdo rje dril bu), author of the above-quoted *Śrīcakrasaṃvaraṣekaparakriyopadeśa* (Tib. *Dpal 'khor lo sdom pa'i dbang gi bya ba mdor bsdus pa*), was an important figure in the Indian Cakrasaṃvara lineage. Tibetan historical and biographical sources identify him as one of a trio of Indian mahāsiddhas—Luhipāda, Kāṇhāpāda and Ghaṇṭapāda himself (*lu nag dril gsum*)—who are credited with establishing important Indo-Tibetan lineages of Cakrasaṃvara teachings and initiations. See Roerich 1976, 228 and Davidson 1991, 221 and n. 52 which provides Sa skya biographical sources on these three masters.

<sup>827</sup> *Śrīcakrasaṃvaraṣekaparakriyopadeśa* (CSU), D 1431, 438<sub>5–6</sub>.

<sup>828</sup> The full passage occurs in *Bde mchog rnam bshad*, 29<sub>4</sub>–30<sub>1</sub> as follows: *de la 'khor ba'i chos rnam shes la snang tsaṃ dang* | *mya ngan las 'das pa'i chos ye shes kyi myong bya nyid du nges pa las* | *phyi ma la re zhig dpyad mi dgos shing* | *rnam shes la rdzas saṃ mtshan nyid kyi sgo nas phyi blta gnyis snang gi cha dang* | *nang blta gsal rig gi cha gnyis las* | *dang po la ni* | *kun rdzob pa'i 'khor ba dang* | *'khor bar 'jog byed kyi<sup>a</sup> dri ma'i cha dang* | *rnam shes kyi gzung rnam shes bya la* | *phyi ma la ni don dam pa'i 'khor ba dang* | *rang bzhin myang 'das dang* | *'dzin rnam dang ye shes kyi ming can dag tu nges la* | *kun rdzob pa'i chos thams cad kyi gnas tshul ni* | *'di kho na las gzhan du yod pa ma yin pas na* | *chos thams cad kyi don dam pa'i 'dus dkyil dang* | *rgyud kyi ming can du gyur pa'i de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying pos ma khyab pa mi srid do* || *de skad du yang* | *nga yis 'di kun khyab pa ste* || 'gro ba'i rang bzhin gzhan ma mthong || *zhes dang* | *dril bu zhabs kyi* | 'gro ba 'di dag rang bzhin gyi || *grub pa'i dkyil 'khor gnyis med pa'o* || <sup>a</sup>addit. as per TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>

<sup>829</sup> The designations Nirākāra[vāda] (*rnam med*) and Alīkākāra[vāda] (*rnam rdzun*) were used, respectively, for Cittamātra branches that maintained the nonexistence of mental representations (aspects), or maintained that such representations are false. The designations Sākāra[vāda] (*rnam bcas*) and Satyākāra[vāda] (*rnam bden*) referred to Cittamātra branch that maintained the existence of representations, or maintained they are true.

and much of the Indian Buddhist tradition sees it, ordinary consciousness (*viññāna* : *rnam shes*) is considered dualistic precisely on account of its subjectivizing and objectivizing operations, its inward-looking apprehending aspect and outward-looking apprehended aspects:

Since there is no difference between these [two aspects] insofar as they are [both] the clear and knowing aspect that is [just] a hallmark of [mundane] consciousness, even these two streams of this clear and knowing aspect stem from the element of karmic predispositions. And because it is [just] a hallmark of other-dependent cognition, and because such knowing also consists in the knower that arises from the *ālayaviññāna* like waves from water, it is not beyond the adventitious stains that are to be relinquished. So, how could that [clear and knowing cognition] possibly be wisdom?<sup>830</sup>

In other words, Shākya mchog ldan has wrongly identified the clear and knowing cognition of the inward-looking, subject pole—or apprehending aspect (*'dzin rnam*)—with nondual wisdom<sup>831</sup>, and the outward-looking object-perception with dualistic consciousness. These identifications are untenable in the Karma pa's eyes because they align the distinction between consciousness and wisdom with the two streams of dualistic consciousness: the objectifying “outward looking” and subjectivizing “inward looking”. Yet, it is for Mi bskyod rdo rje a cornerstone of Buddhist doctrine and praxis to regard these latter as precisely the two aspects of dualistic consciousness—seen by the Yogācāra school as originating from the conditioned *ālayaviññāna* due to karmic predispositions—that are relinquished upon realizing nondual wisdom. Put simply, nondual wisdom is a wisdom wherein both the objectifying (outward-looking) and the subjectivizing (inward-looking) activities of cognition have stopped functioning and are thus transcended.

The opponent descends further down this slippery slope in equating wisdom not only with this generic clear and knowing (*gsal rig*) character of cognition but also with self-awareness (*rang rig*). In fact, Shākya mchog ldan based his argument that wisdom has this clear and knowing character whereas mundane consciousness (*rnam shes*) lacks it on the rationale that this latter consciousness is conventional truth/reality, having only a nominal existence, so the

<sup>830</sup> See Volume II, translation: 114, critical edition: 116. *rnam shes kyi ngo bo gsal rig gi cha yin pa la khyad par med pas | gsal rig gi cha'i rgyun de gnyis kyang 'du byed kyi khams las byung ba dang | gzan dbang rnam rig gi ngo bo yin pa'i phyir dang | de'i shes pa'ang kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa las chu las rlabs 'byung ba lta bu'i shes pa can yin pa'i phyir | spang bya glo bur gyi dri ma las mi 'da' bas | de ye shes su ci ltar rung |*

<sup>831</sup> See, for example, *Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma* (SCsb<sub>(c)</sub> vol. 13, 130<sub>6</sub>–131<sub>1</sub>) where Shākya mchog ldan says that “without primordially present wisdom, mistaken appearances do not arise and [hence] this aspect of the inward-looking apprehending of mistaken appearances is definitely present as wisdom... *gdod ma nas grub pa'i ye shes med par 'khrul snang mi 'char zhing | 'khrul snang gi kha nang blta 'dzin rnam gyi cha de gdod ma'i ye shes su nges par gnas ...*

attribution of clear and knowing does not apply.<sup>832</sup> Against this view, Mi bskyod rdo rje follows the epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti in regarding the clear and knowing (*gsal rig*) property to be a defining characteristic of cognition in general. He moreover follows this tradition in taking self-awareness (*rang rig : svasaṃvedana*) to be the self-evident hallmark of sentience such that its presence or absence is what distinguishes the sentient from the insentient (*jaḍa*).<sup>833</sup> Now, such reflexive awareness, unless it is linked with yogic direct perception, is neither to be identified with wisdom nor with *nirvāṇa*: “This self-aware direct perception (*rang rig mngon sum : svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa*) is *not nirvāṇa* because, in the context of classifying types of mentation (*blo ris 'du ba*), it is said to exist in all ordinary individuals and is therefore sharply separated from yogic direct perception (*rnal 'byor mngon sum : yogipratyakṣa*). Hence it is not at all correct [to call it] *nirvāṇa*.”<sup>834</sup>

To summarize, the Eighth Karma pa does not have to dig too deep to expose the shaky foundations of Shākya mchog ldan's epistemology. In reifying the apprehending aspect of consciousness and elevating it to the status of nondual wisdom, Shākya mchog ldan is said to have followed the blueprint of the Alīkākāra Cittamātra tradition<sup>835</sup>—which, in later works, he began to style as a Madhyamaka system.<sup>836</sup> Three related points need to be made concerning Mi bskyod rdo rje's own view of this Cittamātra tradition, his appraisal of Shākya mchog ldan's doxographical classification of it, and the difference between his own philosophical orientation and his rival's. The first concerns the questionability of regarding the Alīkākāra as a Madhyamaka system in light of both doxographic and definitional considerations. In terms of doxography, Mi bskyod rdo rje bluntly states in his MA commentary that neither Shākya mchog ldan's identification of Alīkākāra with Madhyamaka, nor his claim that

<sup>832</sup> See Komarovski 2011, 240–41.

<sup>833</sup> Śāntarakṣita *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (MAL 16 = *Tattvasaṃgraha* k. 2000) in Ichigō 1985, 70 f.: *vijñānaṃ jaḍarūpebhyo vyāvṛttam upajāyate | iyaṃ evātmasaṃvittir asya yā 'jaḍarūpatā || Tib. rnam shes bem po'i rang bzhin las || bzlog pa rab tu skye ba ste || bems min rang bzhin gang yin pa || de 'di'i bdag nyid shes pa yin ||* “Consciousness arises as something opposed to the nature of insentient matter. It is precisely the self-awareness of that [consciousness] which [constitutes this] immateriality.”

<sup>834</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1012<sub>4-5</sub>: *rang rig mngon sum 'di myang 'das min te | blo ris 'du ba'i skabs su 'di so so skye bo thams cad la yod par bshad pas | rnal 'byor mngon sum las kyang zur du phye ba'i phyir | rnam pa thams cad du myang 'das su mi 'ong ngo ||* The distinction between these two types of direct perception is of central importance for distinguishing between self-conscious direct observation which remains dualistic and yogic direct perception which is nondual.

<sup>835</sup> See the section in *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1013<sub>6</sub>–1014<sub>1</sub> that begins “Well now, is there anyone who claims that the so-called “apprehending aspect” is nondual wisdom? This indeed is claimed by the Alīkākāravāda-Cittamātra [school].”

<sup>836</sup> Komarovski has usefully noted that the author's identification of the Alīkākāra system with Madhyamaka instead of with Cittamātra as was traditionally accepted, and the introduction of the term *rnam bdzun dbu ma pa* (\*Alīkākāra-Mādhyamika), begin to appear in texts no earlier than 1477, this being the composition date of his *Theg pa chen po dbu ma rnam par nges pa'i bang mdzod lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (Shākya mchog ldan *gsung 'bum* vol. 14–15) in which these identifications are first found. See Komarovski 2006.

the distinction between Satyākāra and Alīkākāra—i.e., those who believe representations to be true or false, respectively—is really a distinction between Cittamātra and Madhyamaka respectively, are in accord with the doxography of philosophical systems<sup>837</sup> allegedly outlined by the Buddha in authoritative Indian texts.<sup>838</sup> The distinction, he contends, was introduced in order classify the philosophical positions of two Cittamātra philosophies that both “took as their doctrinal basis (*gzhi*) the claim that mind is truly established as ultimate” (*sems don dam bden grub par 'dod pa gzhir byas*) but diverged on the issue of whether they affirmed or denied the existence of (true) mental representations (*rnam pa yod med*).<sup>839</sup>

Concerning the related matter of definition, the Alīkākāra tradition which believes mental representations to be false nonetheless holds that nondual wisdom or consciousness in itself are truly established as ultimate.<sup>840</sup> In other words, despite its position that mental representations are delusive, this tradition has not relinquished the belief in cognition as a real entity having real properties, whether this belief is grounded in a representationalist or

<sup>837</sup> On the main subclassification of Cittamātra into Nirākāravāda (Nonrepresentationalists) and Sākāravāda (Representationalists) as attested in canonical sources such as Candrarhipāda's *\*Ratnamālā*, Jñānavajra's *\*Tattvamārgadarśana* and Vajrapāṇi's *\*Guruparamparākramopadeśa*, a commentary on Maitrīpa's *Tattvaratnāvalī*, see Almogi 2010, 137–38. See also Almogi 2013 for an analysis of further Tibetan subclassifications of Sākāravāda (Representationalists), known by some Tibetans scholars as Samala-Sākāravāda, into *\*Sātyākāravāda* (Those who proclaim representations are real) and *\*Alīkākāravāda* (Those who proclaim representations are false), and the still further subdivision of *\*Alīkākāravāda* into *\*Samala-Alīkākāravāda* (Those who proclaim distorted false representations) and *\*Nirmala-Alīkākāravāda* (Those who proclaim undistorted false representations).

<sup>838</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 27<sub>3-5</sub>: ...*sems tsam rnam bden rdzun gyi khyad par dbu sems kyi khyad par 'byed byed du smras pas | grub mtha'i rnam gzhag sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa dang mi mthun pa'i phyir ||*

<sup>839</sup> See *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (27<sub>15</sub>–28<sub>1</sub>) where he distinguishes the two as follows: “[1] According to the first [i.e., Sākāravādins, Representationalists], there is no subject-object duality with regard to external objects and hence all the phenomena regarded as such are asserted to be Mind Only. However, the subject-object [relation] belonging to the representation (*rnam pa*) of the object with regard to the inner cognition is asserted to be an independent substance (*rdzas gzhan*). [2] According to the second [i.e., Nirākāravādins, Nonrepresentationalists], by asserting in that way that the subject-object [relationship] with regard to the inner cognition is an independent substance, the selflessness of phenomena would not obtain. Therefore, proclaiming that these representations are just false, like falling hairs [in one suffering from ‘floaters’], they proclaim that it is precisely the nondual wisdom (*ye shes*) or consciousness (*rnam shes*) that is truly established.” [1] *dang pos phyi don la bltos pa'i gzung 'dzin gnyis med pas der bltos kyi chos thams cad sems tsam du khas len kyang nang shes pa la bltos pa'i don gyi rnam pa'i gzung 'dzin rdzas gzhan khas len la | [2] gnyis pas de ltar na nang shes pa la bltos pa'i gzung 'dzin rdzas gzhan khas blangs pas chos kyi bdag med mi 'byung bas rnam pa de dag skra shad brdzun pa nyid du smras nas gnyis med kyi ye shes sam rnam shes nyid bden grub par smra'o ||* Note here that wisdom and consciousness are treated by these Nirākāravādins as virtual synonyms, an identification which, as we have previously noted, Mi bskyod rdo rje considers to be based on a fundamental confusion.

<sup>840</sup> See preceding note. In *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (47<sub>10-12</sub>), Mi bskyod rdo rje follows the criticism of Stag tsang Lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen who had identified a number of Tibetan traditions professing to be Madhyamaka whose views did not warrant this designation: “According to Stang tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen, since the Alīkākāra adherents claim that nondual wisdom is truly established, it does not make sense [to call their tradition] Madhyamaka.” *stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen gyis | rnam rdzun pas gnyis med kyi ye shes bden grub par smra bas dbu mar mi rigs ...*

nonrepresentationalist epistemology.<sup>841</sup> Now, in Mi bskyod rdo rje's view, if there is one defining and unifying principle of Madhyamaka traditions, it is their blanket rejection of all types of realism, from substance ontologies to subjective idealism, a view epitomized in the expression "freedom from extremes of existence and nonexistence" (*yod med mtha' bral*). In the Karma pa's eyes, it matters not whether it is 'external' phenomena or 'internal' minds that are taken as real entities having real properties; in either case, such realist assumptions automatically disqualify their proponents from the antirealist viewpoint which alone merits the designation "Madhyamaka".

The second, related point made by Mi bskyod rdo rje is that the Alīkākāra and Satyākāra tenets were both not only traditionally identified as Cittamātra, but were also said to have been decisively refuted and transcended by Madhyamaka views, above all by the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā system<sup>842</sup> of Maitrīpa<sup>843</sup> and his colleagues that combined the Madhyamaka system of Nāgārjuna with the Mahāmudrā instructions of Saraha and his followers. In his MA commentary, the Karma pa mentions that Maitrīpa upon defeating Ratnākaraśānti, a Nirākāra Cittamātra proponent, in debate was given the title 'Victor' (*rgyal ba : jina*).<sup>844</sup> In this connection, the author then quotes as scriptural support the second stanza from Maitrīpa's *Tattvadaśaka*: "For one who wishes to know suchness (*tathatā*), there is neither Sākāra nor Nirākāra; Even a Middle [Way] not adorned with the Guru's words is only

<sup>841</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje would appear to identify the Alīkākāra as Nonrepresentationalists (Nirākāravāda), unlike Rong zom, for example, who treated the \*Sātyākāravāda (Those who proclaim representations are real) and \*Alīkākāravāda (Those who proclaim representations are false) as subdivisions of the Sākāravāda (Representationalists). See Almogi 2009 and 2010.

<sup>842</sup> It was standard practice in the Indian doxographies to show how and why each higher-ranking view transcends the one just below it and, in some cases, how it is defined in contrast to it. As an example consider Jñānavajra's account of the Māyopamādvayavāda ("The strand which maintains that [phenomena] are nondual, inasmuch as they are like illusions") Madhyamaka position as summarized by Orna Almogi: "The Māyopamavādins reject the positions of both Sākāravāda (i.e. here clearly Satyākāravāda, which maintains the existence of true images) and Nirākāravāda (which maintains the nonexistence of images), asserting that it is neither the case that images are true nor that there are no images, but rather that images are like illusions, which, like any other phenomena, are impermanent on account of being momentary, but at the same time continuous (*skad cig gis mi rtag la rgyun du gnas*), that is, in terms of their mode of appearance. Therefore, according to them, on the absolute level images, when analysed, are unattestable; still, the illusions are true, since otherwise experiencing happiness or suffering would be fictitious (*brdzun*), and it would then be pointless to strive for Buddhahood, while the four buddha-Bodies for their part would not exist either." Jñānavajra goes on to specify how the still higher Apratiṣṭhānavāda ("Those who maintain [all phenomena] are not fixed [in nature or origin]") Madhyamaka position in turn rejects the Māyopamavādin view that all representations are ultimately illusory, arguing that this refers only to the conventional level, the ultimate being beyond negative or positive determination, and without any substratum whatsoever. See Almogi 2010, 147–48. Concerning different interpretations of Apratiṣṭhāna in Maitrīpa's exegesis, see Mathes 2007.

<sup>843</sup> On doxographical systems attributed to Advayavajra (traditionally identified with Maitrīpa) which rank Madhyamaka systems above the Nirākāra and Sākāra strains of Cittamātra, see Almogi 2010. On problems of identification of Advayavajra with Maitrīpa, however, see Mathes 2016.

<sup>844</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 9<sub>15–18</sub>.

middling.”<sup>845</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje proceeds to quote Sahajavajra’s interpretation of this passage which states:

[Maitrīpa] said “Even the middle [path] (i.e., Madhyamaka) which is not adorned with the words of the guru, is only middling”, because [“middling”] refers to a putative object which remains (*lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa*) [even] after the [Sākāra and Nirākāra] branches have been refuted. As for the aim of [presenting reality] here [as] suchness of unity (*yuganaddha*), which is adorned with the pith-instructions of the genuine guru, namely, Bhagavatī<sup>846</sup> it has been taught [in order to] captivate the minds of learned ones. This is because all phenomena are the unborn reality.<sup>847</sup>

Among similar passages quoted is one from the *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti declaring that “if one remains within the spheres of either Sākāra or Nirākāra, it will be impossible to gain access to all-knowing wisdom.”<sup>848</sup> It is conspicuous, then, that Mi bskyod rdo rje follows the tradition of Maitrīpa and other siddha-scholars in his rejection of the idealist positions of both Sākāra and Alīkākāra branches of Mind Only. He also considers putative “Madhyamaka” positions that retain some idea of a postulated object—which Mi bskyod rdo rje identifies as a truly established cognition (*shes pa bden grub*)—to fall short of the Madhyamaka global antireificationist view of teachers such as Nāgārjuna and Maitrīpa who dispensed with all versions of epistemic and ontological foundationalism. As he explains, “Having refuted the Cittamātra adherents, to then describe what remains—namely, the postulate of a truly established cognition—as Madhya[maka] is only a ‘middling Middle [Way]’ because it is not the pure Madhya[maka] tradition [of the Gurus such as Nāgārjuna and also Maitrīpa in his Amanasikāra cycle].”<sup>849</sup> Needless to say, what the Karma pa calls the ‘pure Madhyamaka

<sup>845</sup> This passage is given in the edition and translation of *Advayavajrasaṃgraha* by Mathes 2015 as follows: TD, 92, ll. 3–4: *na sākāranirākāre tathatāṃ jñātum icchataḥ | madhyamā madhyamā caiva guruvāganalaṃkṛtā ||*

<sup>a</sup>According to Bhattacharya’s edition. The Japanese study group proposes *sākārā nirākārā tathatā*. Tib. *de bzhin nyid ni shes ’dod pas | rnam bcas ma yin rnam med min | bla ma’i ngag gis ma brgyan pa’i | dbu ma’ang ’bring po tsam nyid do ||*

<sup>846</sup> An epithet for the Perfection of Wisdom (of emptiness) symbolized by the goddess Prajñāpāramitā.

<sup>847</sup> The critical edition (from Mathes 2015) of the passage from Sahajavajra’s *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā* (which differs somewhat from the one quoted by Mi bskyod rdo rje on 10<sub>12–16</sub>) reads as follows: TDṬ<sub>B</sub>, 11a5–b1; TDṬ<sub>P</sub>, 182b1–3: *bla ma’i ngag gis ma brgyan pa’i | dbu ma’ang ’bring po tsam nyid do | zhes bya ba smras te | bye brag rnam par bkag nas | lhag ma khas blangs<sup>a</sup> ba’i yul yin pa’i phyir | ’dir bcom ldan ’das ma bla ma dam pa’i man ngag<sup>b</sup> gi rgyan<sup>b</sup> gyis brgyan pa’i zung du ’jug pa’i de bzhin nyid kyi dgos<sup>c</sup> pa ni mkhas pa rnams kyi yid<sup>d</sup> ’phrog par byed pa nye bar bstan te | gang gi phyir yang chos thams cad ni ma skyes pa’i de kho na nyid do ||* <sup>a</sup>B (dPal spungs block print of the *Phyag rgya chen po’i rgya gzhung*) blang<sup>b</sup>P gis brgyan<sup>c</sup>P dgongs<sup>d</sup>P yid yid

<sup>848</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 9<sub>18–20</sub>.

<sup>849</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 10<sub>16–19</sub>: ...*sems tsam pa rnam par bkag nas lhag ma shes pa bden grub khas len pa la dbu mar brjod pa ni dbu ma ’bring po ste dbu ma’i lugs rnam par dag pa de ma yin pas ...*

tradition’ comprises both the \*Prāsaṅgika strand of Nāgārjuna and the Apratiṣṭhāna strand of Maitrīpa.<sup>850</sup>

The third point about the Cittamātra followers in general, which the Eighth Karma pa attributes to their reification of the mental, is that they are inclined not only to blur the distinction between ordinary consciousness and wisdom but also, in some cases, to elevate the former to the status of the latter. It must here be noted that Shākya mchog ldan had himself emphasized the importance of differentiating between consciousness and wisdom, even to the point of portraying them as mutually exclusive. He at one point goes so far as to characterize them as sharing no common ground (*gzhi mthun*) at all, like clouds in the sky or patina on gold.<sup>851</sup> Acknowledging Shākya mchog ldan’s endorsement of the distinction, the Karma pa sets out to expose instances where the proclivity to blur the line between consciousness and wisdom had led the Sa skya master to accept positions at odds with his own philosophical commitments, an inconsistency that Mi bskyod rdo rje attributes to the influence of Cittamātra thinking and its idealist premise that mind is a real entity having real properties. The Karma pa’s criticisms of Shākya mchog ldan are in this way deeply indebted to and intertwined with traditional Madhyamaka critiques of Cittamātra idealism.

In the classical Tibetan Buddhist milieu, the consciousness/wisdom differentiation was elaborated into an influential indigenous distinction between all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) and all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*) which is endorsed by Mi bskyod rdo rje and also undergirds his critique of Shākya mchog ldan’s tantric buddha nature epistemology. The distinction appears to have been introduced by Dol po pa (1292–1361)<sup>852</sup> who included it in a series of dichotomies that posit ultimate and conventional truths as completely separate domains or “great kingdoms having nothing to do with each other”. If most classical scholars repudiated such a dichotomization as antithetical to the tantric principle of unity (*yuganaddha*), the Jo nang master’s *kun gzhi ye shes/rnam shes ye shes* distinction was nonetheless widely, if not homogeneously, employed in Jo nang, Sa skya and Bka’ brgyud circles.<sup>853</sup>

<sup>850</sup> See also Mathes 2006 (212–14) where the author compares Mi bskyod rdo rje’s position with ’Gos lo tsā ba’s.

<sup>851</sup> *Rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med*, vol. 13, 130<sub>3–4</sub>. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Komarovski 2011, 239–40.

<sup>852</sup> See Stearns 1999, 49–52 and discussion of doctrinal context by Mathes 2008, 56–57. This distinction is also endorsed by classical bKa’ brgyud scholars.

<sup>853</sup> It is of interest to note that the conjunction *kun gzhi ye shes* does occur in the Tibetan translation of the *Śrīdākāraṇavamaḥāyoginītantrarājavāhikaṭīkā* (D 1419) attributed to Padmavajra, but it appears there in a sequential listing of the terms in which *jñāna* (wisdom) identified as a ninth aspect of consciousness beyond the *ālaya* (*kun gzhi*) and its eight aspects. Thus, the conjunction of *kun gzhi ye shes* appears to be the rendering of a co-ordinative (*dvandva*) compound with *ālaya* and *jñāna* listed as the eighth and ninth aspects of consciousness. The relevant passage reads: *sgra dang dri dang ro dang reg | chos yid blo dang nga rgyal lo | rna ba sna dang lce*

In searching for parallel formulations in Tibetan traditions, it is worth noting that the great Rnying ma polymath Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308–1364), a contemporary of Dol po pa, had drawn a quite similar distinction between *kun gzhi'i me long lta bu'i ye shes* and *kun gzhi rnam shes*<sup>854</sup>, specifying that the first is the all-ground of the basic expanse (*dbyings kyi kun gzhi*) that is identified with awareness (*rig pa*) and buddha nature while the latter is the all-ground of the eightfold cognitive ensemble (*tshogs brgyad kyi kun gzhi*) which is identified with ignorance (*ma rig pa*) and the impure stains (*dri ma ma dag pa*).<sup>855</sup>

It is well-attested, then, that the distinction between all-ground consciousness and all-ground wisdom had proved popular with exegetes of most Tibetan religious traditions, not only Buddhist but also Bon.<sup>856</sup> Shākya mchog ldan employed the distinction in various doctrinal contexts and at one point stated that the *kun gzhi ye shes* is what is known as *rdzogs chen* by the Rnying ma pas.<sup>857</sup> The distinction is not mentioned by Rang byung rdo rje, but was, as we have previously noted, discussed at length in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century commentaries on his *Zab mo nang don* by Dwags rams pa Chos rgyal bstan pa (composed 1514), Karma phrin las pa Phyogs las rnam rgyal (composed 1509) and their successors in this prodigious commentarial tradition.<sup>858</sup> Both these commentators identify Rang byung rdo rje's conception

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*dang lus | yid dang nyon mongs can de bzhin | kun gzhi ye shes rnam shes te | rnam pa dgu ru yongs su grags |* (571<sub>4</sub>) Interestingly, wisdom is not here construed as a pure aspect of the *ālayavijñāna* but as a factor of consciousness that transcends *ālayavijñāna* altogether. On these different ways of interpreting *ālayavijñāna*, see Higgins 2013.

<sup>854</sup> See *Zab don gnad kyi me long*, in *Snying thig ya bzhi* vol. 13, 267<sub>2-3</sub> where the author argues at length why the all-ground that is mirror-like wisdom is different from the all-ground of the eight consciousnesses. *kun gzhi me long lta bu'i ye shes ni | tshogs brgyad kyi kun gzhi dang mi gcig ste |*... While the former is identified with awareness itself, the latter is the aspect that constitutes an impure stain.

<sup>855</sup> See *Ibid.*, 267<sub>3</sub>–269<sub>3</sub> where the *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.47 is quoted as scriptural support.

<sup>856</sup> See, for example, the colophon of Bdud 'joms rin po che's *Zab lam phag mo snying thig las: Gsang sgrub ye shes rab 'bar*, 126<sub>4</sub>: *'di yang sprang ban rol pa rtsal lam bdud 'joms rdo rje rtsal de ye shes dākiñ gsang mdzod kun gzhi ye shes 'bar ba'i klong sgrom nas spyang drangs pa'o |* The distinction also found its way into Bon po works and it occurs, for example, as the subject of the second chapter of a Bon Yoginī tantra (*ma rgyud*) included in the Bon po Kanjur called *Gzhi ye sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud* that bears the title *Kun gzhi ye shes lhun grub kyi le'u gnyis pa*. See BK vol. 153, 24<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>857</sup> *Gangs can gyi chen po snga phyir byon pa'i lta sgom spyod pa'i rnam bzhag rang gzhung gsal ba'i me long: khor ba byed po kun gzhi yi | rnam shes nyid las gzhan du med | myang 'das byed po kun gzhi yi | ye shes nyid yin de yi mtshon | gab pa mngon pa phyung ba dang | rdzogs pa chen po zhes su btags |* As quoted by Karmay 1988, 180 n. 34.

<sup>858</sup> At present it has been possible to identify fifteen works in the *Zab mo nang don* corpus. They are of varying lengths and styles and date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup>, with the latest commentary being published in 2004. The development of the corpus can be broadly classified into three periods: [1] a classical period of innovation and systematization (14<sup>th</sup> c.) marked by Rang byung rdo rje's composition of the root text and auto-commentary; [2] a post-classical period of consolidation and elaboration (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.) marked by the composition of several important commentaries that further explicate the text's subject matter and develop a number of core philosophical and soteriological themes; and [3] a late renaissance period (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.) marked by a resurgence of interest in the *Zab mo nang don* that owes much to the ecumenical spirit of the Nonsectarian (*ris med*)



of the mind possessing purity with the all-ground wisdom and his ‘impure mind’ with all-ground consciousness.<sup>859</sup> Like his forerunners, Mi bskyod rdo rje saw the distinction as valid and important but also worried that its misunderstanding had been the source of considerable confusion among his coreligionists.<sup>860</sup>

In his *Tonic*, for example, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes issue with Shākya mchog ldan for not adequately differentiating all-ground consciousness from all-ground wisdom in certain deployments of this distinction. By mixing two levels of discourse pertaining to asymmetrical modes of being and awareness, the Sa skya author is accused of leaving himself susceptible to various errors in exegesis and praxis, errors that were subsequently perpetuated by his followers:

Moreover, if the *dharmadhātu* is taken as the basis of adventitious stains, then you must clearly distinguish between the all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*) and [all-ground] consciousness ([*kun gzhi*] *rnam shes*). If you don’t distinguish these, then it is not appropriate to explain that all-ground which serves as the basis for adventitious stains as being wisdom and buddha nature. Therefore, when anyone says it is necessary to accept [only the] *ālayavijñāna* which is the basis of adventitious stains, it follows that it is inadmissible to then introduce within that *ālaya* a distinction between the pure and impure. This is because if it were possible of that which is called \**sugatagarbha* or *dharmadhātu* or all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi’i ye shes*) to function as the basis for the arising of adventitious stains, then there would not be any role left for the *ālayavijñāna* to be the basis of these [stains].

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movement that was initiated by two important masters who contributed to the *Zab mo nang don* corpus, Klong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813–1899) and ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892).

The *Zab mo nang don* is perhaps best known for its highly detailed elaborations of tantric physiology—devoting separate chapters to the energy channels (*rtsa*), currents (*rlung*) and potencies (*thig le*)—based on accounts found in the *Kālacakratāntra* and other Unsurpassed Yoga (Yoganiruttara) tantras. However, the *Zab mo nang don* corpus also contains a wealth of material on central doctrinal developments within Tibetan Bka’ brgyud traditions from the fourteenth century to the present day. We find inter alia interesting material on *mahāmudrā*, buddha nature theories from early Buddhism onward, the nature of consciousness and its analysis in terms of the distinction between ordinary and originary modes of awareness (*rnam shes* and *ye shes*), the mind-body relationship in contemplative-yogic praxis, two truths (*bden gnyis*) doctrines according to the different Buddhist philosophical systems (*grub mtha’*) as well as Mantrayāna, Buddhist hermeneutics, and differing views of emptiness including *rang stong* and *gzhan stong*.

<sup>859</sup> See Dwags ram pa, *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa’i gsal ba’i rgyan* (107<sub>1-6</sub>) where the pure all-ground wisdom (*dag pa kun gzhi’i ye shes*), i.e. purity of mind (*sems kyi dag pa*), which is a homogeneous cause of *nirvāṇa* and a governing or dominant cause of *saṃsāra* is differentiated from the impure all-ground consciousness (*ma dag pa kun gzhi’i rnam shes*), i.e., the impure mind (*sems ma dag pa*) which is the actual cause of *saṃsāra* but not a cause of *nirvāṇa* [at all].

<sup>860</sup> See below, 298–300.

Moreover, among you and the teachers in your lineage, there is not even one who has penetrated this matter deeply. Some have asserted that the clarity aspect in the context of the all-ground consciousness is the all-ground wisdom. Some have asserted that the clarity aspect that is the intrinsic nature of the all-ground consciousness is not conducive to *nirvāṇa* since it is not beyond *saṃsāra*. Some have claimed that *saṃsāra* manifests in that clarity aspect which is the all-ground wisdom or quintessence. Hence, [I ask] you, masters and disciples<sup>861</sup>—is *nirvāṇa* the clarity aspect of the all-ground consciousness or is the all-ground consciousness the clarity aspect of the all-ground wisdom? Masters and disciples, you must give up this inconsistent talk<sup>862, 863</sup>!

The Eighth Karma pa here argues why it is necessary to unambiguously distinguish between the source of adventitious stains and unconditioned luminous wisdom: the all-ground consciousness and all-ground wisdom, respectively. So long as the two are not clearly distinguished, their opposing functions—defilement and purification—will also not be distinguished. The author proceeds to outline some of the ambiguities and contradictions that had followed from confusing the natures and functions of the two all-grounds. We are informed in an interlinear note to this passage that Shākya mchog ldan had maintained in his *Cakrasaṃvara Commentary* (*Bde mchog rnam bshad*) that consciousness (*rnam shes*) arises as the clarity aspect (*dvangs cha*) of wisdom. Conversely, his student Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba (a.k.a. Rdo rje rgyal mtshan, b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) proclaimed that wisdom is the clarity aspect of consciousness.

<sup>861</sup> The plural marker (*rnams*) indicates that the author is here addressing a number of masters and disciples, not only Shākya mchog ldan and his student Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba. Little is known about the latter figure but Mi bskyod rdo rje in a response (in meter) to questions of Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba mentions in the colophon some of this scholars writings (none currently available) which included Epistemology, Madhyamaka, Abhidharma, Tantra and “especially [his] Gzhan stong commentarial work on the *Kālacakra*”. See *Paṇ chen rdor rgyal ba'i legs bshad*, MKsb vol. 3, 257<sub>3-4</sub>.

<sup>862</sup> This is a provisional rendering of the problematic line *dpon slob kha ngan pa gyis la byon zhig* |.

<sup>863</sup> *Rgan po'i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1020<sub>5</sub>–1021<sub>4</sub>: *gzhan yang chos dbyings kyi glo bur gyi dri ma'i rten byed na | khyod cag kun gzhi ye shes dang rnam shes gnyis 'byed dgos la | mi 'byed na glo bur dri ma'i rten du gyur pa'i kun gzhi de ye shes dang bde gshegs snying po la 'chad na mi rung bas | glo bur dri ma'i rten kun gzhi'i rnam shes zhig cis kyang khas len dgos zer nas kun gzhi la dag ma dag gnyis kyi dbye 'byed byed pa de mi 'thad par thal | bde gshegs snying po'am chos dbyings sam kun gzhi'i ye shes kyi ming can de nyid kyi glo bur gyi dri ma 'char ba'i rten du rung ba gang zhig de rung na de'i rten la kun gzhi'i rnam shes kyi mgo bde ma byung ba'i phyir | gzhan yang khyod dpon slob brgyud pa dang bcas pa la rnam rtog gting tshugs pa gcig kyang med par | res kun gzhi rnam shes kyi steng gi gsal cha de kun gzhi ye shes su khas len | res kun gzhi rnam shes kyi rang ngo'i gsal cha 'khor ba las mi 'da' bas myang 'das su mi rung bar khas len | res kun gzhi ye shes sam snying po'i gsal cha de la 'khor ba 'char zer | des na khyed rang dpon slob rnams kun gzhi rnam shes kyi gsal cha myang 'das yin nam | kun gzhi ye shes kyi gsal cha kun gzhi rnam shes yin dpon slob kha ngan pa gyis la byon zhig |*

“Hence, the positions subscribed to by these two, master and disciple, are [as] opposed as East and West.”<sup>864</sup>

The foregoing survey of the Eighth Karma pa’s views on buddha nature, the nature of reality and nature of mind, has attempted to clarify the important place that robust distinctions occupy in the author’s thinking. For Mi bskyod rdo rje, distinctions are the very stuff of soteriological philosophy. In clarifying the primacy of what is basic and enduring in contrast to what is contingent, derivative and superfluous, they establish the conceptual parameters needed to traverse the Buddhist path. For example, the central metaphoric dyad of the *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly*—the quintessence (*snying po*) versus chaff (*shun pa*)—is used to separate the “wheat from the chaff” at every stage of the path of awakening. Whether the focus is the nature of mind, the nature of reality or buddha nature—these representing different frames of reference within a unitary experiential dimension—the Karma pa urges the seeker not to confuse the basic nature (*ye shes, chos nyid, bde gshegs snying po*) with its distorted expressions (*rnam shes, chos can, sems can*) which are seen as both deriving and deviating from it due to the influence of ignorance and latent karmic tendencies. To blur the lines between such distinctions, he argues, is tantamount to conflating what perpetuates self-imposed limitations and suffering with what emancipates one from them. It is comparable, he argues, to not distinguishing medicine from poison and treating them as members of a single category. The simile was clearly meant to highlight the potentially grave repercussions of such category mistakes in the domains of salvific knowledge and contemplative praxis. These may result not only in semantic confusion—what Mi bskyod rdo rje characterizes as the collapse of terminological conventions and the attendant misrepresentation of Buddhist doctrine—but, more significantly, in soteriological confusion, a lack of clarity about the proper goals and procedures of the Buddhist path.

#### THE PROBLEM OF THE REMAINDER (*LHAG MA : AVAŚIṢṬA*)

For the Eighth Karma pa, the kinds of strong distinctions examined above play a vital *descriptive* role in the task of elucidating the complex and heterogeneous structure of mind in terms of its abiding and adventitious modalities. But equally important is their *prescriptive* role in the task of articulating the conditions of possibility of mind to free itself from self-imposed obscurations and limitations so as to recover its innate capacities for unpremeditated

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<sup>864</sup> *Rgan po’i rlung sman*, MKsb vol. 15, 1021<sub>5-6</sub>. These two mutually contradictory positions epitomize the divergent theories the author discusses: the clarity aspect is seen either a conditioned product of the unconditioned or as an unconditioned product of the conditioned. For the author, these two extreme views, each untenable in its own right, illustrate the absurdities that follow from not properly distinguishing between (all-ground) consciousness and (all-ground) wisdom.

altruistic activities which have been obscured by its own self-objectifications.<sup>865</sup> It is in light of such distinctions that the author characterizes the Mahāyāna path of self-fulfilment (*rang don*) and other-enrichment (*gzhan don*) in terms of the disclosure of innate mind (*gnyug ma'i sems*) or primordial wisdom (*gdod ma'i ye shes*) which he identifies with buddha nature (*bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*), the naturally present potential (*rang bzhin gnas pa'i rigs : prakṛtisthagotra*), as well as with the tantric ideas of the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*) and ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*). Such terms variously describe what is revealed when adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*) and its self-obscuring activities have been purified out of existence. They draw attention to an invariant mode of being (*gnas lugs*) that is always and already present, however much its realization may seem, from the perspective of ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*), to be the emergence or growth of something new. We may recall that this ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*) was defined by the Karma pa as “what remains” (*lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa*) when what has obscured it has been purified away.<sup>866</sup>

The idea of the remainder is a recurrent leitmotif in the author's philosophical oeuvre which he treated not as an established Buddhist principle but rather as a hotly debated philosophical problem, soliciting widely differing views and therefore demanding careful and nuanced consideration.<sup>867</sup> Because it reflected a tension at the heart of the Eighth Karma pa's own view of the ultimate, it was not a problem he could simply ignore. The tension arises at the confluence between the two currents of Buddhist thought that had most strongly shaped the Eighth Karma pa's philosophical view. On the one hand, his allegiance to affirmative Mahāmudrā, Tathāgatagarbha and Vajrayāna paradigms led him to acknowledge some kind of remainder—a ground that endures when the conceptual structures built upon it have collapsed. At the same time, however, we may recall that it was precisely the belief in some residual cognitive remainder that was taken by Maitrīpa and his followers as the core presupposition of the Cittamātra tradition which was rejected root and branch by the pure Madhyamaka traditions. For Maitrīpa, emptiness is luminosity, but this is not to be regarded as a real entity. The Karma pa's own affiliations with this tradition and the equally anti-foundationalist Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka tradition consequently led him to deny this remainder any ontological status whatsoever. What remains is completely beyond discursive constructs (*sprobsbral*). In its various permutations, the longstanding problem of the remainder emerges as a

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<sup>865</sup> This theme of existential recovery is central to reflective philosophy, a branch of French existential philosophy associated with Jean Nabert that is concerned with the subject's attempt, through interpretation, to recapture itself through the expressions of life (signs) that objectify it. Paul Ricoeur has characterized it as “mind's attempt to recover its power of thinking, acting and feeling—a power that has, so to speak, been buried or lost—in the knowledge, practices, and feelings that exteriorize it in relation to itself.” See Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Pierre Changeux, *What Makes Us Think? A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue about Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain* (tr. M. B. DeBevoise), Princeton University Press, 2002, 4.

<sup>866</sup> See above, 266.

<sup>867</sup> Many have been discussed in contemporary Buddhist Studies, on which see sources noted below, 302.

keystone concept in Buddhist thought, one which locks into place a number of related doctrinal and soteriological issues that had long preoccupied Buddhist scholars. Since many of these issues also attracted the attention of the Eighth Karma pa, the question of the remainder makes a fitting starting point for investigating his views on the nature and characteristics of liberating knowledge.

The question of what, if anything, remains upon the realization of emptiness was central to post-classical intersectarian doctrinal controversies over empty of own-nature (*rang stong*) and empty of other as well as persistent Madhyamaka versus Yogācāra debates over the status of the ultimate. In a more soteriological vein, it was also central to a cluster of intertwined problems concerning the cessation of mind (*cittanirodha*)<sup>868</sup>, the existence or nonexistence of wisdom on the level of buddhahood (*sangs rgyas kyi sa la ye shes yod dam*)<sup>869</sup>, and the relative efficacy of mental engagement (*manasikāra*) and mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*)<sup>870</sup> that had long been discussed and debated by Indian Mahāyāna scholars and their Tibetan successors. The Karma pa consecrated considerable attention to each of these controversies, often considering and weighing multiple points of view. While our focus in these final pages will be on some of his more original responses to the set of soteriological issues, it may be worthwhile to turn our attention briefly to the doctrinal background of the remainder problem in order to shed light on the doctrinal history behind the Karma pa's own contributions.

Viewed in light of its historical-doctrinal development, the problem of the remainder can be traced to one of the earliest recorded discourses on emptiness attributed to the historical Buddha as it occurs in the *Cūḷasuññatasutta* (abbreviated as CS) of the *Majjhimanikāya* (no. 121) of the Pāli Canon. More specifically, it may be traced to a famous refrain which the Buddha repeats eight times to Ānanda in the course of delineating progressive stages in the meditation on emptiness, ranging from the material to the immaterial spheres:

It is perceived that when something does not exist there, then “that [place] is empty of that [thing]”. Further it is comprehended of what remains there that “that exists in that [place]” as a real existent.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>868</sup> See Griffiths 1991.

<sup>869</sup> Almogi 2009.

<sup>870</sup> Mathes 2015.

<sup>871</sup> AN, *Majjhimanikāya*, sutta no. 121 et passim: *iti yaṃ hi kho tattha na hoti, tena taṃ suññaṃ samanupassati; yaṃ pana tattha avasiṭṭhaṃ hoti, taṃ santaṃ idam atthūti pajānāti* | Tib. D (Dpe sdur ma ed.) vol. 71, 662<sup>15-18</sup>: Tib. ...gang la gang med pa de des stong ngo zhes bya bar yang dag par rjes su mthong yang | de la lhag ma gang yod pa de de la yod do zhes bya bar yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes te | [kun dga' bo stong pa nyid la 'jug pa 'di ni yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin te phyin ci ma log pa yin no |] See Mathes 2012.

This passage has lent itself to widely varying interpretations by Buddhist scholars through the ages, not least of all because of difficulties of working out the referents of its numerous pronouns. As one of the few Pāli suttas to be translated into Tibetan and included in the Bka' 'gyur, it also represents, in the words of Lobsang Dargay, “one of the extremely rare cases where the same sūtra is part of Theravāda tradition as well as of the Tibetan Mahāyāna heritage.”<sup>872</sup> The passage has continued to attract the interest of Buddhist scholars in the present day and has been discussed by a number of scholars including D. Seyfort Ruegg, G.M. Nagao, S. Yamaguchi, H. Urban and P. Griffiths, L. Dargay, K.D. Mathes and Bikkhu Anālayo.<sup>873</sup> Taken collectively, their research poignantly reveals the extent to which the passage was excerpted from its original context and tailored to fit the aims and presuppositions of different scholastic lines of interpretation. In the *Cūḷasuññata* itself, the progressively deepening stages of meditation on emptiness, from material to immaterial spheres, leads finally to the “supreme emptiness”, a state that is empty of reifications and contaminations (*āsavas*) but not empty of the six “sense fields that, conditioned by life, are grounded in the body itself.”<sup>874</sup> According to Bikkhu Anālayo, “[w]hat remains, after this supreme accomplishment in emptiness, is simply the continuity of life, exemplified by the body and the senses together with the life faculty.”<sup>875</sup>

Let us now consider some influential examples of how the passage was later appropriated by Mahāyāna scholars and redeployed to support their differing theories regarding the existence or nonexistence of any residual factor after the realization of emptiness. [1] In general, Yogācāra-Cittamātra thinkers used the Pāli passage to support the view that something *does* remain following meditation on emptiness, though their accounts of what this something is and how it is best characterized were far from homogeneous. They variously interpreted the remainder mentioned in the CS passage as follows: [1] in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh)<sup>876</sup> it is an unfathomable locus (*āśraya*) for the postulation (*prajñapti*) of “forms” (*rūpa*) which are empty constructs; [2] in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MA 1.1–2 and commentary)<sup>877</sup> it

<sup>872</sup> Dargay 1990, 82. In Tibetan canonical versions, the sūtra is entitled *Great Discourse on Emptiness* (Tib. *mdo chen po stong pa nyid ces bya ba*; Skt. *sūnyatānāmamahāsūtra*). P 956, 274b2–278a7; D 290, 253b2–253b2. Passages from Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan editions of the text are compared in Schmithausen 1981, 232–39. See also Skilling 1997, 335–63 where he traces (338) the Tibetan version(s) to the *Madhyama Āgama* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda. Tibetan and Pāli texts are critically compared in Skilling 1994, 146–81.

<sup>873</sup> Yamaguchi 1941; Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 319 ff.; Nagao 1991, 51–60 (reprint of 1978 article); Dargay 1990; Urban and Griffiths 1994, Mathes 2009, 2012 and Anālayo 2012.

<sup>874</sup> *Cūḷasuññata* (CS) as quoted by Nagao 1991, 52.

<sup>875</sup> Anālayo 2012, 345.

<sup>876</sup> See Nagao 1991, 55 and 240 n. 21.

<sup>877</sup> See Griffiths and Urban 1994, 19: “A strong case can be made, then, for the conclusion that phenomenally rich mental images—designated by *viññapti*, *pratibhāsa*, *nimitta*, or *abhūtaparikalpa*—do remain in emptiness but that these cannot have been subject to the constructive activity denoted by *vikalpa*.” The idea of a nondual

is unreal imaginings (*abhūtaparikalpa*) which persist following the realization of emptiness but are thenceforth empty of subject and object, [3] in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS)<sup>878</sup> it is the selflessness of the eighteen psychophysical elements (*dhātus*) which are empty of I and mineness, and finally [4], in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV)<sup>879</sup> it is *tathāgatagarbha* which is empty of adventitious stains (*āgantukamala*). Against the background of these Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha ideas of the remainder, we can better understand the target of Mi bskyod rdo rje's previously quoted statement: “since even the clinging to the experience of some mere clarity and mere awareness as emptiness is similar to the birth and subsequent death of a child in a dream, one should not cling to the awareness and clarity as an intrinsic essence and as a mode of being. This is how the so-called ‘ultimate truth’, ‘the perfect nature’, which is left over as a remainder (*lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa*)—namely, the wisdom empty of the duality of subject and object [maintained by the] Alīkāravāda Cittamātra—is ascertained as being beyond discursive elaborations.”<sup>880</sup>

[2] Mi bskyod rdo rje's final remark that “what remains” is beyond discursive elaborations reflects his Madhyamaka orientation. This tradition took seriously the dictum “everything is empty” (*sarvaṃ śūnyam*), concluding that nothing can withstand critical assessment, and hence nothing at all survives the realization of emptiness. On this view, all phenomena *across the board* are comprehensively empty, and there is nothing left standing when critical reasoning has concluded its analytical investigations. This is the gist of Candrakīrti's response in his *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* (PSP) to the Vijñāptimātra interpretation of the CS passage that the remainder left over from analytical investigation exists. Candrakīrti contends that those who read the passage as scriptural proof (*lung gis sgrub par byed*) for the existence of some substantially real essence (*rdzas su bden pa'i ngo bo nyid*) are adherents of a flawed (*nyes pa : doṣa*) conception of emptiness consisting in “one thing being empty of another” (*itaretaraśūnyatā*).<sup>881</sup> Why? Because this so-called ‘emptiness’ is based on the rationale that that of which something is empty (*gang gis stong pa*) is nonexistent, whereas that which is empty of something (*gang stong pa*) is existent. Candrakīrti for obvious reasons rejects a principle of emptiness that allows some truly existent substance (*rdzas pa bden par yod pa*)

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unreal imaginings (these normally predicated on the dualism of subject and object) that survive the realization of emptiness is, of course, problematic and especially vulnerable to the anti-foundationalist critiques of Maitrīpa et al.

<sup>878</sup> AS, 40. See Nagao 1991, 55–56, Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 321–22.

<sup>879</sup> RGV I.157–58. See Nagao 1991, 58–60.

<sup>880</sup> See above, 251 and n. 702.

<sup>881</sup> This is the much-criticized view of emptiness consisting in one thing being empty of another (*gcig la gcig med pa'i stong pa nyid*) which is also criticized as the lowest of all types of emptiness in the author's MA auto-commentary. The more common Tibetan rendering of *itaretaraśūnyatā* (lit. “emptiness of the one from the other”) is *nyi tshe ba'i stong pa nyid* meaning “partial (or limited) emptiness”.

to survive the ascertainment of emptiness.<sup>882</sup> It is worth noting that this “emptiness of the one from the other” (*itaretarāśūnyatā*) is counted in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) as the seventh of seven types of emptiness outlined in the CS passage and similarly dismissed as an inferior view of emptiness that should be abandoned.<sup>883</sup>

In the context of Bka’ brgyud exegesis, the problem of what remains figured in classical and post-classical Tibetan debates over the status of emptiness and ultimate reality as affirmative Mahāmudrā and Mantrayāna discourses emphasizing the abiding nature of mind, reality and buddhahood were brought into confrontation with anti-foundationalist Madhyamaka critiques. While the former discourses retained the idea of an unchanging element of human reality that is amenable to positive descriptions, the latter rejected the ontological possibility of any metaphysical residue—any knowable entity or knowing cognition—once the cleansing solvent of emptiness has done its work, and on this basis ruled out all positive determinations. Mi bskyod rdo rje’s varied treatments of this related set of issues cover a characteristically broad spectrum of viewpoints. Our aim here, as in foregoing discussions, is to determine how he sought to align his unifying Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā orientation with the dominant views of his day.

As one could by now anticipate, the positive and negative ends of the spectrum of Tibetan views concerning what remains had, by the post-classical period, become associated in the minds of many Bka’ brgyud scholars with the Jo nang pa and Dge lugs pa schools respectively. Geshe Lobsang Dargay has shown that Dol po pa (1292–1361) took the CS passage, as it had been interpreted in the AS, as confirmation for the Gzhan stong view. On this view, although empty phenomena are nonexistent vis-à-vis the basis of emptiness, one “correctly sees that some basis of emptiness (*stong pa’i gzhi*) wherein empty phenomena do not exist is [thus] empty of those phenomena. Hence, one fully comprehends that the remainder which is empty of those [nonexistent] phenomena is the basis of emptiness, i.e., the perfect nature (*chos nyid yongs grub*), which exists eternally (*nam yang*)<sup>884</sup> there, as the truly real.”<sup>885</sup> This interpretation is then used by Dol po pa to support his Gzhan stong view that

<sup>882</sup> *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* (PSP) D 3866, 501<sub>3</sub> f.

<sup>883</sup> See Mathes’ forthcoming article “Yoga Conduct (Yogācāra) Hermeneutics – Indian Prototypes of Tibetan ‘Emptiness of Other’ (*gzhan stong*) Strategies” where the relevant passage from LAS is quoted: “Mahāmāti, the particular and universal characteristics of no phenomena exist everywhere at the same time. Therefore, the one’s emptiness of the other is [what is] spoken of. Mahāmāti, these are the seven types of emptiness. Mahāmāti, the one’s emptiness of the other is the most inferior one; you must abandon it.”

<sup>884</sup> This follows the Tibetan (D, P) of the CS which has *de la rtag par yod*, “exists permanently there”.

<sup>885</sup> *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho* (Peking ed. 1998), 147<sub>1-3</sub>: *stong pa’i gzhi gang la stong pa’i chos gang med pa de chos des stong par yang dag par rjes su mthong ste | ’di la chos des stong pa’i lhag ma stong pa’i gzhi gang yin pa chos nyid yongs grub de ni ’dir nam yang yod pa’o || zhes yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes so ||* as quoted in Dargay 1990, 90–91, n. 14. (translation our own) Terms from Tibetan version of CS indicated with bold lettering.



“empty phenomena are understood to be empty of an own-nature (*rang stong*) and the basis of emptiness (*stong pa'i gzhi*) is understood to be empty of other (*gzhan stong*).”<sup>886</sup> But this view, from another angle, can be seen as a textbook example of that inferior “emptiness of the one from the other” (*itaretarāśūnyatā*) which Candrakīrti had rejected on the basis of the LAS as a flawed or inferior conception of emptiness.

Indeed, it was along precisely these lines that the Dge lugs pas rejected the Jo nang view of an ontological remainder. Tsong kha pa in his MA commentary, *Dgongs pa rab gsal*, is critical of the Yogācāra view of what remains, particularly its three nature view according to which the perfect (*pariniṣpanna*) is empty of the imagined (*parikalpita*) and based on (or, in some cases, also empty of) the dependent (*paratantra*). He goes on to explain that the Yogācāra view of the remainder found in treatises such as the BBh and MA is totally dissimilar to the RGV I.157–158 passage which Asaṅga in his RGVV had explained in terms of the CS passage on the remainder.<sup>887</sup> The RGV passage states:

The real should be seen as real, and seeing the real, one is liberated. The [buddha] element is empty of adventitious [stains], which have the characteristic of being separable; but it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities, which have the characteristic of not being separable.<sup>888</sup>

Commenting on this passage Asaṅga adopts the CS formulation to explain that when one recognizes that buddha nature is “not empty of inconceivable buddha qualities, which are inseparable [in that it is impossible] to recognize [them] as something disconnected, and which surpass in number the grains of sand of the river Gaṅgā,” then “one thus perceives that ‘when something that does not exist in that [place],’ then ‘that [place] is empty of that [thing]’

<sup>886</sup> *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, as quoted in Dargay 1990, 91, n. 15. (translation our own)

<sup>887</sup> *Dgongs pa rab gsal*, 309<sub>3-4</sub>: “The meaning of the passage ‘...when something does not exist there, [the latter is empty with regard to the former]’ etc. as interpreted in the *Rgyud bla ma* [RGV] commentary, is not at all comparable to the previous two [Yogācāra works, i.e., BBh and MAV], but it does exist in the Madhyamaka commentarial method. I will not write [about it here] for fear of prolixity. *rgyud bla ma'i 'grel bar gang zhig gang na med pa de ni zhes sogs kyi don bkral ba ni | snga ma gnyis dang gtan mi 'dra bar dbu ma'i 'grel tshul du yod de mangs bas 'jigs nas ma bris so* |. This passage is quoted by Dargay 1990, 91, n.21. The translation is our own.

<sup>888</sup> RGV 1.157–58 (J 1.154–55); RGVV, 76.1–4: *nāpaneyam ataḥ kiṃcid upaneyaṃ na kiṃcana | draṣṭavyaṃ bhūtato bhūtaṃ bhūtadarśī vimucyate || śūnya āgantukair dhātuh savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ | aśūnyo 'nuttarair dharmair avinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ ||*

and thus “comprehends that something which remains exists [permanently]<sup>889</sup> there as a real existent.”<sup>890</sup>

It is unfortunate that Tsong kha pa declines, for fear of prolixity, to specify how this RGVV interpretation of the remainder is “not at all consistent” with that outlined in the two Yogācāra works. Yet it is not hard to fathom why he would be struck by the difference between [1] the relatively weak CS, BBh and MA remainder interpretations which maintain that after realizing emptiness some vestige of conditioned existence survives—be it the continuity of corporeal life (CS), an inscrutable substrate for the imputation of materiality (BBh), or unreal imaginings (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and emptiness (MAV)—and [2] the strong RGVV version which construes the remainder as buddha nature which is *completely* devoid of adventitious stains (i.e., the conditioned) which do not exist at all. In the RGV, the unreal imaginings are part of adventitious afflictions (*āgantukakleśa*) and thus cannot be part of the remnant.<sup>891</sup> In the strong version, the remainder is *all* that exists, as in an arithmetic remainder or difference left over after after performing subtraction<sup>892</sup>, whereas what is subtracted from the original is entirely nonexistent.

It was left to Tsong kha pa’s disciple Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen (1364–1432) to reinterpret the relevant RGV I.157–8 statement in line with his master’s \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka philosophical orientation. On this interpretation, the statement that buddha *dhātu* is “empty of adventitious stains...but not empty of unsurpassable qualities” is taken as support for the thesis that what remains is that which is empty of intrinsic essence and it is *that* which “exists permanently” (*lhag mar gyur pa rang bzhin gyis stong pa de ni de la rtag par yod*). On this reinterpretation, there indeed is a remainder (rather than no remainder at all) but it consists in things as they really are (*yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin : yathābhūta*) when all reifications are removed, namely, that which is empty of intrinsic essence (*rang bzhin gyis stong pa*). This enables him to identify the remnant buddha nature in terms of a nonaffirming negation. As Rgyal tshab explains:

Because this *tathāgata* element which is by nature thoroughly pure inasmuch as there are [no] defilements that were previously existent and are currently to be

<sup>889</sup> The Tibetan (D, P) have *de la rtag par yod*, “exists permanently there”.

<sup>890</sup> RGVV, 76.6–7, *aśūnyo gaṅgānadīvālikāvyaativṛttair avinirbhāgair amuktajñair acintyair buddhadharmair iti | evaṃ yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam iti samanupaśyati | yat punar atrāvaśiṣṭaṃ bhavati tat sad ihāstīti yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti* | For Sanskrit, Tibetan and English of RGVV 76.5–7, see above, 97 n. 243. Compare with the *Cūḷasuññata* passage, *Majjhimanikāya*, sutta no. 121 (et passim), as quoted above, 301 n. 871.

<sup>891</sup> See Mathes 2009, 2012.

<sup>892</sup> Nagao notes that the RGV remainder is akin to the arithmetic remainder (or, more precisely, the *difference*) which is left after subtraction.

removed, the two kinds of self which were the object or the reason for believing in a self of persons and phenomena do not exist at all. This is so because freedom from inherently existent (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) adventitious stains is the nature of this element. When, according to this [*Ratnagotravibhāga*], being empty of inherent existence (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*), empty of existence by its own characteristics (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*), and empty of existence by its own nature (*rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*) are taught as the ultimate truth, one should know that the presentation of this system of two truths is shown to have the same meaning as the doctrine of Lord Nāgārjuna... In this regard, the insight which directly understands selflessness perceives correctly that “when something does not exist there”—i.e., some inherently existent phenomena as a basis—“then that [place] is empty of that [thing]” (*de ni des stong ngo*). However, “something which remains” is that emptiness of intrinsic essence and it is “that which exists permanently there”. It is comprehended, in the context of post-meditation state (*rjes kyi skabs*), as reality just as it is (*yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin : yathābhūta*).<sup>893</sup>

It is evident from the two foregoing accounts of the remainder that the Jo nang and Dge lugs pa have advanced diametrically opposed interpretations of the same RGV passage on the remainder which reflect their different views of buddha nature. For the Jo nang pas buddha nature with its inseparable qualities constitutes an intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bo : svabhāva*). For the Gelugpas buddha nature is the emptiness of the mind from an inherently existing mind; and the inseparability of buddha qualities is interpreted, along the lines of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab, to mean that they emerge when meditating on the emptiness of mind. In short, for the Jo nang pas, buddha nature is existent and its qualities are innate, whereas for the Dge lugs pas, buddha nature is a nonaffirming negation and its qualities are emergent or acquired. On the basis of their divergent views of buddha nature, the Jo nang pas use the idea of the remainder to support the determination of a permanent metaphysical perfect nature (*chos nyid yongs grub*) construed as a basis of emptiness (*stong gzhi*) which is empty of adventitious stains, whereas the Dge lugs pas use it to support the determination of reality just

<sup>893</sup> *Theg pa then po rgyud bla ma'i tika*, 324<sub>5</sub>–325<sub>6</sub>: *gang gi phyir rang bzhin gyis yongs su dag pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams 'di la sngar yod gsar du bsal bar bya ba kun nas nyon mongs pa gang zag dang chos kyi bdag tu 'dzin pa'i rgyu mtshan te dmigs pa bdag gnyis 'ga' yang med de | glo bur ba'i dri ma rang bzhin gyis grub pa dang bral ba ni khams 'di'i rang bzhin yin pa'i phyir ro || 'dis rang bzhin gyis grub pas stong pa dang | rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pas stong pa dang | rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis grub pas stong pa don dam pa bden par bstan pa na | bden pa gnyis kyi rnam bzhas mgon po klu sgrub kyi bzhes pa dang don gcig tu bstan par shes par bya'o ||... de ltar na rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i chos **gang zhig gzhi gang na med pa de ni des stong ngo zhes** bdag med mngon sum du rtogs pa shes rab kyi **yang dag par rjes su mthong la | gang zhig de la lhag mar gyur pa rang bzhin gyis stong pa de ni de la rtag par yod do zhes** | rjes kyi skabs su **yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du shes so | zhes so** ||*

Wording from Tibetan edition of RGVV (D) indicated in bold face lettering.

as it is, viz., as empty of intrinsic essence, a stance which allows no room for any residual basis of emptiness (*stong gzhi*).

Turning to Mi bskyod rdo rje's own treatments of the remainder problem and the related set of Madhyamaka views concerning the existence or nonexistence of *buddhajñāna*, we find him attempting in different ways to navigate the middle ground between these contrasting lines of thought. The main sources for his treatment of this problem are found in his MA and *Dgongs gcig* commentaries which we can assign to roughly the same period based on colophonic information and intertextual cross-references.<sup>894</sup> The author's interpretive method in these works is to rigorously apply the Madhyamaka principle of freedom from extremes: "according to the Madhyamaka of sūtra and mantra [traditions], the real objects of refutation are the two great extremes of eternalism and nihilism because there are no other extremes which are not subsumed under these." And, once liberated from these extremes, "there is left behind not the slightest remainder of any belief in extreme [positions]."<sup>895</sup> Note that Mi bskyod rdo rje here qualifies the absence of remainder to pertain to beliefs, leaving the question of the ontological status of the remainder open.

The Karma pa investigates the remainder issue in a section of his *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* V devoted to clarifying 'Jig rten gsum mgon's eleventh adamant precept in the first section of his *Dgongs pa gcig pa* which states that "The teachings of Cittamātra reveal the Madhyamaka free from extremes."<sup>896</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje's excursus to some extent follows the Sa skya master Stag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen's arguments for the superiority of Madhyamaka over Cittamātra which are advanced in his *Grub mtha' kun shes* auto-commentary.<sup>897</sup> At any rate, in clarifying the sense of 'Jig rten gsum mgon's precept, it is evident that the Karma pa wishes to emphasize not only that Cittamātra and Madhyamaka traditions are complementary, but that the latter marks a definite advance beyond the former's idealistic standpoint. It should be noted that this interpretation underscores the superiority of Madhyamaka over Cittamātra, in contrast to 'Jig rten gsum mgon's precept, as well as its interpretation by Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659) who had rather stressed the compatibility of their views, as evident in the latter's following remark: "the precept [I.11] teaches that all entities are not established as other than mind. Since mind, too, is free from the extremes of existence and nonexistence,

<sup>894</sup> The *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* and *Dgongs gcig* works each contain references to one another which will be documented in a forthcoming publication on Mi bskyod rdo rje's buddha nature views.

<sup>895</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 229–11: *mdo sngags kyi dbu ma mtha' dag gis dgag par bya ba'i don po rtag chad kyi mtha' chen po 'di gnyis yin te | 'dir ma 'dus pa'i mtha' gzhan med pa'i phyir te | ...mthar 'dzin gyi lhag ma cung zad kyang lus pa'i phyir |*

<sup>896</sup> *Dgongs pa gcig pa*, 165<sub>12</sub>: *sems tsam bka' yis mtha' bral dbu ma ston ||*

<sup>897</sup> See *Grub mtha' kun shes rtsa 'grel*, 10 ff. (root text) and 140 ff. (auto-commentary).

who would expound a Madhyamaka different from that? Take the training in the nonduality of manifestation and mind as [your] basis.”<sup>898</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje for his part begins by explaining that “although in Mahāyāna teachings, there are scriptural passages by Cittamātra teachers cited as support for the establishment of cognition (*rnam rig pa'i grub pa*), the final intent must be based solely on the interpretations by the Great Ācārya Nāgārjuna.”<sup>899</sup> It is of course this Indian master’s teaching on emptiness that is taken by the Karma pa to be the core insight and indisputable axiom of Buddhist philosophical thinking. “In general, although it is not declared in *all* the buddha’s teachings that there is no distinction between provisional and definitive meaning, in the case of canonical writings of both the middle and final turnings which teach the selflessness of phenomena, it is indisputable that in teaching profound emptiness as it is, they did not teach that there are profound differences [between] superior and inferior [kinds].”<sup>900</sup> In other words, there is only a single, comprehensive emptiness which admits of no gradations. He then quotes a passage from the *Samādhirāja* sūtra which proclaims the emptiness of phenomena to be the single meaning (*don gcig*) common to all the varied *buddhavacana*. He concludes that “Here in Tibet in particular, even among those sūtras which profess to teach the Vijñāpti[mātra] (Cognition [Only]), it is abundantly clear that this Vijñāpti[mātra] doctrine is shown as not being the superior one.”<sup>901</sup> In this connection, Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes the following passage from the *Laṅkāvatāra* (LAS):

Once one has relied on [the notion of] Mind Only,  
External objects should not be imagined.  
Based on the apprehension of suchness,  
One should also pass beyond Mind Only. (LAS X.256)

Having passed beyond Mind Only,  
One should pass beyond a state which is without appearances.  
A yoga practitioner who is established in a state without appearances

<sup>898</sup> *Dgongs pa gcig pa dka' 'grel*, 165<sup>13-17</sup>: *gsungs pa dngos kun sems tsam las gzhan du || ma grub sems kyang yod med mtha' bral pas|| de las gzhan pa'i dbu ma su yis bshad || skrang sems gnyis med nyams len rta bar gzung ||* Translation our own.

<sup>899</sup> *Dgongs pa gcig 'grel pa V*, 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo, vol. 80, 194<sup>4-5</sup>: *theg pa chen po'i bka' ni sems tsam pa'i slob dpon dag gis rnam rig pa'i grub pa'i rgyab tu 'dren yang | mthar thug gi dgongs pa slob dpon chen po nā gardzu nas bkral ba nyid kho nar gnas bya ba yin |*

<sup>900</sup> *Dgongs pa gcig 'grel pa V*, *ibid.*, 194<sup>6</sup>–195<sup>1</sup>: *spyir bde bar gshegs pa'i bka' thams cad la drang nges kyi rnam dbye med par mi smra yang | 'khor lo bar mthar chos kyi bdag med ston pa'i gsung rab la ni | zab mo stong pa nyid kyi rang ldog bstan pa la mchog dman nam zab khyad yod par ma bstan par gor ma chag ste |*

<sup>901</sup> *Ibid.*, 195<sup>4</sup>: *khyad par bod 'dir rnam rig bstan par 'dod pa'i mdo dag las kyang | chos rnam rig pa'i lugs de mchog ma yin par bstan pa ni ches gsal te |*

Sees the Mahāyāna.<sup>902</sup> (LAS X.257)

The author at this point turns his attention to the question of the remainder:

Now, some teachers who cling to a Cittamātra position [say] that a truly established cognition (*rnam rig : vijñapti*) is shown by the final turning [scriptures] to be of definitive meaning. From the *Sūtra on Ultimate Emptiness* (*Don dam pa stong pa nyid kyi mdo*<sup>903</sup>):

When something does not exist there, then that [place] is empty of that [thing]. Further it is comprehended that something that remains there does exist there. This is the nonerroneous, correct view regarding emptiness, the Middle Way.<sup>904</sup>

In clarifying the intent behind this statement, the Karma pa first explains that the Buddhist teachings were unlimited both in content and modes of expression because they functioned as skillful means tailored to each of the varying mind-sets of individuals.

After outlining some of the hermeneutical devices employed in interpreting and translating the buddha-word, the Karma pa turns to the RGV's special interpretation of the "remainder" as buddha nature which is empty of adventitious stains:

When it comes to the meaning of the [above] quotation, the esteemed teacher Asaṅga stated that uncontaminated awareness (*zag med kyi shes pa*), operative since time without beginning, which is the cause of perfect buddhahood (*rdzogs sangs*) free from obscurations, was termed "buddha nature" (\**sugatagarbha*). Since it is not possible for it to be mingled with the mode of being of that which constitutes the nature of all obscuration, it exists as something separable. But since it is the cause which generates qualities such as the powers on the level of buddha-

<sup>902</sup> LAS 298<sub>15</sub> – 299<sub>1</sub>: *cittamātram samāruhya bāhyam arthaṃ na kalpayet | tathatālabhane sthitvā cittamātram atikramet || cittamātram atikramya nirābhāsam atikramet | nirābhāsthito yogī mahāyānaṃ sa<sup>a</sup> paśyati ||*

<sup>a</sup>According to Tibetan in Nanjio 1923, 299, fn. 1. Nanjio proposes to read *na*. Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes only the first stanza, but the second is included here for context.

<sup>903</sup> This title is not found in the Tibetan canon. It may be noted that the Tibetan title of the CS is *Mdo chen po stong pa nyid*. The quotation resembles the CS passage on the remainder with the exception of the last line. Stag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen quotes the same passage and under the same title *Don dam pa stong pa nyid kyi mdo* in his *Grub mtha' kun shes* auto-commentary, 141<sub>13–16</sub>.

<sup>904</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa V, 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* vol. 80, 195<sub>5</sub>–196<sub>1</sub>: *yang sems tsam gyi phyogs 'dzin pa'i slob dpon kha cig || 'khor lo tha mas rnam rig bden grub pa zhiḡ nges don du bstan pa yin te | don dam pa stong pa nyid kyi mdo las | gang na gang med pa de ni des stong pa nyid yin la | 'di la lthag ma gang yin pa de ni 'dir yod pa ste | 'di ni dbu ma'i lam stong pa nyid la lta ba yang dag par phyin ci ma log pa'o ...*

hood, it has not been known to be separable since beginningless time. Hence, it appeared to be explained in the sense of not being empty [of buddha qualities].<sup>905</sup>

The author concludes by quoting the above-cited passage from Asaṅga's RGVV to substantiate the view that the remainder is buddha nature devoid of adventitious stains which is separable in the sense of being empty of adventitious obscuration and inseparable in not being empty of unsurpassed buddha qualities.

Surveying a number of the Karma pa's treatments of the remainder problem, it becomes evident that his aim is to avoid extremes of existence and nonexistence while at the same time balancing affirmative and negative modes of discourse. We have proposed that his Mahāmudrā and Tathāgatagarbha orientations prompted him to acknowledge a remainder of some kind—buddha nature, the nature of mind, the nature of reality—while his allegiance to \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhāna views led him to disavow any hypostatization of this remainder as an established basis (*gzhi grub*). This helps to explain his emphasis, increasingly conspicuous in his later writings, on the need to realize an emptiness free from any remnant beliefs in the extremes of existence and nonexistence. In this regard, despite indications of his early favouring of Gzhan stong-like affirmation of the basis of emptiness over the Rang stong-based denial of such a basis, his later works such as the MA and *Dgongs gcig* commentaries endorse the metaphysically disinclined stance of the antifoundationalist Madhyamaka traditions. In his MA commentary, he determines that among the extensive ways of teaching emptiness found among innumerable Madhyamaka, Cittamātra and tantric sources, those presented within Madhyamaka teachings and treatises are “most lucid” (*ches gsal ba*) because “by teaching an emptiness that leaves behind not even the slightest remainder of discursive elaborations and characteristics (*spros mtshan gyi lhag ma*), this tradition takes the remaining emptiness to be fully comprehensive in scope”.<sup>906</sup> Stated succinctly, this tradition's profound emptiness which leaves behind no ontological residue in the form of reifying superimpositions is deemed to be the most far-reaching and soteriologically efficacious.

Later in his MA commentary, the Karma pa remarks that the Jo nang had forsaken this comprehensive emptiness of the Madhyamaka tradition in subscribing to an “emptiness of other” (*gzhan stong*) position predicated on the belief in a permanent, unconditioned ultimate reality which is fundamentally separate from dependent arising. To this extent the Jo nang school is said to be vulnerable to the criticism of advocating an extreme of eternalism.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 1963–5: ...*lung de'i don ni slob dpon thogs med zhabs kyis | thog ma med pa'i dus can gyi zag med kyi shes pa bden par med bzhin du sgrib bral rdzogs sangs kyi rgyu bde gshegs snying po'i ming can la | sgrib pa thams cad kyi rang bzhin de'i gnas tshul dang 'dre mi rung bas dbyer yod la | sangs rgyas kyi sa'i stobs sogs kyi chos bskyed pa'i rgyus ni thog med nas 'bral mi shes pas mi stong ba'i don du 'chad par snang gi ...*

<sup>906</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 519–63. *lugs 'dir ni spros mtshan gyi lhag ma cung zad kyang ma lus par stong nyid du bstan nas stong pa nyid kyi lus yongs su rdzogs par mdzad pa'i phyir |*

Yet this is a view, Mi bskyod rdo rje contends, which also leads inescapably to the opposite extreme of nihilism:

Hence, you take the real Gzhan stong ultimate truth to be something unconditioned and permanent. Thus, since what is permanent would perforce be devoid of activity (*bya ba med pa*), the triad of object, agent and action (*bya byed las*) stemming from ultimate truth would stop functioning. And were that to stop, then liberation stemming from realizing that ultimate truth would [also] stop. Were that to stop, then saṃsāric phenomena would also stop functioning. Hence, anyone who claims that the conventional, i.e., *saṃsāra*, is erroneous due to delusion regarding the ultimate, i.e., *nirvāṇa*, is required to assert the qualification that it is impossible for the ultimate, *nirvāṇa*, to exist. And if there is no *nirvāṇa*, then there is also no *saṃsāra* as its counterpart and thus there is no alternative but to assert nihilism.<sup>907</sup>

The Karma pa here tactfully redeploys Nāgārjuna's argumentation (e.g. MMK chapter 24) for why emptiness—i.e. the lack of inherent, independent existence in all phenomena—is a precondition for conditioned, transitory, dependently arisen, phenomena. The latter had on this basis maintained (MMK XXIV.18) that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is equivalent to dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Against his rival substance realist (*vastuvādin*) who had contended that emptiness, if true, would render spiritual realization impossible, Nāgārjuna responded that, on the contrary, emptiness, the lack of inherent existence, is a necessary condition for any kind of activity and change, spiritual progress and realization included. It was rather his opponent's view of independently and inherently existent entities that would render such progress impossible since permanence and independent existence preclude activity and change. Arguing along similar lines, the Eighth Karma pa demonstrates how an eternal, unconditioned ultimate that completely transcends causally dependent processes is by definition impervious to soteriological activity, a metaphysically eternalist view that leads to soteriological nihilism.<sup>908</sup>

In *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* Ia, Mi bskyod rdo rje extends this line of criticism to Tsong kha pa's account of the realization of emptiness which leaves as its remainder a true reality,

<sup>907</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 22<sub>14–11</sub>: *des na khyed cag dngos su gzhan stong don dam bden pa 'dus ma byas rtag pa la byas pas | de'i dbang gis rtag pa la bya ba med pas don dam bden pa las brtsams pa'i bya byed las gsum rgyun chad par 'gyur zhing | de chad na don dam bden pa rtogs pa las brtsams pa'i rnam grol rgyun chad par 'gyur la | de chad na 'khor ba'i chos kyang rgyun chad par 'gyur te | 'khor ba kun rdzob pa ni don dam myang 'das la 'khrul nas phyin ci log tu byung bar 'dod pa gang zhig | don dam myang 'das ni yod du mi rung ba'i khyad par khas len dgos byung zhing | myang 'das med na der bltos kyi 'khor ba yang med pas chad par khas mi len ka med du 'gyur ba'i phyir |*

<sup>908</sup> Compare with Dol po pa who maintained that it is the permanent which makes the impermanent possible. See Stearns, 215.



“the way things really are” (*yathābhūta*) ultimately, that is, empty of any established nature. The Karma pa poses the question: “How, according to the account of emptiness advanced by you, Tsong kha pa, can [you] establish a nonentitative entity, i.e., the phenomenal entity, which is the object of negation (*dgag bya*)?”<sup>909</sup> The question follows a lengthy interrogation of Tsong kha pa’s acceptance of a non-reified true reality (*yathābhūta*) on the ultimate level by exposing it to Candrakīrti’s unequivocal repudiation of substance realist *vastuvādin* (*dnegos po smra ba*) views. Coming to the gist of his criticism, Mi bskyod rdo rje states “If the general idea of a real entity is not established even conventionally by Mādhyamikas, then how could it be established ultimately!”<sup>910</sup> The answer would be, it can only be established ultimately, because conventionally everything is unreal. To sharpen his criticism, the Karma pa makes the surprising comment that Tsong kha pa’s account of emptiness is no different from the account of emptiness as a real, existent remainder given in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS).<sup>911</sup> This is so, the Karma pa argues, because “since your account of emptiness amounts to one real entity being empty of another real entity, and therefore does not establish that the entire spectrum of phenomenal entities is empty, what [view] could be lower than that?”<sup>912</sup> Here he echoes the LAS which had ranked the emptiness of one thing of another (*itaretaraśūnyatā*) as the most inferior among the seven kinds of emptiness and a kind to be avoided at all costs.

The specific sense in which Tsong kha pa’s account of emptiness can be refuted as an instance of *itaretaraśūnyatā* is clarified in the Karma pa’s MA commentary. “In [this] account of emptiness, according to which all phenomena are empty of an own-nature, a pot is not empty of a pot in the sense that a pot which is empty of reality is said to be a pot that is empty of own-nature.”<sup>913</sup> By way of summary, to declare that a pot which is empty of a truly established (*bden grub*) nature survives as a remnant on the ultimate level is to endorse a type of object realism predicated on an emptiness consisting in one thing being empty of another. Mi bskyod rdo rje considers Tsong kha pa’s logic of emptiness to be at least formally identical

<sup>909</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ia, MKsb vol. 4, 445<sub>5-6</sub>: *ci tsong kha pa khyed bzhed pa’i stong nyid kyi tshul la chos can dngos po dgag bya’i dngos po min pa’i dngos po sgrub tshul de ni* |

<sup>910</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ia, MKsb vol. 4, 445<sub>2-3</sub>: *dbu ma pas dngos po’i spyi tsam kun rdzob tu yang ma grub na don dam par grub par lta ga la zhig...*

<sup>911</sup> AS, D 4049, 152<sub>3-4</sub>: “What is the defining characteristic of emptiness? “It is perceived that when something does not exist there, then that [place] is empty of that [thing]. It is further comprehended that ‘something that remains there exists there’ [and that] it is the truly real.” This is the view of the real which is the entry into emptiness; it is described as ‘nonerroneous’.” *stong pa nyid kyi mtshan nyid gang zhe na* | “*gang la gang med pa de ni de stong par yang dag par rjes su mthong ba ste* | ‘*di la lag ma gang yin pa de ni*’ *dir yod pa’o zhes yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes so*” || ‘*di ni stong pa nyid la*’ *jug pa yang dag pa’i lta ba ste* | *phyin ci ma log pa zhes bya’o* |

<sup>912</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ia, MKsb vol 4., 445<sub>5-6</sub>: *khyod kyi stong tshul de ni dngos po gzhan la dngos po gzhan gyis stong tshul du song ba’i phyr dngos chos mtha’ dag stong par mi ’grub pas de las tha shal ba ci zhig yod* |

<sup>913</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 343<sub>19-21</sub>: *chos thams cad rang gi ngo bos stong pa’i stong tshul la bum pa bum pas mi stong la* | *bum pa bden pas stong pa bum pa rang stong pa’i don yin ces smras pa ...*

to the rival position (*phyogs snga*) of *itaretaraśūnyatā* which had been criticized by a wide range of Madhyamaka canonical texts as being antithetical to the principle of profound all-inclusive emptiness that leaves no remainder. As he explains:

The claim that the emptiness of one thing [being empty] of another is a [valid] principle of emptiness is refuted as follows. For example, the Cittamātra propounds within the framework of dependent cognition (*gzhan dbang rnam rig*) an emptiness which is empty of the imagined subject and object (*gzung 'dzin kun brtags*), but nevertheless proclaims that it is not empty of the nature of dependent cognition. As the principle of emptiness you maintain is like that, it follows that it is not that final emptiness (*stong pa nyid dpyis phyin*) encompassing all phenomena. This is because among the two truths, there is ultimately left behind as a remainder some phenomenon that is not empty. Thus, we declare [that you] propound the *itaretaraśūnyatā*. While proponents of real entities (*vastuvādins*) are [on this same basis] ruled out [by you] as mistaken, in the case of the Madhyamaka tradition you subscribe to, the accusation directed at the realists such as the Cittamātra rebounds to your side.<sup>914</sup>

#### ON THE PROSPECT OF A GROUNDLESS GROUND

Mi bskyod rdo rje's analysis of the opposing Tibetan "remainder" positions attempted to demonstrate the extent to which the Jo nang Other-emptiness and Dge lugs Own-emptiness accounts of emptiness were predicated on the same logic of retaining one aspect of reality at the expense of another. The principal difference is that Jo nang pa remainder is an enduring metaphysical reality whereas the Dge lugs pa remainder is non-reified external phenomena. Now, for Mi bskyod rdo rje, neither of these views meets the requirement of an all-inclusive

<sup>914</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 344<sub>5-13</sub>: 'dis nyi tshe ba'i stong nyid stong pa nyid kyi tshul du smra ba 'gog pa ni | dper na | sems tsam pas gzhan dbang rnam rig gi steng du gzung 'dzin kun brtags kyi stong pa'i stong nyid smra yang | gzhan dbang rnam rig gi ngo bos mi stong par 'dod pa la | khyod 'dod pa'i stong nyid kyi tshul de lta bu de chos thams cad la khyab pa'i stong pa nyid dpyis phyin de ma yin par thal | bden pa gnyis las don dam par mi stong pa'i chos shig lhag mar lus pas stong nyid nyi tshe bar smra ba'i phyir zhes dngos por smra ba la nongs pa phar la bskur bar mdzad pa yin la | khyed 'dod pa'i dbu ma'i lugs de ltar na | sems tsam pa sogs dngos smra ba la nongs pa phar la bskur ba de tshur la log par 'gyur te | ['di ltar khyed cag dbu ma pas stong nyid kyi tshul smra ba de'i tshe chos thams cad la khyab pa'i stong nyid khas len no || zhes brjod pa de mi 'thad par thal | bum pa chos yin pa ni gang zhig | de de rang gi ngo bos mi stong par lhag mar lus la | bum pa sdod lugs kyi bden grub nyi tshe bas stong yang chos thams cad stong pa nyid du ma grub pa'i phyir zhes brjod na | khyed kyi lugs ltar smra ba'i dbu ma pa de rtags gsal khyab pa gang la'ang lan 'debs kyi spa bkong bar mi 'gyur ram | khyed kyi 'dod pa de ltar na | bum pa rang gi ngo bos stong pa nyid yin nam min | ma yin par 'chad mi nus te | khyed kyi dbu ma'i 'chad tshul de ngo bo nyid med smra'i dbu ma par khas len gyin 'dug pa'i phyir | yin na bum pa rang gi ngo bo de chu skyor zhabs zhum lto ldir gyi don byed pa'i mtshan nyid can gyi dngos po de yin nam | sdod lugs kyi grub pa'i bden grub pa de yin | gnyis pa ltar yin pa mi srid de | de 'dra de shes bya la med pa'i phyir ||

emptiness which leaves behind no ontological residue. But is the Karma pa's own viewpoint able to meet this stringent requirement? In other words, can he retain his Mahāmudrā tradition's central teachings on recognizing the nature of mind (*sems nyid*) or natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) by means of unmediated yogic direct perception (*rnal 'byor pa'i mngon sum*) and mental nonengagement (*vid la mi byed pa*) without recourse to realist and foundationalist aspirations and assumptions? This question brings us to the heart of the Karma pa's middle path, a path which opens onto the discernable but elusive nature of mind and reality described in Mantrayāna, Mahāmudrā and Tathāgatagarbha discourses whilst steering clear of illegitimate imputations. It is a path, that is, which brings into view the groundlessness of the ground (*gzhi'i gzhi med*), a foundationless foundation (*gnas med gnas*). Its discovery must be a matter of yogic direct perception, an attestation of reality in its most ontologically primitive condition, but one which avoids construing what is uncovered as a foundation, a shovel-stopping bedrock on which all depends but which itself depends on nothing.<sup>915</sup> The Karma pa thus finds himself in the difficult position of having to clarify and justify how there is available to the Mahāmudrā practitioner some basic and invariant ground (*gzhi*) of human experience which is itself without any still deeper source or grounding (*gzhi med rtsa bral*) and therefore exempt from Madhyamaka charges of realism and foundationalism.

To articulate the possibility of a nonfoundationalist ground of experience, the Karma pa must first acknowledge the presence of a basic nondual mode of awareness which, however elusive, is nonetheless accessible and discernible *within* the experiential continuum and also specify how it is structurally separate from concurrent adventitious streams of dualistic cognition. In this regard, it is imperative for him to clarify that the former can never be a transformed aspect of the latter—that is to say, nondual wisdom cannot be merely an altered state of mundane consciousness. Rather, nondual wisdom is what reveals itself when the imputed and adventitious modes of consciousness are purified out of existence, leaving in their wake no remainder, no residual reifications:

In this [Karma Bka' brgyud] tradition, according to the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas, if investigated, all the constellations of consciousness are of the nature of adventitious stains, so it is not possible for them to be fundamentally transformed into the essence of stainless wisdom. This is so because, were this possible, then [wisdom] would have to possess error (*'khrul pa*) since an effect must be concordant with its cause. For this reason [the Prāsaṅgika] do not accept that on the level of buddhahood even the wisdom of fundamentally transformed consciousness [exists]. And consequently, a truly established mind empty of both subject and

<sup>915</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* Ia, MKsb vol 4., 497<sub>1</sub>.

object is not endorsed by *all* Mādhyamikas. That said, there are some Svātantrikas who explain that, conventionally, the mind empty of duality, luminosity, and wisdom exists in the meditative equipoise of noble bodhisattvas and perfect buddhas. However, the Prāsaṅgikas do not maintain the existence of the functioning of mind and wisdom at all, even conventionally.

Hence, in the case of the six or eight constellations of consciousness, some remnant (*lhag ma*) mind empty of subject and object would [have to] be covert, unable to produce the overt cognitions (*rnam rig : prajñapti*) of subject and object. The stream of consciousness (*rig rgyun*) which has entered the sphere without remainder [in the case] of śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha saints is not explicitly manifest; [yet] this cognition or mind that is not modified by objects and in which dualistic appearances have vanished is not at all the same as the buddha nature of ground, path and fruition explained in the *Uttaratantra* [RGV] and the nondual wisdom of ground, path and fruition explained in the Mantra[yāna] because were it the same, then one would be forced to conclude that even the goals of buddha-hood of the sūtras and tantras are not at all the same... and the buddha[hood] of sūtras and tantras [would] be subdivided into superior and inferior [types].<sup>916</sup>

The author is here emphatic that the invariant nondual wisdom or buddha nature which is progressively revealed in all its dynamism by the Buddhist sūtric and tantric paths is fundamentally different from consciousness as variously classified in Buddhist Abhidharma and Yogācāra sources, as well as the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha ‘stream of consciousness’ which enters the sphere without remainder. As he explained in his *Reply to Bla ma Khams pa*, it may be observed that the flow of adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*) is concurrent but nonconvergent (*ma ’dres pa*) with the flow of innate mind (*gnyug ma’i sems*). This phenomenological observation allows Mi bskyod rdo rje to conclude that ‘consciousness’ both in its sixfold (non-Yogācāra) or eightfold (Yogācāra) classifications is a cover term for a complex and heterogeneous set of phenomena that are epiphenomenal, having no independent

<sup>916</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 48<sub>13</sub>–49<sub>11</sub>: *lugs ’dir dbu ma thal ’gyur bas dpyad pa na rnam shes kyi tshogs thams cad glo bur dri ma’i bdag nyid can yin pas de nyid dri bral ye shes kyi ngo bor gnas ’gyur du mi rung ste | rung na ’bras bu rgyu’i rjes su ’gro bas ’khrul bcas su ’gyur ba’i phyir | sangs rgyas kyi sar rnam shes gnas gyur gyi ye shes kyang mi ’dod la | des na gzung ’dzin gnyis kyis stong pa’i sems bden grub pa dbu ma thams cad kyis mi bzhed kyang | tha snyad du rang rgyud pa kha cig | gnyis stong gi sems ’od gsal ba dang | ye shes byang ’phags dang rdzogs sangs kyi mnyam gzhas na yod par ’chad cing | thal ’gyur bas ni tha snyad du’ang der sems dang ye shes kyi rgyu ba gtan yod par mi bzhed la | des na rnam shes kyi tshogs drug gam brgyad la gzung ’dzin gyis stong pa’i sems lhag ma gzung ’dzin mngon gyur ba’i rnam rig bskyed mi nus kyi bag nyal | nyan rang dgra bcom lhag med kyi dbyings su zhugs pa’i rig rgyun mngon par mi gsal ba yul gyis kha ma bsgyur cing gnyis snang nub pa’i shes pa’am sems de ni rgyud bla mar bshad pa’i rgyu lam ’bras bu’i bde gshegs snying po dang | sngags su bshad pa’i gzhi lam ’bras gsum gyi gnyis med ye shes dang gtan mi gcig ste | gcig na mdo sngags kyi ’bras bu sangs rgyas kyang mi gcig ka med du ’ong zhing |... mdo sngags kyi sangs rgyas la mchog dman gyi khyad par ’byed pa’i phyir |*

existence apart from the nature of mind and reality. Unconditioned wisdom is what remains when the conditioned *ālayavijñāna* and its dualistic operations have ceased. The nondual wisdom revealed is therefore not the same as the residual nondual mind left behind when duality ceases if this latter is taken as a foundational construct to support a particular theory of mind. The point is that this wisdom needs to be personally experienced (*so sor rang rig gi ye shes*) to be attested; methods of rational justification such as deductive or inductive inference are insufficient for verifying its presence.

To be sure, the possibility of human beings attaining this *buddhajñāna* can scarcely be denied without rendering the entire edifice of Buddhist soteriology incoherent and pointless. Nondual primordial awareness is both the point of the Buddhist path and what makes it possible. Nor can the view be rejected that there remains a nondual mode of awareness—however elusive to deluded minds—when all that obscures and obstructs it is dispelled without begging the question of what distinguishes Buddhist goal-realization from the kind of voluntary stupefaction or blank-mindedness that was so sharply criticized by Mahāyānists. In this regard, the Karma pa underscores the soteriological significance of Buddhist ideas concerning mind’s luminous nature which, whether implicitly (in the sūtras) or explicitly (in the tantras) described, which were taught in order to draw attention to immanent buddhahood which may be realized through these exoteric or esoteric paths:

Now, among the middle turning [scriptures] etc., intending as [their] underlying intentional reference (*dgongs gzhi*)<sup>917</sup> the luminous mind (*sems ’od gsal*) which is explicated in Mantra [scriptures], there were statements that the very essence of the six or eight constellations of consciousness is luminosity with the purpose (*dgos pa*) of making [people] thereby understand buddhahood of the sūtras and tantras which is attained by means of the paths of sūtras and tantras. Hence the statement “mind is no mind; the nature of mind is luminous”<sup>918</sup> was explained in terms of that most expansive mind and wisdom which is *not* the mind consisting in the apprehending [subject] and apprehended [object]. Having this meaning in

<sup>917</sup> In Tibetan Buddhist hermeneutics, a statement, teaching or scripture that is deemed to be of provisional meaning (*neyārtha : drang don*), i.e., in need of further interpretation to arrive at a definitive sense (*nūtārtha : nges don*), must meet three criteria: [1] it has a fundamental or underlying (deep or hidden) intentional reference (*abhiprāya : dgongs pa/dgongs gzhi*), [2] it has a motive or necessity (*dgos pa : prayojana*), and [3] it contradicts reality if taken literally (*dnegos la gnod byed : mukhyārthabādha*). On this three-fold scheme as formulated in Tibet by Sa skya Paṇḍita, see Seyfort Ruegg 1985, 198.

<sup>918</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikaprajñāpāramitā* 5b.1–2. The corresponding passage from the Sanskrit is given in Schmithausen 1977, 41 as lines E.b.1–2 *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvārā ||* see n. 174.

mind, the noble Maitreya also stated<sup>919</sup>: “It is declared that there is no other mind apart from the mind of reality (*dharmatācitta*) which is naturally luminous.”<sup>920</sup>

In an exposition on tantric practice in his *Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje characterizes the nature of that mind which is thoroughly acquainted with the supremely incomprehensible<sup>921</sup> domain of the buddhas, but which is not the domain of sophists (*rtog ge ba*), as being devoid of any source (*rtsa ba med pa*), foundation (*gnas pa med pa*), ground (*gzhi med pa*), characteristics (*mtshan ma med pa*), and shapes and colours (*dbyibs dang kha dog med pa*), and also as transcending the sense faculties (*dbang po las 'das pa*).<sup>922</sup> Thus what is truly established as the unchanging and luminous features of ordinary mind cannot be equated with the ultimate tantric luminosity of mind (*sems kyi 'od gsal*) because the former are simply reified images of the mind.

One’s own mind has been described by the illustrious Dwags po Bka’ brgyud pas as ‘great primordial freedom without ground or source’ (*gzhi med rtsa bral*) which is free from all limits of discursive elaborations. Though established in that way, it is not possible that [what is] truly established as the unchanging permanence of mind and the luminosity of cognizing mind constitutes the luminosity of mind of the Mantra[yāna] which is the limit of reality (*bhūtakoti*) [i.e., ultimate truth] because these are not free from mental imagery involving elaborations.<sup>923</sup>

The idea that the nature of mind is without ground or source (*gzhi med rtsa bral*) has been a recurrent theme in Tibet doctrinal history and was already well attested in the earliest Rdzogs chen traditions.<sup>924</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje resurrects this idea in his *Dgongs gcig* commentaries, observing that in Buddhist teachings on the lack of intrinsic essence of all

<sup>919</sup> MSA XIII.19 (Sylvain Lévi ed., 88): *na dharmatā cittam r̥te 'anya cetsaḥ prabhākharatvaṃ prakṛtau vidhīyate* ||

<sup>920</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 49<sub>11-19</sub>: *des na 'khor lo bar pa sogs las dgongs gzhi sngags nas bshad pa'i sems 'od gsal la dgongs nas | dgos pa mdo lugs kyi lam gyis mdo lugs kyi sangs rgyas thob par shes pa'i ched du rnam shes kyi tshogs brgyad dam | drug gi rang ngo 'od gsal bar gsungs pa yod de | “sems ni sems ma mchis pa ste sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba'o” zhes gzung 'dzin gyi sems ma mchis pa'i sems dang ye shes ches rab 'byams su bshad cing | don de la dgongs nas rje btsun byams pas kyang | chos nyid sems las gzhan pa'i sems gzhan ni || 'od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do* ||

<sup>921</sup> The expression *mchog tu bzung bar dka 'bar* literally means “supremely difficult to grasp”.

<sup>922</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 22, 260<sub>4-5</sub>.

<sup>923</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, 260<sub>5</sub>–261<sub>1</sub>: *dpal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud pa dag gi rang sems gzhi med rtsa bral spros pa'i mtha' thams cad dang bral ba'i ye grol chen po zhes bshad pa de nyid du grub la | sems 'gyur med kyi rtag pa dang rnam rig pa'i sems 'od gsal bden grub la | sngags kyi sems kyi 'od gsal yang dag mthar mi rung | de dag gis ni spros pa'i mtshan ma las ma grol ba nyid kyi phyir ro |*

<sup>924</sup> See Higgins 2013, 172 f.

phenomena, “inasmuch as the nature of all phenomena is without foundation, it was not demonstrable in terms of any linguistic imputation of a ‘foundation’.”<sup>925</sup> Yet, emptiness, the lack of intrinsic essence, had been described by the buddha as a foundationless foundation (*gnas med gnas yin*) since it is of the nature of nonreification or nonsuperimposition. Already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bla ma Zhang brtson ’grus grags pa (1122–1193) had provocatively declared that characterizing the absolute without ground and devoid of a source (*gzhi med rtsa bral*) is deeply mistaken given that “the basis of designation, the designation and the terms themselves” are without ground or source. The absolute is neither a ground nor groundless, neither a source nor sourceless. Mi bskyod rdo rje comments that if one is to fully comprehend the comprehensive Madhyamaka mode of emptiness which is not the dialectical emptiness of one thing of another, it is necessary to realize that the entire range of phenomenal entities are without any ground or source (*gzhi med rtsa bral*). However, he proceeds to quote the relevant passage of Bla ma Zhang which concludes by stressing the absurdity of declaring the absolute to be groundless:

Even concerning the absolute imputed by the scholars,  
The basis of designation, the designation and the terms themselves  
Are [said to be] without ground and devoid of source.  
[But] being neither ground nor groundless,  
Those who call it ‘groundless’ are mistaken.  
[And] being neither a source nor devoid of source,  
There being no deeper supporting ground,  
Those who label it as ‘devoid of source’ are deeply mistaken!<sup>926</sup>

In sum, the long history of paradoxical-sounding Buddhist formulations such as “groundless ground”<sup>927</sup> may be viewed as attempts to articulate an invariant continuum of being and awareness available to first-hand experience while avoiding the polar extremes of existence and nonexistence. From the Karma pa’s Middle Way perspective, it is a fallacy, in this instance as in so many others, to force upon the mind a choice between *existence* and

<sup>925</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ia, MKsb vol 4., 496<sub>4-5</sub>: *chos rnam kyī rang bzhin ni gnas pa med pa la gnas pa’i sgras sgro btags nas bstan ma yin te* | ... The author quotes an unidentified sūtra which states “ these phenomena, these things which are not grounded, do not have a foundation. Although the foundationless is described in terms of a foundation, an intrinsic essence is not discovered.” *chos ’di dag ni mi gnas pa’i ’di dag la ni gnas yod min || gnas med gnas pa’i sgras brjod kyang || rang gis ngo bo’o rnyed ma yin ||*

<sup>926</sup> As quoted in *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* Ia, ‘Bri gung bka’ bgyud chos mdzod chen mo vol. 77, 445<sub>3-5</sub>: *mkhas pa’i mthar thug sus btags kyang || gdags gzhi dang ni ’dogs byed dang || ming nyid gzhi med rtsa bral te || gzhi dang gzhi med mi ’dug par || gzhi med ces su btags pas ’khrul || rtsa ba med cing rtsa bral med || gtad sa gting nas mi ’dug par || rtsa bral zhes btags shin tu ’khrul ||* This passage belongs to a section that is missing from MKsb.

<sup>927</sup> See Braver 2012, 177.

*nonexistence*, as though such exclusive options exhausted the range of possibilities. To take either side is to impute either more or less to phenomena than experience can deliver. We might add that it is precisely because human experience is as heterogeneous and richly layered as it is that it remains radically underdetermined by what we make of it, lending itself to multiple descriptions without being definitively captured by any of them.

## ON WHETHER OR NOT A BUDDHA HAS WISDOM

The problem of the remainder dovetails with the long-standing Mahāyāna controversy over whether a buddha can be said to possess wisdom (*jñāna*) or any knowledge at all. A strong no remainder thesis would indeed seem to lead inescapably to the conclusion that nothing at all—certainly no cognition, no appearances, and no intentional acts—would exist for a buddha who has fully realized emptiness. This can be shown by the following chain of propositions: if [1] nothing at all remains upon realizing buddhahood and [2] the minds of buddhas have thus stopped functioning completely, then [3] buddhas have no knowledge at all, [4] perceive no appearances at all, and thus [5] do not *really* act for the welfare of others, their apparent altruistic deeds being merely a mindless mechanical functioning driven by the power of former aspirations (*prañidhāna*), like a potter’s wheel that continues spinning long after the potter had turned it.<sup>928</sup> This cluster of propositions became the focus of increasing interest and debate in Indian Mahāyāna circles from the 8<sup>th</sup> century up until the destruction of institutionalized Buddhism in India.<sup>929</sup> It had already begun to attract the attention of Tibetan scholars from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>930</sup> onward and has since been vigorously defended or criticized by representatives of various Tibetan schools down to the present day.

One persistent objection to the theory that all thinking, all appearances and all intentional activity stop on the level of buddhahood was that it seemed completely at odds with traditional accounts of the post-enlightenment historical Buddha as a socially-engaged teacher who used language, ideas and deeds in various skillful ways to guide beings to enlightenment. One of Candrakīrti’s interpreters, Jayānanda, evidently found it difficult to defend the former’s view that the Buddha has no cognition at all against the criticism that this

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<sup>928</sup> Dunne 1996, 549. The author quotes the following passage from Candrakīrti’s MA 12.6–7: “The strong potter’s wheel turns very quickly because he has long striven at it. Even though the potter no longer exerts himself, the wheel turns, and we see that it is a cause for ewers and such. Likewise, while (a buddha) makes no conceptual effort, s/he abides in the body whose essence is Dharma, and that (Dharmakāya’s) activity is impelled by beings’ distinctive virtue and the special prayers (that buddha made when s/he was a bodhisattva) —how inconceivable!”

<sup>929</sup> Almogi 2009, 13.

<sup>930</sup> The issue is already discussed by the famous Tibetan translator Ye shes sde who lived from the second half of 8<sup>th</sup> to early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. For an account of various positions on the controversy as advocated by Indian and Tibetan scholars, see Almogi 2009.



renders standard accounts of the Buddha's three *kāyas* and his activities for the sake of sentient beings untenable. Kevin Vose has shown the extent to which Jayānanda, despite his Candrakīrtian Madhyamaka pedigree, ends up resorting to the Yogācāra model of fundamental transformation (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*, °-*parivṛtti*) of the eight ordinary modes of consciousness into the five wisdoms of buddhahood in order to account for the buddha's extraordinary realization and capacities.<sup>931</sup> This transformation model was, of course, predicated on a distinction between consciousness (*viññāna*) and wisdom (*jñāna*), a distinction which is not unknown in Candrakīrti's works<sup>932</sup> but which is nonetheless difficult to reconcile with his view that a buddha has no cognition at all. Jayānanda was among a long list of Madhyamaka interpreters who obviously found the type of Buddha portrayed by Candrakīrti disquieting<sup>933</sup>—one is hard pressed to imagine a less appealing ideal for would-be buddhas on the path—and sought alternative paradigms.

Turning his critical attention to this set of issues, the Eighth Karma pa stresses the need to reconsider the problem from a Middle Way perspective in order to avoid being shoe-horned into either of two mutually exclusive extremes. A stance of agnosticism is discernible in his most extensive treatments of the issues which are found in his MA commentary as well as the first and seventh chapters of his *Dgongs gcig* commentary. Recognizing the complexity of this tangle of issues, the author in those works seeks to uncover the underlying conceptual problems which seem to bedevil any simple either/or solution. Specifically, he shows that a definitive answer would require prior determination of two basic criteria: [1] what specific kind(s) of wisdom (*jñāna* : *ye shes*, *mkhyen pa*, *shes pa*) a buddha may be said to either have or not have, and [2] what it means to say that wisdom exists or doesn't exist (and what ceases) upon realizing buddhahood. He concludes that both criteria resist unequivocal determination. [1] We previously had occasion to examine some of the Karma pa's reservations concerning semantic ambiguities of the Sanskrit *jñāna* in light of his and his disciple Gtsug lag phreng ba's arguments that a buddha may be said to have certain kinds of *jñāna* but not others.<sup>934</sup>

[2] Regarding the second issue of existence and nonexistence of knowledge on the level of buddhahood, the author states in his MA commentary that the structure of the debate

<sup>931</sup> Vose 2009, 115–17. As Vose explains, “[w]hile Candrakīrti was consigned to arguing (to largely deaf ears) against a vibrant Yogācāra movement, Jayānanda could more freely adopt features from Yogācāra into a Prāsaṅgika context.” (117)

<sup>932</sup> As noted above 284, n. 815, this passage has been discussed in MacDonald 2009, 163–65. The author there draws attention (164) to another passage (YŚV on YŚ 4cd) where Candrakīrti attributes a transcendent mode of wisdom to buddhas: “buddhas abide in objectless gnosis, far beyond the spiritually immature.” *de'i phyir de dag skye bo byis pa rnam las shin tu 'das pa dmigs pa med pa'i ye shes la gnas pas de dag nyid che ba'i phyir bdag nyid chen po zhes bya ste* |

<sup>933</sup> See Dunne 1996, 548.

<sup>934</sup> See above, 286–87.

was built upon an ill-considered use of categories of ‘existence’ and ‘nonexistence’ by those who did not recall that Buddhist canonical literature, and the exegesis of Nāgārjuna in particular, showed these categories to be discursive elaborations that are inapplicable to knowable objects in general, and also unobservable.<sup>935</sup> To put it concisely, recourse to either postulate betrays a lack of comprehension of the key Madhyamaka principle that all knowable objects are not independently existent (or nonexistent for that matter) but rather dependently arisen (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and therefore only intelligible in light of their reciprocal determinations. After demonstrating that the obscurations to be relinquished are beyond discursive elaborations of existence and nonexistence—if they existed, freedom would be impossible and if they didn’t exist, we would already be free—he next demonstrates how the same holds for a buddha’s wisdom:

If wisdom was inherently existent as an intrinsic essence, then sentient beings and *saṃsāra* would not be possible, even conventionally. Whereas if wisdom did not exist for a buddha even conventionally, then all [a buddha’s] worldly and trans-worldly qualities would also not exist. If [wisdom] existed until the end of the continuum [of levels] but did not exist afterward, it would [entail] extremes of both eternalism *a parte ante* and *a parte post*<sup>936</sup>. It is also inadmissible that the two obscurations and the impure aggregates, elements and cognitive domains and the rest existed in sentient beings after which the limitless qualities of wisdom and transformation of basis are nonexistent in buddhas. Were wisdom nonexistent, the boundless qualities of the higher existences and the *summum bonum* of deliverance (*nges par legs pa*) would not exist.<sup>937</sup>

<sup>935</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 729<sub>1-4</sub>: “In general, that all knowable objects have always been free from all discursive elaborations such as existence and nonexistence is not understood because [1] there is a debate over whether *buddhajñāna* alone either exists or does not exist, and [2] they do not recall that [A] both existence and nonexistence have been repudiated in all the Buddhist canonical literature and all the treatises of father Nāgārjuna and his heirs, nor that [B] the Tathāgata declared that this existence and nonexistence is not seen in any way at all.” *spyir shes bya thams cad gdod ma nas yod med sogs spros pa thams cad dang bral ba yin pa la de ltar ma shes par sangs rgyas kyi ye shes ‘ba’ zhiḡ la yod med du rtsod pa’i phyir dang | yod med gnyis ka gsung rab thams cad dang klu sgrub yab sras kyi bstan bcos thams cad nas bkag pa dang | yod med de bzhin gshegs pas kyang rnam pa thams cad du ma gzigs par gsungs pa ma dran pa’i phyir...*

<sup>936</sup> These are the extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

<sup>937</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa’i shing rta*, 729<sub>1-19</sub>: *ye shes rang gi ngo bor gyur pa rang bzhin gyis yod na sems can dang ‘khor ba tha snyad du’ang mi ‘thad pa dang | sangs rgyas la ye shes tha snyad du’ang med na ‘jig rten dang ‘jig rten las ‘das pa’i yon tan thams cad med par ‘gyur ba’i phyir rgyun mtha’i bar yod la | de nas med na rtag chad gnyis ka’i mthar ‘gyur zhiḡ sems can la sgrib gnyis dang ma dag pa’i phung khams skye mched sogs yod nas | sangs rgyas la ye shes dang gnas gyur gyi yon tan mtha’ dag med pa’ang mi ‘thad pa’i phyir dang | ye shes med na mngon par mtho ba dang nges par legs pa’i yon tan mtha’ dag med par ‘gyur te |...* We have not translated the two instances of *phyir* (“because”) which serve to connect this passage with the larger argument negating the validity of postulates of existence and nonexistent with regard to all knowable objects.

Earlier in the commentary, the Karma pa had advanced the revisionist argument that Candakīrti's denial that a buddha has a mind or knowledge was made specifically with reference to the deluded knowledge of the conventional and did not entail a denial of *all* awareness across the board. To claim *buddhajñāna* exists in the way real entities exist is an illegitimate superimposition (*sgro 'dogs*), but to say it does not exist at all is an unwarranted deprecation (*skur 'debs*). Strictly speaking, *buddhajñāna* can neither be said to be *something* nor *nothing* without falling prey to conceptual confusion:

Since all cognitions that apprehend conventional, false objects are deceived, all subjects, i.e., minds using conventional cognitions, are in error. Hence it is said that, upon investigation, there is no establishment whatsoever on the level of buddhahood of a knowledge (*mkhyen pa*) that perceives the conventional. While this is maintained in all of the Mahāyāna teachings, other commentators on Mahāyāna were afraid that such a statement that there is no omniscience regarding the conventional, if conveyed literally, would be something terrifying. Hence, they were not able to convey these teachings in a literal manner. By contrast, Candrakīrti with a fearless voice declared that the Buddha has no wisdom or mind that takes conventional, deluded phenomena as its object, for the Buddha has permanently relinquished the two obscurations along with their latent tendencies. This does not, however, entail any deprecation to the effect that the omniscient one does not possess omniscient wisdom either, because, upon investigation, both the notion that the Buddha knows or does not know everything are discursive elaborations (*spros pa*). Hence, if it is said that “the Buddha possesses an omniscient mind” this also turns out to be a deprecation because one thereby proclaims that omniscience exists as a discursive construct (*spros chos*).<sup>938</sup>

From the thesis that a buddha lacks any knowledge or intentions follows the conclusion that a buddha's activities must therefore be regarded as an automatic and mindless functioning driven solely by former aspirations. Mi bskyod rdo rje reconsiders this idea from the standpoint of practical reasoning in a section of his *A Trove Containing Myriad Treasures of*

<sup>938</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 718<sub>16</sub>–719 : *yul kun rdzob brdzun pa 'dzin pa'i shes pa thams cad bslu bas yul can kun rdzob shes pa'i blo de thams cad 'khrul pa nyid kyis sangs rgyas kyi sar kun rdzob gzigs pa'i mkhyen pa ni dpyad na 'gar yang mi 'grub bo zhes theg pa chen po'i bka' mtha' dag tu zhugs kyang | theg pa chen po'i dgongs 'grel mkhan gzhan dag | de ltar sgra ji bzhin du smras na tha snyad du thams cad mkyhen pa med do zhes ya nga ba la 'dzems nas sgra ji bzhin du smra ma nus pa las | slob dpon zla ba grags pas 'jigs pa med pa'i dbyangs kyis sangs rgyas la kun rdzob 'khrul pa'i chos yul du byed pa'i ye shes dang blo med de | sgrib gnyis bag chags dang bcas pa gtan spangs zin pa'i phyir | de ltar na thams cad mkhyen pa la thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyang med do zhes skur 'debs su'ang mi 'gro ste | dpyad pa na sang rgyas la thams cad mkhyen pa dang mi mkhyen pa gnyis ka'ang spros pa yin pas sangs rgyas la thams cad mkhyen pa'i blo yod ces smras na des kyang skur 'debs su 'gro ste | thams cad mkhyen pa la spros chos yod par smras pa'i phyir ro zhes 'chad pa yin la |*

*Profound Mahāmudrā* (edited and translated in Volume II, 122–142) which is worth quoting here at length.

Here, concerning the resultant wisdom that is the nonerroneous realization of emptiness by a subtle intelligence, there have been many theories in India and Tibet about whether or not a buddha has wisdom. As for the statement that “wisdom does not exist on the level of buddhahood,” some great Ācāryas in India explained that there is no intrinsic difference in the wisdom specific to the equipoise meditations of those on the tenth spiritual level. Nevertheless, they explained that there *are* [differences] in the continuity of equipoise meditation, whether or not it is profound, or whether it is vast or narrow in scope. On that basis, [they maintained that] once [wisdom] definitively removes the obscurations of wayfarer’s wisdom in the post-meditation, [the obscurations and wisdom both] assume the character of nonorigination. And as long as there is wisdom generated in the post-meditation and the wayfarer’s wisdom which relinquishes objects to relinquish, [wisdom] is claimed to exist like a flame that lasts only as long as there is a wick and oil.

When they further explain that buddha[hood] (*bde bar gshegs pa* : \**sugata*) is a denomination of “emptiness,” they say that wisdom and the [buddha] powers are [only] of provisional meaning. But in clinging [to the view] that these depend solely on great compassion and former aspirations, they have lost the proficiency [needed] to understand<sup>939</sup> the definitive meaning. For in that case, it would be impossible that emptiness is inseparable from skillful means and the capacities enabling skillful means [as traditionally maintained], and also that [these two] are therefore interdependent in nature.<sup>940</sup> On the other hand, all the extraordinary special qualities of the Tathāgatas according to the Unsurpassed Mantra[yāna], [ranging] from one [buddha] family up to hundreds of [buddha] families, would have to be explained as being of provisional meaning.<sup>941</sup>...

The assertion by some people that [altruistic wisdom and deeds are] due solely to the power of compassion and [former] aspirations is not admissible at all. If even those [bodhisattvas] on the tenth level have ten powers, then buddhas would have attained limitless powers. So the [idea that such altruism] has to depend solely on

<sup>939</sup> Literally, “the capacity of intelligence (*blo gros kyi rtsal*) concerning definitive meaning has been lost”.

<sup>940</sup> In other words, the view of emptiness as being of definitive meaning but wisdom and powers as being of merely provisional meaning precludes a central viewpoint of Mahāyāna and Mantrayāna—the inseparability of insight-emptiness (*prajñā/sūnyatā*) and skillful means-compassion (*upāya/kāruṇa*).

<sup>941</sup> See Volume II, translation: 131–32, critical edition: 141.

former aspirations means that [a buddha's] skillful means would be of diminished scope [compared to a bodhisattva's].<sup>942</sup>

Revisiting the widely influential Indian Madhyamaka view that a buddha's activities are mindless and dispassionate, the Karma pa demonstrates the extent to which this runs counter to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna accounts of buddhas displaying unbounded altruistic capacities in responding to the limitless needs and aspirations of sentient beings. Granted, there is no question for him that dualistic mind and mental factors (*cittacaitta*) stop functioning upon attaining buddhahood (though he is careful here to clarify that these never had 'existed' in the first place). But if *all* awareness, even the *buddhajñāna*, stops with goal-realization, it would absurdly follow that all the altruistic capacities for thinking and acting which, on traditional accounts, are said to steadily increase during the bodhisattva's progression through the ten spiritual levels would, instead of unfolding completely in buddhahood, come to an abrupt end. On this view, the goal of buddhahood would signify not only a total loss of agency but also of autonomy since a buddha's activities would be entirely dependent on past events. Further, large swaths of accepted Buddhist terminology and ideas concerning goal-realization, including *buddhajñāna* itself, would be rendered nonsensical since the truth-conditions sufficient or necessary for their application would be thereby precluded.

#### MAHĀMUDRĀ AS MENTAL NONENGAGEMENT (*AMANASIKĀRA*)

The Eighth Karma pa's reconsiderations of the problem of the remainder and the parallel controversy over whether or not a buddha has knowledge throw a valuable back-light on post-classical debates over the role and relative efficacy of conceptual and nonconceptual modes of awareness and meditation. In an intriguing way, these formulations reawakened old questions of what happens when an investigation to ascertain the ultimate is pushed to the point of eliminating its own conceptual resources. It was noted in the introduction that post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes were keenly aware that Madhyamaka methods of radical negation must ultimately prove self-undermining: because conceptual reasoning is by nature conditioned and adventitious, it must eventually consume itself, as suggested by the analogy from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* that Kamalaśīla had famously cited: "The characteristic of discerning reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣa*) is here [in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (NPDh)] considered to be mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*). That [discernment] has the nature of being conceptual, but it is burned away by the fire of genuine wisdom arising from it, just as a fire kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood burns these very pieces."<sup>943</sup> From this standpoint,

<sup>942</sup> See Volume II, translation: 133, critical edition: 143.

<sup>943</sup> *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīkā* (NPDhT), Peking Kanjur no. 5501, 157b<sub>5-6</sub>: yang dag par so sor rtog pa'i mtshan ma ni 'dir yid la mi byed par dgongs so || de ni rnam par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin mod kyi | 'on kyang de

the Buddhist path is ultimately self-immolating insofar as the conceptual constructs which are used to realize nondual nonconceptual wisdom must deplete or devour themselves at the time of its realization. But what is the ontological status of this fire of wisdom? Does wisdom also incinerate itself? Many Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars appear to have thought so, as we can gather from the Karma pa's above-quoted allusion to those who believed that wisdom ceases with the cessation of the objects to be relinquished, its existence being like a flame that persists only so long as there is a wick and oil to fuel it. Moreover, while it was generally acknowledged in Buddhism that ultimate truth is beyond the scope of the intellect<sup>944</sup>, we have reason to question the status of this ultimate that eludes intellectual understanding. Does there remain, *necessarily* even, a knowing capacity of some kind, even if it consists in the fact of negation itself. Gajin Nagao posed the problem this way: "Perhaps one should understand this [remainder] as an ultimate reality that is never denied, not even at the extremity of radical negation; it is, for instance, similar to the situation in which one cannot negate the fact that one is negating. It is affirmation found in the midst of negation, and it is true existence because it is found in negation."<sup>945</sup>

Here it is worth noting that at the heart of long-standing Buddhist debates over the roles and relative efficacy of conceptual and nonconceptual modes of cognition there existed a tension between two traditionally sanctioned, but notably different, approaches to soteriological knowledge. Certain Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud scholars distinguished these along doxographic lines, using various terms to differentiate between: [1] an inferential-representational mode of knowledge predominant in the so-called Cause-oriented Vehicle of Characteristics (*rgyu'i mtshan nyid kyi theg pa*)<sup>946</sup> or Vehicle of Perfections (*pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pa*) which advocates a linear progression toward a pre-established goal by means of causes and conditions, and [2] an experiential-presentational mode predominant in the so-called Goal-sustained Secret Mantra Vehicle (*'bras bu gsang sngags kyi theg pa*) or Adaman-tine Vehicle (*rdo rje theg pa*) which emphasizes an ever-present goal identified as the nature of mind, nondual wisdom, buddha nature. The tension is by now a familiar one, as are the types of undesirable consequences that are deemed to follow from privileging either mode of

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*nyid las byung ba yang dag pa'i ye shes kyi mes de bsregs par 'gyur te | shing gnyis drud las byung ba'i mes shing de gnyis sreg par byed pa bzhin no ||*

<sup>944</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (BCA) 9.2b: "Reality (*tattva*) is not the domain of the intellect. The intellect is said to be concealing/conventional." *buddher agocaras tattvam samvṛtir ucyate ||*

<sup>945</sup> Nagao 1991, 54.

<sup>946</sup> There were tantric precedents for this distinction such as the *He ru ka'i gal po*, Tb vol. 33, 225<sub>7-8</sub>: *mtshan nyid rgyu yi theg pa yis || sems nyid sangs rgyas rgyu ru shes || 'bras bu sngags kyi theg pa yis || sems nyid sangs rgyas nyid du bsgom ||*. Another source is the *Susiddhikaramahātantra* which is quoted by Klong chen rab 'pa (*Grub mtha' mdzod*, 1012<sub>5-6</sub>): *rgyu dang 'bras bu'i dbye ba yis || pha rol phyin pa'i theg pa dang || rdo rje theg pa bla na med ||* The work possibly refers to a Kṛīyayoga tantra entitled *Susiddhikaramahātantrasādhana-opāyikapāṭala*, D no. 807, 168–222. On the Susiddhi class of tantras, see Hunter 2004.

cognition to the exclusion of the other. Just as the metaphysician's affirmation of a transcendent reality beyond the scope of the intellect seemed to lead down the rabbit hole of a quasi-Brahmanical absolutism, the sophist's reactionary stance that nothing at all survives the realization of emptiness seemed to lead down the cul-de-sac of a sterile intellectualism, allowing no room for transsubjective modes of thought and activity. Post-classical thinkers such as Mi bskyod rdo rje sought to accommodate crucial elements of both perspectives within their soteriological outlook while avoiding their more extreme variants.

Some of the Karma pa's most illuminating insights concerning these issues of soteriological knowledge were advanced in response to Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's (1182–1251) criticisms of certain contemporary Dwags po Bka' brgyud contemplation trends he advanced in his *Sdom gsum rab dbye, Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* and *Skye bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge*.<sup>947</sup> In these works, Sa paṇ had identified *amanasikāra* as a doctrine of the Chinese Heshang Moheyan (late 8<sup>th</sup> c.), one purportedly advocating the suppression of all thoughts and activities, in order to attack, by way of analogy, a certain non-tantric “present-day Mahāmudrā” (*da lta'i phyag rgya chen po*) which he describes as being for the most part (*phal cher*) a Chinese Rdzogs chen tradition (*rgya nag lugs kyi rdzogs chen*). Sa paṇ's critique was primarily directed at certain nongradual Mahāmudrā teachings associated with Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen emphasizing the direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to the nature of mind. These teachings the Sa skya scholar had criticized on the grounds that [1] they were being taught independently of the Tantric system of four *mudrās* elaborated by Nāropa and transmitted in Tibet by his disciple Mar pa, that [2] they represented newly introduced doctrinal innovations of questionable (i.e., non-Indian) provenance and that [3] they advocated an erroneous nonconceptual, nongradual approach to goal-realization.<sup>948</sup>

Here it is important to note that Sa skya Paṇḍita had censured his Bka' brgyud pa contemporaries for allegedly espousing a certain sūtric *amanasikāra* teaching associated with the Chinese Heshang (8<sup>th</sup> c.), and *not* the considerably later Siddha *amanasikāra* tradition of Saraha and Maitrīpa (circa 11<sup>th</sup> c.) with which the former was often confused by later Sa skya and Dge lugs critics. This is understandable when one considers that the Siddha Virūpa, who the Sa skyas regarded as their spiritual progenitor, extols this latter *amanasikāra* in his spiritual songs. Let us consider, for example, Virūpa's *Dohākoṣa* where he declares that freedom from mental engagement, which he equates with the realization of *mahāmudrā*, allows one to directly realize the nature of things (*chos nyid*) because the cognition and its objects have

<sup>947</sup> The relevant sections are translated in Jackson 1994, 159 ff.

<sup>948</sup> See Jackson 1994, 72 f. Sa skya Paṇḍita's source appears to have been the *sBa bzhed* since he refers to a *dPa' bzhed*, *dBa' bzhed*, or *'Ba' bzhed* in his discussions of Heshang's doctrines.

thereby been purified away.<sup>949</sup> He later identifies “focusing the mind on the abiding nature” (*gnas lugs yid la byed*) as a cause of deviation (*gol ba’i rgyu*).<sup>950</sup> In other words, Virūpa’s understanding of *amanasikāra* is firmly in line with the antinomian tenor of the Siddha movement in general and Maitrīpa’s interpretation of *amanasikāra* in particular.

What is perhaps most problematic for Sa paṇ’s critique is the fact that the *dohās* ascribed to Virūpa, Saraha, Tilopa and other Buddhist siddhas not only allowed for the *possibility* of a Mahāmudrā path of direct perception that could be pursued independently of the tantric system of four *mudras*, but positively endorsed this nongradual path as the best available option for advanced candidates. In fact, as Mathes has recently shown in an examination of scriptural sources of Sa paṇ’s arguments against nongradual Mahāmudrā systems, Sa paṇ had based his argument on a mistaken reading of a key passage in the *Caturmudrānvaya* (CMA) which actually lends support, rather than opposition, to the less conceptually and ritually mediated approach to *mahāmudrā* endorsed by Saraha, Maitrīpa and their successors.<sup>951</sup> This raises pertinent questions about the extent to which it was legitimate to call such an approach a Tibetan innovation (*rang bzo*), let alone to associate it with a Sino-Tibetan sūtric Chan contemplative teaching with which it seems to have had no discernable historical or doxographical connection.

Here, it is worth reiterating the point that the Mahāmudrā teachings of the Indian siddhas and their Indian and Tibetan successors were emphatically nongradual, advocating as they did direct, nonconceptual, and spontaneous modes of meditation. Furthermore, these teachings were at times taught independently of the tantric system of four *mudrās*. In short, whatever may have been the non-Indian influences on Sgam po pa’s varied discourses on Mahāmudrā (and these seem to have been negligible), it is within the teachings of the Indian siddhas and their Tibetan successors (such as Mar pa and Mi la ras pa) that we find the major source of inspiration for the nongradual Mahāmudrā teachings of Sgam po pa and his followers. This point has been underscored in contemporary works<sup>952</sup> and will be further demonstrated and documented in these concluding pages of the present chapter as we attempt to sketch in broad strokes the Eighth Karma pa’s innovative views on mental nonengagement.

<sup>949</sup> *Dohākoṣa* (DK), D 2280, 268<sub>6-7</sub>: “When one is free from any mental engagements, the immaculate [reality] is undoubtedly [realized]. Since knowledge and its object are purified away, the nature of things directly manifests.” *gang yang yid bral na dri med the tshom med || shes dang shes bya dag pas chos nyid mgnon sum ’char ||*

<sup>950</sup> DK, D 2280, 69<sub>6</sub>: “If one mentally focuses on the abiding condition, and clings to the experience [of it], and becomes habituated to and meditates upon this reality, [these are] causes of deviation.” *gnas lugs yid la byed cing nyams la zhen pa dang || de nyid don la goms shing bsgoms na gol ba’i rgyu ||*

<sup>951</sup> See Mathes 2013. For further details on Padma dkar po’s criticism of Sa paṇ’s interpretation of the relevant *Caturmudrānvaya* (CMA) passage, see below, 364–65.

<sup>952</sup> See Mathes 2008, 2013; Higgins 2006.



More detailed attention is devoted to the varied Indian Buddhist contexts of *amanasikāra* in the final chapter on Padma dkar po, a scholar for whom *amanasikāra* formed an indispensable cornerstone of his attempts to clarify and legitimize the historical and doctrinal foundations of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā traditions.

Among the Eighth Karma pa's many and varied treatments of *amanasikāra* are two short texts composed with the aim to correct certain widespread misconceptions about the Dwags po Bka' brgyud *amanasikāra* tradition and to clarify how it differed from the system of abandoning thoughts and activities that had been attributed to Heshang.<sup>953</sup> In one of these, the *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra*, it is argued that "here in this [Bka' brgyud tradition] mental nonengagement has the sense of "immediacy"; hence, to not conceptualize the flow of lucid awareness, to not put into words [thought] fluctuations and [their] latent impressions." He adds that "by depending [only] on Madhyamaka reasoning, apart from [getting] merely a general idea (*don spyi*) of it, the suchness which is directly perceived, being free from obscuration, is unable to manifest."<sup>954</sup> Since this *amanasikāra* refers to the immediacy of direct perception which undercuts the functioning of dualistic thought forms and their residual impressions, it is entirely different from the type of auto-stupification which had become associated with Heshang's *amanasikāra* teaching. This latter is at best a temporary suspension of thought activity which leaves open the possibility that reifying activities and their residual impressions may reassert themselves later.

It is in the Karma pa's voluminous commentaries on the MA, *Dgongs gcig* and *Sku gsum ngo sprod* that we find his most extensive and penetrating treatments of *amanasikāra* both as a general Buddhist teaching and a specific Indo-Tibetan Mahāmudrā system of thought and meditation. In general, he deemed *amanasikāra* teachings to be of definitive meaning and to constitute a shared doctrinal cornerstone of Mahāyāna tantric and non-tantric traditions alike. As he states in his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, "not only was this method of mindfulness (*dran pa*) and mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*) which is without mindfulness (*dran pa med*) and mental engagement (*yid la byar med*)<sup>955</sup> the definitive meaning of the sūtras,

<sup>953</sup> These works include *Hwa shang dang 'dres pa'i don mdzub tshugs su bstan pa* in MKsb vol. 15, 1083–93, *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra*, MKsb vol. 15, 1095–99.

<sup>954</sup> *Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra*, MKsb vol. 15, 1096<sub>1-2</sub>: *de la 'dir yid la mi byed pa'i don | de ma thag pas dus rgyun du shes pa gsal la mi rtog pa g.yo bar byed cing bag chags brjod<sup>a</sup> du mi 'jug par byed pas so | dbu ma'i gtan tshigs la brten nas don spyi tsam ma gtogs mngon sum gyi sgrib bral du de bzhin nyid 'char ma thub pa ni |*  
<sup>a</sup>MKsb *brjed*; corrected as per *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad sogs* ed.

<sup>955</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje cites as examples the following: "According to the *Sāgaramatipariṣcchā* (D 152), '[The Buddha] taught the application of mindfulness which is without mindfulness and without mental engagement.' This application of mindfulness and nonmindfulness is not contradictory because according to the *Buddhasaṃgīti* (D 228): "Mañjuśrī: 'How does one persist in the application of mindfulness?' [Reply:] 'Without mindfulness and without mental engagement [regarding] all phenomena.'" *blo gros rgya mtshos zhus pa'i mdo las | dran med yid la byed med pa'i || dran pa nye bar gzhas pa ston || zhes dran med dang dran pa nyer bzhas mi 'gal ba ste*

it is also the unsurpassed culminating view and meditation of the completion state of Mantra[yāna].”<sup>956</sup> In his *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI, however, he explains that this Bka’ brgyud system of *amanasikāra* “is not identified with the *mahāmudrā* of the Completion Stage of Unsurpassed Mantra[yāna]. Regarding this [direct] method of view and meditation, the methods of spiritual praxis which accord with sūtras and tantras are [nonetheless] something unrivalled because those eloquent instructions by the Great Master Maitrīpa which emphasized mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed*), nonorigination (*skye med*), and transcending the intellect (*blo ’das*) are present [in his] so-called ‘Amanasī[kāra] doctrinal cycle’.”<sup>957</sup>

Pertinent historical details concerning the Tibetan assimilation and transmission of Indian *amanasikāra* traditions and their complex relationships with tantric and non-tantric Mahāyāna currents are outlined in the author’s MA commentary<sup>958</sup>:

Here in Tibet, there were three different ways of fulfilling the intention of the great Ācārya Maitrīpa’s Madhyamaka system of Mental Nonengagement: [1] a practice emphasizing the Mantra-Madhyamaka that is profound and clear, [2] a practice emphasizing the Sūtra-Madhyamaka that is profound, and [3] a practice emphasizing Alīkākāra-Cittamātra-Madhyamaka. The last of these three explains as the sense of the *dohās* the self-aware self-luminous cognition empty of subject and object which it establishes as ultimate (*don dam du grub pa*). It was widely represented in India and Tibet by Vajrapāṇi (b. 1012) [from India], Bal po A su [aka. Skye med bde chen from Nepal] and Kor Ni ru pa [Ni ru pa ta] (b. 1062) from India and so forth.

As for the explanation of the Madhyamaka in this tradition, many thinkers (*dpyod ldan*) such as the Gro lung pa, a proponent of reasoning, were not pleased, and said that all sorts of systems the likes of *amanasikāra* were not in accord with the Madhyamaka and should be suppressed. Relying merely on these words, Sa skya Paṇ chen and all sorts of Bka’ gdams pas developed a hostile attitude toward the whole Amanasikāra cycle of Rje btsun Maitrīpa which is very pure. Subsequently, there appeared people with a disposition to denigrate the *amanasikāra* [teaching] of the Great Brahmin [Saraha] which is the meaning of his *Dohākoṣagīti*, as well as the Master Maitrīpa and the exalted Saraha the elder and younger. The teaching

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*’phags pa sangs rgyas bgro bar | ’jam dpal | dran pa nye bar bzhag pa la gnas pa ji lta bu lags | smras pa chos thams cad dran pa med pa | yid la byed pa med pa’o ||*

<sup>956</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 22, 362<sub>1-2</sub>: *de ltar mdzad pa dran pa med cing yid la byar med pa’i dran pa dang yid byed kyi tshul ’di mdo’i nges don du ma zad | sngags kyi rdzogs rim mthar thug pa’i lta sgom bla na med pa yin te |*

<sup>957</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI, MKsb vol. 6, 99<sub>3-4</sub>. See Volume II, translation: 151, critical edition: 154.

<sup>958</sup> See also Seyfort Ruegg 1984, 8–9, which paraphrases the quoted passage.

traditions (*bka' srol*) of the first two were followed and practiced in their entirety by Lord Mar pa and Mi la ras pa. The middle teaching tradition was emphasized by Sgam po pa who, having claimed to take it to heart, widely propagated these teachings.<sup>959</sup>

The author proceeds to outline the standard Bka' brgyud account of Sgam po pa's previous incarnation as the Indian Candrabhadra Kumāra who promulgated the *Samādhi-rājasūtra* (SRS) which had as its intended meaning the Madhyamaka doctrinal system (*dbu ma'i chos tshul*). This system was given the name 'Mahāmudrā,' an appellation which signified the wisdom of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong gi ye shes*) which has its inception in the Unsurpassed Mantrayāna. Because it is the system which removes the most tenacious of reifying tendencies, tendencies which may continue to linger even after Mantrayāna Completion Stage attainments, it is regarded as indispensable:

When this Madhyamaka view has arisen in one's mind-stream, it is termed 'eliciting natural awareness' and 'directly realizing *dharmakāya*'. And, when it is realized that these phenomena (*chos can*) such as sprouts and thoughts are not established as other than their true nature (*chos nyid*), it was expressed in the statement "thoughts arise as *dharmakāya*". This view and meditation were therefore extolled as absolutely necessary, being the antidote which completely dispels the tenacious presence of latent propensities for discursive elaboration and

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<sup>959</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 10<sub>20</sub>–11<sub>18</sub>: **slob dpon chen po mai tri pa**'i yid la mi byed pa'i dbu ma 'di la bod 'dir dgongs pa skong tshul mi 'dra ba gsum byung ste | zab gsal sngags kyi dbu ma rtsal du bton nas nyams su len pa dang | zab pa mdo'i dbu ma rtsal du bton nas nyams su len pa dang | sems tsam rnam rdzun gyi dbu ma rtsal du bton nas nyams su len pa gsum las | phyi ma 'di ni gzung 'dzin gyis stong pa'i shes pa rang rig rang gsal don dam du grub pa do ha'i don du 'chad pa rgya gar **phyag na** dang | **bal po a su** dang | **kor ni ru pa** sogs rgya bod du ches mang ngo | lugs 'di dbu mar 'chad pa la rigs par smra ba **gro lung pa** sogs dpyod ldan mang pos ma rangs nas a ma na si pa sogs ci rigs kyi lugs dbu ma pa'i lugs dang mi mthun zhes 'gog par mdzad la | tshig 'di tsam la brten nas **sa skya paṇ chen** dang | *bka'* gdams pa ci rigs pa zhig gis | **rje btsun mai tri pa**'i chos rnam par dag pa **a ma na sa'i skor** thams cad la sdang zhen byed pa dang | de'i zhar la **bram ze chen po**'i yid la mi byed pa **do ha mdzod** kyi **glu'i** don dang | **mnga' bdag mai tri pa** dang **rje btsun sa ra ha che chung** la skur pa 'debs pa'i skal ba can yang byung snang ngo || dang po gnyis kyi *bka'* srol ni | **rje mar pa** dang **mi la** lta bu la gnyis ka tshang bar bzhugs shing nyams len du mdzad la | *bka'* srol bar pa 'di ni lhag par **rje sgam po pa** nyid kyi rtsal du bton te thugs nyams su bzhes pa skad du mdzad nas de'i *bka'* rgya cher spel ba yin te |...

malaise<sup>960</sup> [which may persist] even where there has arisen a very positive experience of wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness of the Mantra[yāna].”<sup>961</sup>

In a later section of the commentary, the Karma pa discusses a separate and later Indo-Tibetan line of *amanasikāra* instructions, allegedly representing further developments and clarifications of the Saraha tradition, which were given by Mitrayogi (*mi tra dzo gi*)<sup>962</sup> to Khro phu Lo tsā ba Byams pa'i dpal (1173–1225)<sup>963</sup> during the former's sojourn in Tibet in 1198–1199 in response to the latter's invitation.

Concerning this method [of pacifying elaborations, having] the unexcelled vital point of all the definitive meanings of sūtras and tantras as their intention, there evolved so-called doctrinal systems of “Mahāmudrā of mental nonengagement” [and] “transcending intellect” (*blo 'das*) which were passed down in lineal succession from Rje btsun Saraha and Dpal ldan Śavari dbang phyug to Rje btsun Mar pa, Mi la and so on. At a later time, this doctrinal system was clarified more and more. There arose the entire range of cycles of Mahāmudrā *amanasikāra* instructions given by Avalokiteśvāra Mitrayogi to Khro phu lo tsā ba [which contained]

<sup>960</sup> Seyfort Ruegg 1969 (439) translates *daṣṭulya* (Tb. *gnas ngan len*) as ‘la Turbulence’, Davidson 1988 (177 f.) as ‘hindrances’ (and elsewhere ‘baseness’), and Schimthausen 1987 (vol. 1, 66) as ‘badness’. Schimthausen discusses many connotations of the term which include badness or wickedness (*kleśa-pakṣyam*), unwieldiness (*karmanṣyatā*), heaviness (\**gurutva* : *lci ba nyid*), stiffness (*middhakṛtam āśrayajāḍyam*), incapacitation or lack of controllability (*akṣamatā*), and unease or misery (*daṣṭulya-duḥkha*). The idea here is that unsatisfactoriness permeates human existence to such an extent that it is perceived and felt most fundamentally a situation of affliction, suffering, degradation, malaise and powerlessness. It has the effect of hindering, physically and mentally, a yogin's ability to attain his goal (Davidson 1988, 177).

<sup>961</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 12<sub>2-11</sub>: 'di'i dbu ma'i lta ba rgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang | chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang | chos can myu gu dang rnam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas | gsang sngags kyi bde stong dbyer med kyi ye shes sogs kyi nyams myong ches bzang bzang po skyes pa la'ang da dung spros pa'i bag nyal dang | gnas ngan len yod pa sel byed kyi gnyen por lta sgom 'di nyid cher dgos par bsngags te | 'dis dper na sman dkar po chig thub dang 'dra bar sgrib pa thams cad rmeg nas sel bar byed pa'i phyir zhes gdams pa yin no ||

<sup>962</sup> *Mi tra dzo gi/ki* (Mitrayogi) was the popular name of a Siddha from India identified by Bu ston as Śrī Jagatamitrānanda (*śrī dza ga ta mi tra a nanta*) who visited Tibet in 1198–1199 on the invitation of the translator Khro phu Byams pa'i dpal (1173–1225). With Khro phu, he translated tantric texts including the *Samvaraekajātā* (*Bde chen Ral gcig gi skor*) cycle (D 2122–26) and *Svacittaviśramaupadeśa* (*Sems nyid ngal gso*) cycle (D 2129), and is credited with composing and translating the *Sugataśāsanaratnavohittha* (*Bstan pa'i gru*) (D 2462). See Obermiller 1931–32, 222–24. He is also credited by Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802) with consecrating the land for Khro phu monastery and thus establishing a foundation for the Khro phu Bka' brgyud tradition. See *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought*, tr. Geshe Lhundub Sopa (Wisdom Publications: 2009), 136.

<sup>963</sup> The history and teachings of with this lineage are as yet poorly understood and remain desiderata for future research.

the definitive meaning of sūtras and tantras. There are many people nowadays who [wrongly] declare unanimously that this system is the system of the Chinese Heshang.<sup>964</sup>

Further historical and doctrinal details of these *amanasikāra* systems are given in the author's *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* VI, where the author offers a valuable synopsis of the methods employed in the precepts of the Dwags po and Khro phu Bka' brgyud traditions:

To say a few words about the method of instructions in this tradition: all phenomena are only conceptually-imputed appearances and the aspects of appearances that are imputed in whatever fashion are not found as something other than the imputing cognition. And apart from just that phenomenal cognition which is the imputer, there is nothing else besides its true nature (*chos nyid*), which is only profound emptiness. The [teaching] which primarily takes as its view and meditation the point where the nature of these two [cognition and its empty nature] have resolved like water poured into water is called “sustaining natural awareness”. It evolved predominantly in [1] the extensive traditions which maintained the instruction transmission (*gdams srol*) renowned among the [Mahā]mudrā such as the Khro phu Bka brgyud tradition and [2] the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition in Tibet which stem from the *dohā* explanations in the tradition stemming from [Vajra]pāṇi in India, and [from] from Jo bo Mitrayogi (*mi tra dzo gi*) [respectively]. If a profound emptiness other than that is taken as view and meditation, then some nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*) wherein the phenomenal awareness and the like is never connected with its abiding nature is posited as a mental object. A view and meditation on emptiness that makes one inordinately attached to that [object] through the mode of apprehension is therefore not acknowledged by this [Mahāmudrā] approach to be totally pure.<sup>965</sup>

The Bka' brgyud *amanasikāra* methods of the Dwags po and Khro phu lineages are here said to lead to the realization of emptiness in which both the imputing phenomenal cognition and its imputed objects are resolved in their unborn nature, like water poured into

<sup>964</sup> *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad*, 325<sub>13-21</sub>: *tshul 'di ni mdo sngags kyi nges don mtha' dag gi srog gnad phul du dbyung du med par dgongs te | rje btsun sa ra ha dang | dpal ldan sha wa ri dbang phyug nas rje btsun mar pa mi la sogs las nye bar brgyud pa'i yid la mi byed pa blo 'das phyag rgya chen po'i chos tshul zhes 'byung ba de nyid yin la | phyis kyi dus chos tshul 'di ches cher gsal bar byed pa ni spyān ras gzigs mi tra dzo kis khro phu lo tsā ba la gdams pa'i mdo sngags kyi nges don yid la mi byed pa phyag rgya chen po'i gdams skor mtha' yas pa 'byung ba'i lugs 'di la deng sang sbye bo mang po kha mthun pa rgya nag hwa shang gi lugs yin no zhes smra ba...*

<sup>965</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* VI, MKsb vol. 6, 99<sub>3</sub>–100<sub>1</sub>. See Volume II, translation 151–52, critical edition 154.

water. Mi bskyod rdo rje further explains in his later *Sku gsum ngo sprod* commentary that these *amanasikāra* teachings had been preserved in Mahāmudrā traditions of earlier and later interpreters of Saraha's *dohās* who taught the succession of [1] mindfulness (*dran pa*), [2] nonmindfulness (*dran med*), [3] nonorigination (*skye med*) and [4] transcending intellect (*blo las 'das pa*).<sup>966</sup> In particular, he adds, these *amanasikāra* teachings were eloquently explained in the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā instructions in connection with the Four Yogas as these relate to mindfulness (*dran pa*) and vigilance (*shes bzhin*) in the context where the flame of insight which directly realizes the abiding condition (*gnas lugs*) mounts higher and higher: [1] effortful mindfulness (*rtsol bcas kyi dran pa*), [2] effortless mindfulness (*rtsol med kyi dran pa*), [3] authentic mindfulness that is the dharma of realization (*rtogs chos yang dag gi dran pa*) and [4] intellect-transcending mindfulness (*blo 'das kyi dran pa*) or circle of wisdom mindfulness (*dran pa ye shes kyi 'khor lo*).<sup>967</sup>

These Dwags po Bka' brgyud *amanasikāra* teachings, as typified by the four so-called symbol terms (*brda' bzhi*) that developed in commentarial traditions based on Saraha's *dohās*, describe a movement from mindfulness (*dran pa*) to nonmindfulness (*dran med*), mental engagement (*vid la byed pa*) to mental nonengagement (*vid la mi byed pa*), finally culminating in transcendence of dualistic mentation (*blo las 'das pa*).<sup>968</sup> The idea here is that mental nonengagement is precisely a mental engagement which is free from all mental engagements bound up with apprehending subject and apprehending objects. Maintaining that there is no contradiction between these two conceptions, Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes the Fourth Zhwa dmar Ye shes dpal bzang po (1453–1526): “interpreting the term *amanasikāra*, it is the cessation of conditioned, transient mental engagements in *saṃsāra* and likewise the one-pointed equipoise that is the unconditioned mental engagement in the *nirvāṇa* in which one does not remain (*apraṭiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*) [either in *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*]. These two yogas are not incompatible.”<sup>969</sup> In this connexion, Mi bskyod rdo rje also quotes Rje La yag pa [Byang chub dngos grub]<sup>970</sup> who in his commentary on the Four Dharmas of Sgam po pa stated that: “Mental nonengagement means familiarizing oneself with the true nature of things through relinquishing all mental engagements such as the apprehended [object] and apprehending [subject]. Alternatively, because the *a* is the foremost thing, it is said that everything abides in the state

<sup>966</sup> These so-called symbol terms (*brda' bzhi*) were associated with exegesis on the *dohās* by Vajrapāṇi and other Indian commentators. See Guenther 1969, 5–6.

<sup>967</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 22, 362<sub>2–4</sub>.

<sup>968</sup> See chapter four for Padma dkar po's analysis of the relationship between *manasikāra* and *amanasikāra*.

<sup>969</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa*, MKsb vol. 21, 210<sub>3–5</sub>. See Volume II, translation: 145, critical edition: 148.

<sup>970</sup> La yag pa Byang chub dngos grub (b. 12<sup>th</sup> c.) We were unable to locate this quotation in the author's *Mnyam med dwags po chos bzhir grags pa'i gzhung gi 'grel pa*.

of nonorigination.”<sup>971</sup> To show that this principle of noncontradiction between mental engagement and nonengagement is well-attested in Indian Buddhist non-tantric sources, the Karma pa quotes both the *Sāgaramatiparipṛcchā* (SMP) which states that “[Buddha] taught the application of mindfulness which is without mindfulness and without mental engagement”<sup>972</sup> and the *Buddhasaṃgīti* (BS) which states: “[Query:] Mañjuśrī, how does one sustain the application of mindfulness? [Reply:] Without mindfulness and without mental engagement regarding all phenomena.”<sup>973</sup>

Concerning the complex relationships between the Indo-Tibetan Bka’ brgyud *amanasikāra* teachings and sūtric and tantric *amanasikāra* strands of Indian Buddhism, Mi bskyod rdo rje proposes in his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* that Maitrīpa had based these teachings on similar ideas promulgated in classical Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, *Buddhānusmṛti* (BAS) and *Nirvikalpapraveśadharaṇi* (NPDh):

Concerning the mindfulness of direct recognition, even in the definitive sūtras such as the *Mother of the Victor* [*Prajñāpāramitā*], that absence of any mindfulness and mental engagement was [deemed] to be inseparable from the mindfulness and sustained awareness of precisely the nonconceptuality [described] in the *Buddhānusmṛti*<sup>974</sup>, *Nirvikalpa[praveśa]dharaṇi* and other texts. It was on account of the meaning of such statements that the great master Maitrīpa gave extensive instructions to Śrī Śavaripa on the absence of mindfulness and mental engagements in ways of view and meditation on the emptiness of all phenomena once one has attained realization of the Completion Stage of the Secret Mantra [vehicle]. Given that great learned ones like Ratnākaraśānti had not fully taken this to heart, the teacher Maitrīpa wrote extensive treatises on *amanasikāra*. In these treatises, the perfection of insight [*prajñāpāramitā*] which is not separate from the associated mindfulness and mental engagement, which are precisely the lack of [the sort of] mindfulness and mental engagement that clings to any of the extremes of discursive elaborations, was explained as the unsurpassed view and meditation grounded in the perfection of insight which is attested both in the sūtras and tantras. Therefore, thanks to the realization of those having the jewel of insight such as the great

<sup>971</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 21, 211<sub>4-5</sub>. See Volume II, translation: 147, critical edition: 149.

<sup>972</sup> D 152, 43<sub>4-5</sub>.

<sup>973</sup> D 228, 415<sub>3-4</sub>. See Volume II, translation: 147, critical edition 150.

<sup>974</sup> There are a number of canonical texts, both sūtric and tantric, with *Buddhānusmṛti* as their title or part of their title.

teacher Śāntipa<sup>975</sup> and others, [Amanasikāra tradition] was revitalized more and more.<sup>976</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje's observation that Maitrīpa taught this cycle in order to instruct scholars such as Ratnākaraśānti who had “not fully taken this to heart” may be corroborated with accounts of this teacher given in Tibetan biographical sources. There we learn that Maitrīpa was ordained by Ratnākaraśānti at age eighteen, and during the following year received teachings from him on the Yogācāra system of the Nirākaravāda, but later defeated him in debate after receiving the *amanasikāra* Mahāmudrā teachings from Śavaripa. We further learn that Ratnākaraśānti interpreted Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka in an idealist vein and his circle generally did not favour Candrakīrti's interpretation.<sup>977</sup> In this regard, it may be recalled that the Karma pa had specified in his MA commentary that it was Maitrīpa's defeat of Ratnākaraśānti in debate that earned him the title ‘Victor’.<sup>978</sup>

In view of the prevalence of *amanasikāra* teachings in Indian tantric and non-tantric Mahāyāna discourses<sup>979</sup>, it is not unwarranted for the Eighth Karma pa to argue that those who criticized these teachings as non-Buddhist and soteriologically non-efficacious, or even as detrimental, were, in effect, rejecting an important current of Buddhist thought common to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. As he states in his *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* VIII:

[Query:] Some have asked “isn't it the case that even fools when they cultivate *mahāmudrā* as taught in the Unsurpassed Mantra will not plunge into lower destinies, whereas you by cultivating the Dwags po Bka' brgyud ‘natural aware-

<sup>975</sup> Interestingly, this *mahāsiddha* is traditionally identified with the scholar Ratnākaraśānti. If Mi bskyod rdo rje accepted this tradition, it would mean that this scholar gained legitimacy in the Karma pa's eyes after his ‘conversion’ from Alīkāra Cittamātra to the Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā tradition of Maitrīpa and his subsequently becoming a *mahāsiddha*.

<sup>976</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, MKsb vol. 22, 361–362: ‘di lta'i ngo shes kyi dran pa la ni rgyal ba'i yum sogs nges pa'i mdo rnam su'ang | gang dran pa med cing yid la byar med pa de ni sangs rgyas rjes su dran pa yin no zhes bya ba dang | rnam par mi rtog pa'i gzungs la sogs par gang rnam par mi rtog pa de nyid kyi dran pa dang shes bzhin dang ma bral ba zhes 'byung la | don 'di nyid kyi phyir | **mnga' bdag chen po mai tri pas** | dpal **sha ba ri** la gsang sngags kyi rdzogs rim gyi rtogs pa rnyed pa na chos thams cad stong pa nyid kyi lta sgom gyi tshul la dran pa med cing yid la byar med pa'i man ngag rgya chen bshad la | **mkhas pa chen po rin chen 'byung gnas zhi ba** sogs kyang thugs su ma chub pa la brten | **slob dpon mai tri pas** yid la mi byed pa'i bstan bcos rgya cher mdzad de | bstan bcos de dag tu'ang gang spros pa'i mtha' 'gar yang bzung ba'i dran pa dang yid la byed pa med pa nyid kyi dran pa dang yid la byed pa dang mtshungs par ldan pa dang ma bral ba'i shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ni mdo sngags gnyis kar nas byung ba'i shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i lta sgom bla na med par 'chad pa nyid kyi | **slob dpon chen po shan ti pa** sogs shes rab kyi nor can rnam kyi rtogs pas gong nas gong du dbugs rgya cher 'byin par mdzad pa yin no ||

<sup>977</sup> See Mathes 2015 for further details and sources.

<sup>978</sup> *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 9<sub>15–18</sub>.

<sup>979</sup> For an historical sketch of these, see following chapter, 403 f.



ness’ [and] ‘mental nonengagement’ which you label as *mahāmudrā* will plunge into the lower destinies?” [Reply:] Since it appears that the Ācārya Nāgārjuna and the perfect Buddha designated this *amanasikāra* as *mahāmudrā* and *prajñāpāramitā*, and thus introduced it as meditation for many sages and fools [alike]<sup>980</sup>, it would follow that the Perfect Buddha and Nāgārjuna must be false friends. For in the *Hevajra*[*tantra* I.8.44ab] it is said:

The whole world should indeed be contemplated  
Such that it is not contemplated by mentation.<sup>981</sup>

And according to Nāgārjuna [*Jñānālokālaṃkāra* (JĀA)]:

Homage to you who is without imagined thoughts,  
Whose mind has no foundation at all,  
Who is without reflection, and not mentally engaged,  
And who has no objective reference.<sup>982</sup>

Because such statements are widely attested in Buddhist teachings and treatises, enough elaboration [here]! In this regard, even what is termed “natural awareness” expresses *mahāmudrā*, buddha nature which—like the coemergent wisdom whose nature becomes manifest by power of the empowerments and two stages [of Generation and Completion]—constitutes fundamental transformation via path *mahāmudrā*. Thus, it does not express, by way of contrast, the six constellations of cognition that are adventitious stains. Because, as venerable Karma pa Rang byung stated [in his *De bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po bstan pa*]:

This natural awareness is precisely what  
Is called *dharmadhātu* and the quintessence of the victors (*jinagarbha*).  
It is not made something good by noble beings,  
Nor is it made something bad by sentient beings.<sup>983</sup> [lines 50–53]

If one plunges into the lower destinies by taking this self-occurring, genuine, coemergent wisdom which is personally realized as one’s view and meditation,

<sup>980</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje had previously explained in this commentary that this profound *mahāmudrā* instructions enable the wise and foolish alike to attain the goal of Vajradhara.

<sup>981</sup> HT I.8.44a: Snellgrove ed. Skt. *bhāvvyate<sup>a</sup> hi jagat sarvaṃ manasā yasmān na bhāvvyate* ||<sup>a</sup> Asiatic Society of Bengal Mss. has *bhāvvyante*; Tib. *gang phyir yid kyis mi sgom par* || ‘gro ba thams cad bsgom par bya ||

<sup>982</sup> JĀA, 146<sub>1-2</sub>: This important passage is quoted in *Caturmudrānvaya* (CMA D 2225, 156<sub>7</sub>–157<sub>1</sub>), which has been critically edited and translated by Mathes 2015. Translation altered slightly for sake of consistency. The passage reflects the close connection that existed between the Apratiṣṭhānavāda and Amanasikāra traditions.

<sup>983</sup> *De bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po bstan pa*, in RDSb vol. 7, 285<sub>3-4</sub>.

then all the teachings of the Unsurpassed Vajrayāna would make one reach lower destinies. Therefore, who has a mind that could repeat such prattle?<sup>984</sup>

This passage encapsulates a number of key elements of the syncretistic Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā system in which Indo-Tibetan Amanasikāra Mahāmudrā teachings are clarified with the help of related concepts drawn from Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and Tathāgatagarbha discourses. As a descriptor of goal-realization, *mahāmudrā* is here linked not only with the conceptions of “natural awareness” (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) and “mental non-engagement” that are key concepts of Dwags po Mahāmudrā discourses but also with the *prajñāpāramitā* of non-tantric Mahāyāna discourses as well as the *sahajajñāna* elicited through tantric empowerments and Generation and Completion Stage yogas in Vajrayāna. Finally, this transcendent awareness is identified with *\*sugatagarbha* which is distinguished from the six modes of consciousness which are the adventitious stains which conceal it. The disclosure of this natural and coemergent awareness of mental nonengagement is described in terms of the fundamental transformation (*gnas gyur pa*) through which all that obstructs and obscures this unborn awareness has been purified away. The JĀA passage is used here, as it was in Maitrīpa's *Caturmudrānvaya*, to underscore the intimate connection between the syncretistic Apratiṣṭhānavāda and Amanasikāra traditions which both united Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā currents of late Indian Mahāyāna and Mantrayāna systems.

We can finally direct our attention to central features of Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* tradition which, in Mi bskyod rdo rje's view, distinguish it from the type of ethical quietism and ideoclasm with which it had been associated by Sa skya and Dge lugs scholars. In *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa*, the Karma pa responds to the question “isn't the meditation that involves stopping thinking, as [criticized in] the *Jñānasiddhi* by the King Indrabhūti and in other [texts], [209] invariably explained as the path of Mahāmudrā?”

<sup>984</sup> *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa VIII*, 'Bri gung bka' brgyud mdzod chen mo vol. 83, 66–81 (MKsb vol. 6, 731<sub>1-5</sub> has different annotated version): *de la kha cig sngags bla med nas bshad pa'i phyag chen de blun pos sgoms na ngan song du mi lung kyang | khyed dwags po bka' brgyud pa'i tha mal shes pa yid la mi byed pa la ming phyag chen du btags pa de bsgoms pas ngan song du lung bar 'gyur ro zhe na | 'o na slob dpon klu sgrub dang rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyis kyang yid la mi byed pa de phyag rgya chen po dang sher phyin du ming btags nas mkhas blun mang po la sgom du bcug snang bas rdzogs sangs dang klu sgrub sogs kyang log pa'i bshes gnyen du 'gyur te | dgyes rdor las | gang phyir yid kyis mi sgom par || 'gro ba thams cad sgom par bya || zhes dang | klu sgrub kyis | kun tu rtog pas ma brtags par || rab tu mi gnas pa yi yid || dran pa med cing yid byed med || dmigs pa med la phyag 'tshal 'dud || ces 'byung ba sogs bka' bstan bcos mtha' klas pa nas 'byung ba'i phyir spros pa chog go | 'dir tha mal gyi shes pa zhes bya ba'ang dbang dang rim gnyis kyi mthus mngon du gyur pa'i rang bzhin lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes bzhin phyag rgya chen po bde gshegs snying po de lam phyag chen du gnas gyur pa la brjod kyis glo bur dri ma'i tshogs drug gi shes pa'i rang ldog nas brjod pa min te | karma pa rang byung zhabs kyis | tha mal shes pa 'di nyid la || chos dbyings rgyal ba'i snying po zer || bzang du 'phags pas btang ba med || ngan du sems can gyis ma btang || zhes 'byung ba'i phyir | rang byung gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i so so rang rig pa'i ye shes la lta sgom byas pas ngan song du lung bar 'gyur na ni rdo rje theg pa bla na med pa'i chos thams cad ngan song sgrub byed du 'gyur bas ci 'di lta bu'i rjes bzlos ni sems yod su zhig gis brjod par nus ||*

[*Reply*:] In this [tradition,] we do not engage at all in accepting or rejecting, projecting or withdrawing, thoughts, yet it is not the case that we try to block thoughts either. This is so because this [Mahāmudrā method of] relaxing in one’s natural way of being without any clinging to thoughts and objects is not like the restrictive suppression of thoughts of the Chinese Heshang. It is also not the case that this way of settling [the mind] does not become the Mahāmudrā path because [Saraha’s] *People’s Dohā* [*Dohākoṣa* 57a] states:

Having relinquished thought and no thought,  
One must let be in the manner of a small child.

In letting be in this way, the seeing, awareness, and mentation that focuses on all phenomena, and all [other] mental engagements come to a standstill.<sup>985</sup>

Here, as in many other instances, the Karma pa rejects any association of his traditions’ *amanasikāra* teachings with those attributed to Heshang. That said, we do elsewhere find evidence that he was among the small minority of Tibetans who questioned the accuracy of the meagre historical and doctrinal accounts of Heshang’s Chan tradition preserved in ancient Tibetan chronicles. In his *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI, Mi bskyod rdo rje proposes that the accepted assumptions about Heshang’s views were in fact based “merely on what is known from old historical documents of former times and ancient chronicles” and that it is “not clear at present to whom the [so-called] treatises of Heshang [can be attributed]”.<sup>986</sup> He proceeds to chastize Tibetan scholars who, rather than admitting agnosticism vis-à-vis the Chan tradition of Heshang, instead “fabricated a new [system], alleging something to be the philosophy of Heshang which is not in order to impute faults to others. You [scholars] then proclaim that this [newly fabricated teaching] is similar to the claims of fraudulent [Mahā]mudrā followers such as the Dwags po masters (*dwags po pa*).” The Karma pa proceeds to offer what appears to be one of the most charitable accounts of Heshang’s Chan philosophy yet to be found in Tibetan sources. Consider the following excerpt:

Now, according to the system of Heshang gleaned from the limited [range of] ancient documents and chronicles from times past, the method of practicing view and meditation is as follows. In the midst of all external and internal phenomena, that factor of apprehending the beginningless mind (*thog med kyi blo*) as coemergent self and reality is not the ascertainment of emptiness by way of scripture,

<sup>985</sup> See Volume II, translation: 144, critical edition: 147.

<sup>986</sup> *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI, MKsb vol. 6, 101<sub>1-2</sub>: *ha shang gis ji ltar ’dod sngar gyi chos ’byung gi yi ge rnying pa dang | gna’ gtam du grags pa tsam las ma gtogs pa’i ha shang gi bstan bcos ni da lta su la yang mi gsal la |*

reasoning and instructions. Rather, claiming that merely not grasping any external and internal phenomena by means of conceptual thought constitutes the view and meditation of profound emptiness of mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed pa*), he advocated this as the path of liberation and specified it as [his] tradition. In this way, in the midst of all external and internal phenomena, the grasping of beginningless mind as coemergent self and reality and, in short, the discursively grasped entities and the factor of grasping, are ascertained as emptiness which is specified as skillful means and discerning insight in the scriptures, reasoning and instructions of sūtras and tantras.

Finally, by virtue of there not being left behind any remainder of discursive elaborations and signs from the perspective of the insight which recognizes that [profound emptiness], despite its mere designations as “selfless”, “unreal”, “empty”, and “free from elaborations”, the abiding nature of all phenomena is described as profound emptiness and the like. When the great fetters of mental engagements thus naturally release themselves, the seeds that engender any concepts in language and thought are decomposed at the root and the emergence of all the sprouts manifesting as signs and concepts ceases. In this state of ineffability and nonconceptuality, when the discriminating insight or mental engagements involved in analysis are stilled, there is the unity of calm abiding and deep insight like a butter lamp unshaken by the wind. Hence, concerning the abiding condition, aren’t these two systems of practicing view and meditation [Chan and Mahāmudrā] alike?<sup>987</sup>

The strongly revisionist character of this account from a work composed late in the author’s life sets it apart from the majority of his treatments which were largely concerned with clarifying how Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings differed from the account of Heshang’s Chan system presented in the standard narrative of the Bsam yas debate, a narrative whose historicity and philosophical accuracy very few of his coreligionists had ever deigned to contest.<sup>988</sup> It would appear that in his later years, the Karma pa was more open to the possibility that Heshang’s *amanasikāra* teachings may have reflected legitimate non-tantric Buddhist *amanasikāra* traditions which he considered to be in accord with the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud *amanasikāra* system, even if the latter was regarded as more thoroughgoing in its eradication of the deeply engrained reifying habits of mind and their karmic tendencies. Let us conclude with a passage from *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI where the author responds to the question of how ordinary persons are introduced to the practice of mental nonengagement:

<sup>987</sup> See Volume II, translation: 153, critical edition: 155.

<sup>988</sup> Two exceptions were the Rnying ma scholars Klong chen rab ’byams pa (see Higgins 2006, 261–62 n. 17) and Tshe dbang nor bu (see Bretfeld 2004).

When a Guru who has gained realization directly introduces by means of scriptures and esoteric precepts—the enduring heritage of the proper path—a fortunate disciple to the state of profound emptiness wherein all external and internal phenomena, however they may arise, are beyond all that is established in terms of modes of being and [thus] free from the entire [range] of existence and nonexistence, arising and ceasing, permanence and impermanence, substantiality and insubstantiality, and the conditioned and unconditioned, then for such a disciple all the bonds of wayward projections that are the great hidden flaw of delusion regarding all conventional phenomena, external and internal, are destroyed. [The disciple will also be] liberated from the great abyss of deprecation because there arises a special experiential understanding and realization that all phenomena are already pure of all discursive elaborations of the threefold nexus [of act, object and subject] like dust in the sky, such that they are not existent, not nonexistent, and their being concomitantly both existent and nonexistent, or their being neither, are eliminated. On that occasion, in regard to that [disciple] who is nakedly immersed in the abiding nature which is not amenable to any mental engagement at all, the illustrious Dwags po bka' brgyud have spoken of “seeing the abiding nature of mind” or “eliciting the perfection of wisdom nature”. Or they have paraphrased it as “attaining the direct introduction by directly encountering one’s own face that is [one’s] abiding nature, as never met or known before”<sup>989</sup> and as “losing oneself in the vast expanse of uncontrived *mahāmudrā*.”<sup>990</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the final analysis, the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition of mental nonengagement is understood by Mi bskyod rdo rje to be a philosophy of the ‘middle’ in the dual sense of avoiding extremes and realizing nondual wisdom. To be sure, it is in view of its principal aim to introduce the aspirant directly to a nondual experiential understanding of emptiness-awareness which is free from reifications of subject and object and from the conceptual imputations and deprecations which stem from deeply engrained beliefs in existence and nonexistence that the Eighth Karma pa is led to speak of this tradition as a Middle Way of Mental Nonengagement (*vid la mi byed pa'i dbu ma*).

<sup>989</sup> This is a slightly free rendering of *gnas lugs kyi rang zhal sngar 'dris kyi mi phrad pa ltar ngo 'phrod pas ngo sprod thob bo*: “attaining a direct introduction through directly encountering one’s own face that is the abiding nature, as not encountered in previous acquaintance(s).”

<sup>990</sup> See Volume II, translation: 151, critical edition: 153–4.

PADMA DKAR PO

## OVERVIEW

Born some twenty years after the death of Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) and the birth of Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), the Fourth 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592) adopted a general philosophical orientation that shared much common ground with these thinkers. All three regarded the *rapprochement* between Mahāmudrā and anti-foundationalist strains of Indian Madhyamaka philosophy—specifically, the \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhānavāda systems—as central to their philosophical aims. They each, in their own ways, framed this synthesis in terms of the reconciliation of affirmative (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) strains of Buddhist thought and discourse. In their attempts to strike a balance between these contrasting discursive modes, all three scholars attempted to chart a philosophical middle course between eternalistic and nihilistic currents of Buddhist thought. On one side, they sought to avoid any imputation of a permanent metaphysical reality, a view they linked with the Jo nang school. On the other side, they steered clear of the kind of unwarranted depreciation of the nature of reality that they saw as the undesirable result of taking as the correct view of the ultimate an exclusive or sheer emptiness (*stong pa rkyang pa*)—a complete absence of anything whatsoever—that was the scope of a nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*), a view which they all chiefly associated with the Dge lugs pa school.

To this end, the \*Prāsaṅgika and Apratiṣṭhānavāda systems were generally assigned a preparatory role in the cultivation of the Buddhist path, equipping the truth-seeking intellect with a powerful “system of severing superimpositions” (*sgro 'dogs gcod pa'i lugs*), as Shākya mchog ldan had aptly characterized the \*Prāsaṅgika tradition. While Shākya mchog ldan was perhaps most reluctant of the three to grant this \*Prāsaṅgika view more than a propaedeutic role within Buddhist soteriology as a whole, Padma dkar po and Mi bskyod rdo rje were quite prepared to consider its quietistic no “thesis” (*pratijñā*) and “no elaboration” (*niṣprapañca*) stance as fully in line with the Mahāmudrā view. In any event, all agreed that to the extent that these quietistic strains of Madhyamaka philosophy enabled the aspirant to abandon the metaphysical extremes of existence and nonexistence through philosophical reasoning, they cleared the way for an undistortive engagement with transsubjective modes of being and awareness, particularly as these were articulated and advocated in Mantrayāna, Siddha, and Tathāgatagarbha discourses.

With regard to their views of liberating knowledge, the three authors commonly argued, contra Sa skya Paṇḍita and his later representatives, that Mahāmudrā meditation had nothing in common with the practice of “stopping all thoughts and activities” that had become associated in the minds of many Tibetans with the Chan contemplative system of Heshang Moheyan. Of the three, Padma dkar po was the most insistent on showing the compatibility between Kamalaśīla's identification of *amanasikāra* both with discernment of reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣa*) and well-founded mental engagement (*yonisomanas[i]kāra*)—deemed

“well-founded” (*yoniso*) because it concerns the source or foundation (*yoni*), that is ‘nonorigination’ (*anutpāda*)<sup>991</sup>—and Maitrīpa’s interpretation of *amanasikāra* as a mental engagement (*manas[i]kāra*) of, or that is, nonorigination (signified by the *a*-privative).

Despite notable points of similarity between the three thinkers, Padma dkar po’s approach diverged from theirs in significant respects. We have seen that Mi bskyod rdo rje’s accounts of the Buddhist goal and path followed the differentiation trend, typical of late Yogācāra works such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and endorsed by the Third Karma pa, in emphasizing the fundamental distinction between abiding and adventitious modes of being and awareness. Padma dkar po by contrast placed more emphasis on certain tantric and Siddha currents underscoring the inseparability of these modes within an undifferentiated continuum or ground out of which all differentiations arise and into which they subside. To some extent, Shākya mchog ldan had likewise followed this nondifferentiation current in shifting between conventional and ultimate perspectives of human reality, but without going so far as to take a single ground (*gzhi gcig*) or single reality (*bden gzhi*) model as the basis of his path hermeneutics in the way Padma dkar po did. And neither author went as far as Padma dkar po did in attempting to show how these differentiation and nondifferentiation models with their seemingly contrasting metaphors—one comparing the basic difference between conventional and ultimate to the sky and its clouds, the other comparing their essential sameness to the ocean and its waves—should be seen not as contradictory but as complementary, relating as they do to different soteriological contexts. Put simply, on the Buddhist path, the practitioner must differentiate what is to be removed from what is to be realized. But as the goal realized—the unborn nature of things—is inherently nondual and nondiscursive, antidotes are ultimately no different from discards. On the basis of this kind of soteriological contextualism, Padma dkar po construes the Buddhist path as a dialectical tension between these two trends: the aspirant is able to discern the undifferentiated only by distinguishing it from it what it is not, at which point all conceptual differentiations lose their separateness.

How such differences in these thinkers’ viewpoints may have related to sectarian and political conflicts is a complex matter that falls outside the predominantly philosophical scope of the present work. But it would be remiss not to give at least a brief indication of some of the tensions dividing the Karma and ’Brug pa sects of the Bka’ brgyud tradition in the post-classical era as both vied for the patronage of powerful aristocratic clans and, to a lesser extent, the Ming rulership. Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa has described matters as follows:

Around this time [early 16<sup>th</sup> c.], the Karma pa [Mi bskyod rdo rje] and his spiritual son were supported by Rinlungpa, King Serkangpa of Kongpo, Kyenpa Gyelpo Pelzang and Zingpo Tülmi Yudruk. Drukpa Künkhyen Pekar [i.e., Padma dkar po]

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<sup>991</sup> See below, 418 and n. 1211.



was supported by Japawa, Chongyepa, Kurap, and others. Thereby there were continual conflicts in the environs of Tsari and in the Dakpo and Kongpo regions. There were always minor violations of the peace in which various sorts of leaders would be kidnapped and held as hostages.<sup>992</sup>

It may also be worth looking more closely at the aforementioned letter by Padma dkar po which provides evidence of sectarian tension between the Karma and 'Brug pa orders during this period.<sup>993</sup> The letter was composed in response to a missive from Bshes gnyen Rnam rgyal grags pa (b. 16<sup>th</sup> c.), a Karma bka' brgyud student of the eighth Karma pa, who questions inter alia Padma dkar po's claims to succession in the 'Brug chen reincarnation lineage, his conduct (not specified), the legitimacy of some of his doctrines, and his use of black magic against the Karma Kam tshang. In his letter of response, Padma dkar po responds to these points and also registers his concerns about the incursion of armed Karma Kam tshang troops dispatched by the Karma political party (*kar srid*) into the Kong po district, their use of weaponry including guns and missiles (*rgyogs dang me rgyogs*)<sup>994</sup>, the poisoning of rivers, their burning down of one of his *vihāras*<sup>995</sup>, and the general atmosphere of discord between their traditions. This last observation he contrasts with the relative harmony he observes between his tradition and the Sa skya pas, Dge lugs pas, and Rnying ma pas at this time.<sup>996</sup> It is noteworthy that the letter also attests to Padma dkar po's high regard for Shākya mchog

<sup>992</sup> Shakabpa 2010, 274–75. On the general atmosphere of sectarian rivalry during this time, Shakabpa observes: “The chiefs of Ü, Tsang, and Ngari each maintained large private standing armies. Each had his own lamas for worship, his own territory for each monastery, and his own source of wealth for religious purposes. Each religious school (*chos lugs*) felt superior. Since they were continually attacking one another with varying alliances, there were incessant internal conflicts.” Shakabpa's translator, Derek Maher, offers the following explanation (247): “Shakabpa points out that both Rinpung and other prominent rulers in Tsang were closely allied to Kagyü religious figures and for reasons of regional identity, even in the later 15th and early 16th centuries, they resented being dominated by Nedong, an authority based in Ü.”

<sup>993</sup> On this letter, entitled *A Reply to the Queries of Bshes gnyen Rnam rgyal grags pa* (*Bshes gnyen rnam rgyal grags pa'i dris lan*), PKsb vol. 12, 491–508, see above, 25 and n. 29.

<sup>994</sup> PKsb vol. 12, *ibid.* 503.

<sup>995</sup> *Ibid.* 503<sub>3–5</sub>: “We built a *vihāra* (*gtsug lag khang*) that had become a venerable example in the Kong po region which [your troops] succeeded in burning down, deeming this to be an heroic deed. Since you are one who possesses the eyes of Dharma, [we may ask] is it evil to build a *vihāra* or to destroy one? If it is virtuous to destroy one, then Glang dar ma should likewise be worthy of praise”. *nged kyi gtsug lag khang kong yul pa'i dper 'os pa cig rgyab pa de mer bsreg thub pa la dpa'a lor rtsi | khyod chos kyi spyen ldan yin pas | gtsug lag khang rgyab pa sdig gam | gshig pa sdig yin | gshig pa dga' na glang dar ma bstod 'os su 'gro ba 'dra | 'spa* This is followed by an interesting examination of the ways in which this action had been justified, namely, as wrathful compassionate activity performed in order to tame (or subjugate) beings. Padma dkar po's own verdict is that the deed was motivated by coercion rather than compassion and that conflict is always harmful, whereas non-conflict is highly beneficial.

<sup>996</sup> *Ibid.* 507<sub>2–3</sub>: “Although there has been no discord with those in the Sa[ kya], Dge [lugs], and Rnying ma [traditions], there is some discord with the Rje Karma teacher and disciples” *sa dge rnying ma su dang mi mthun pa ma byung kyang | rje karma dpon slob dang ma mthun pa cig byung |*

Idan's "unparalleled" knowledge of authentic Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. Interestingly, he proceeds to allege that Shākya mchog Idan had exerted a major influence on Karma bka' brgyud scholasticism, but that the scholars of this tradition had unjustly responded to this stimulus with criticism rather than frank acknowledgement.<sup>997</sup> He also objects to the manner in which they similarly demonized Tsong kha pa while at the same time benefiting from his prodigious scholarship.

Despite certain philosophical differences and the general atmosphere of sectarian discord between the rival Tibetan Buddhist schools during their era, it is clear that Padma dkar po, Mi bskyod rdo rje and Shākya mchog Idan were all similarly motivated by a perceived need to clarify the doctrinal foundations of the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings and defend their legitimacy against critics within an intellectual milieu that had become increasingly riven by polarized dogmatic positions. Padma dkar po's conciliatory ambitions within this acrimonious climate have been noted by Sørensen and Hazod:

We have now entered a period and a century [16<sup>th</sup> c.] that, even more than the preceding one, was characterized by skirmishes in different corners. It still involved different lay governorships and religious orders that continued being enmeshed in fightings or in forging shifting short-term allegiances. It is worthy of note, as may be gleaned from contemporary sources, that the holder of ecclesiastic authority almost always remained subordinate to temporal rule and authority. We also have ample testimonies how the head of a secular authority often proffered patronage to a number of distinct orders simultaneously or, conversely, that a religious order or personage served different or shifting secular masters. A key to an understanding of this is hinged upon the circumstance that both parties made use of any means available to meet his or their objective, in a decentralized society and in a political climate fraught with shifting loyalties between regional powers. This commonly entailed neither any contradiction nor involved any notable conflict since convention in the Tibetan politico-religious landscape always exacted a loose and liberal exchange of patronized hospitality in return or exchange for religious instructions. Patronage thus never remained all-exclusive. Still we should not fail to register alternative and uncompromising voices such as the one articulated by Padma dkar-po, indicative of a common situation prevailing in late medieval Tibet during this spell: At one point he disapprovingly bewails the shift of allegiance (not infrequently the forceful conversion) of one denomination to another that regularly took place, considering it against the ethics of Dharma.<sup>998</sup>

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<sup>997</sup> PKsb vol. 12, 498<sub>1-3</sub>.

<sup>998</sup> Sørensen and Hazod, 2007, 508. The source cited is Padma dkar po's autobiography (see following note).

## LIFE, WRITINGS AND INFLUENCES

Padma dkar po<sup>999</sup> was born in the Kong po region of southern Tibet in 1527. From an early age he earned a reputation as a promising Buddhist scholar and practitioner. At the age of nine, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the Third 'Brug chen 'Jam dbyangs Chos kyī grags pa (1478–1523) and enthroned as the Fourth hierarch the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud reincarnation lineage. The 'Brug pa lineage originated with Gling ras pa Padma rdo rje (1128–1188), student of Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po, and his disciple Gtsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo rje (1161–1211) of the Rgya (later 'Brug) clan. From Gtsang pa rgya ras it was transmitted through his hereditary family lineage (from uncle to nephew) at Rwa lung in the Gtsang region of western Tibet. The lineage later subdivided into three branches: [1] the Upper 'Brug (*stod 'brug*) established by Gtsang pa rgya ras's disciple Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258), and passed down through Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa, [2] the Middle 'Brug (*bar 'brug*) established by Gtsang pa rgya ras's disciple Lo ras pa Dar ma dbang phyug (1187–1250), and passed down through Gtsang pa rgya ras's family to the fourth incarnation Padma dkar po, and [3] the Lower 'Brug (*sman 'brug*) established by Gtsang pa rgya ras himself.

Ten generations after Gtsang pa rgya ras, Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal byor (1428–1476) claimed to be not only a reincarnation of Gtsang pa rgya ras in a line going back to the siddha-scholar Nāropa, but also an incarnation of the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara. Rgyal dbang rje was henceforth counted as the Second 'Brug chen in succession from the First, Gtsang pa rgya ras, on the explanation that all but two of the intervening reincarnations during the 217 years between first and fourth had gone unrecognized. Gene Smith observes that his model of a Tibetan master being not only a reincarnation (*yang srid*) of a previous lineage master but also an incarnation (*sprul sku*) was later adopted for religio-political purposes by the Fifth Dalai Lama.<sup>1000</sup> First used by Rgyal dbang rje to confer prestige and spiritual authority to descendants in the Rwa family lineage, it came to play a key legitimizing function in the Dge lugs pa order vis-à-vis the title and office of the succession of reincarnate Dalai Lamas.

The site of Padma dkar po's enthronement as Fourth 'Brug chen was the monastic college of Bkra' shis mthong smon in Jayul (Bya yul or [S]byar yul)<sup>1001</sup> which had been built

<sup>999</sup> The sources for this biographical sketch are the author's autobiography, *Sems dpa' chen po Padma dkar po'i rnam thar thugs rje chen po'i zlos gar*, PKsb vol. 3, 339–597 and the supplement by Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bzang po, PKsb vol. 4, 1–147; Smith 2001, chapter six: "Padma dkar po and His History of Buddhism"; and Tashi Namgyal 2004, *The Wand that Opens the Eyes and Dispels the Darkness of Mind : History of the Gyalwang Drukpa, the Lineage and the Six Ornaments*. Plouray, France: Editions de Drukpa Plouray. On the dispute over Padma dkar po's incarnation, see Shabkabpa 1984, 98–99, and 2010, 317.

<sup>1000</sup> See Smith 2001, 82. On the history of the institution of Dalai Lamas, see Wylie 1978.

<sup>1001</sup> According to Per Sørensen, "Bya yul or [S]byar yul is situated in the eastern part of present-day Lhun rtse county (rdzong, xian) in southernmost Tibet, a country largely covering the ancient districts of Gnyal." From

by the princess of Bya for the Third 'Brug chen 'Jam dbyangs Chos kyi grags pa (1478–1523) who was the son of a prince of Bya. Padma dkar po there pursued intensive studies under Paṇḍita Bkra' bshis rnam rgyal (Kun mkhyen bkra' shis)<sup>1002</sup>—a younger brother of the Third 'Brug chen—and other masters. At age eleven, he became a disciple of the 'Brug chen Ngag dbang chos rgyal (1465–1540), from whom he received lay ordination and bodhicitta vows. In the years to follow he gradually learned from him the entire cycle of 'Brug pa teachings along with tantric empowerments, oral instructions and their supporting scriptures. At age seventeen, he relocated to Dpal 'khor bde ba chen monastery in Gyantse where among the sixteen masters from sixteen separate monasteries in attendance he chose the head abbot (*mkhan po*), the famed Dwags po Bka' brgyud master Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1513–1587), as his principal preceptor. From him he received novice and full ordination vows, Vinaya precepts, and many 'Bka brgyud doctrines. Under 'Brug pa Ngag dbang grags pa (1506–1538), Blo gros chos rgyal (b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) and other masters, he studied grammar, logic, epistemology, and various sūtric teachings such as Madhyamaka and Prajñāpāramitā. He received a wide range of tantric teachings and empowerments from various teachers including Ngag gi dbang phyug (1517–1554), Kun spangs Shes rab rgya mtsho (1478–1542), Rdo rje 'dzin pa Chos kyi mgon po (1501–1582). Although his tantric studies gave special attention to 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud transmissions, they included a broad spectrum of tantras of both the Old (Rnying ma) and New (Gsar ma) translation schools.

As the head of the illustrious 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud tradition, Padma dkar po played a crucial role in synthesizing and systematizing the major doctrines and practices passed down to him from his forebears. His extensive knowledge of sūtras and tantras is reflected in the twenty-four volumes of his collected writings<sup>1003</sup> which contain, among much else, valuable commentaries on the Vinaya, Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka systems and on the tantric Hevajra and Kālacakra systems. Most significant are his detailed expositions of central Bka' brgyud teachings such as the Coemergent Unity (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*), Equal Flavour (*ro snyoms*), Four Yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) and Integration and Transference (*bsre 'pho*) cycles, in which he not only synthesizes their key points, but also relates them to broader currents of Buddhist thought. The breadth of his scholarship earned him the title “All-knowing” (*kun mkhyen*), an epithet reserved only for the most learned among Tibetan masters.<sup>1004</sup> He also gained renown for his historical works on the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet and the history of his own 'Brug pa sect. In addition to his wide-ranging activities as a teacher and

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personal communication recorded in Stefan Larsson, *Crazy for Wisdom: The Making of a Mad Yogin in Fifteenth-Century Tibet*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, 137 n. 13.

<sup>1002</sup> *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* s.v. 1536. The identity of this master is unknown.

<sup>1003</sup> See Bibliography under *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*.

<sup>1004</sup> According to Gene Smith, “[t]he breadth of his scholarship and learning invites comparison with the Fifth Dalai Lama. It was Padma dkar po who systematized the teaching of the 'Brug pa sect.” Smith 2001, 82.

author, Padma dkar po is credited with establishing thirteen monasteries including his own monastery Gsang sngags chos gling, established in 1574 at Rta dbang near the border with Bhutan, which became the main seat of the 'Brug pa lineage.

Alongside Padma dkar po's prodigious attempts to systematize 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud doctrine for posterity and establish institutions of learning, his role as a religious hierarch also tasked him with the less enviable aim of trying to preserve and secure support for the 'Brug pa line in the face of repeated challenges to his tradition's doctrines and practices and to the legitimacy of the 'Brug chen institution itself. As previously noted, he lived during a period increasingly dominated by sectarian strife fuelled by growing internecine conflicts between the powerful ruling aristocratic clans from whom Tibetan religious hierarchs sought support through the long-standing mechanism of patron-preceptor relations. Padma dkar po is credited in Tibetan historical sources with attempts to mediate in the conflicts between the powerful Rinpung clan, who had been sponsors of the 'Brug pa tradition, and the various factions who increasingly opposed its aggressive territorial expansions in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Shakabpa reports that Padma dkar po "frequently attempted to separate the parties and to formulate an agreeable treaty". The author records three instances when the 'Brug chen succeeded in reaching a settlement between the Rinpungpa and their opponents, thereby averting further conflict.<sup>1005</sup> Both within his religio-philosophical and political spheres of influence, Padma dkar po propagated a vision of unity and harmony to a population in the grip of disunity and strife.

During his years of teaching, Padma dkar po attracted many outstanding students including the eminent scholar Mkhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645)<sup>1006</sup>, Mi pham Bkra shis blo gros (1577–1636)<sup>1007</sup>, Lha dbang blo gros (b. 16<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>1008</sup>, Kun dga' snying po (b. 16<sup>th</sup> c.), Cog grwa pa (First) Rin chen dpal bzang (1537–1609), Mi pham Bstan pa'i nyi ma (1567–1619), Ting 'dzin bzang po (b. 16<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>1009</sup> and Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bzang po (1546–

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<sup>1005</sup> See Shabkapa 2010, 279–81.

<sup>1006</sup> He wrote a lengthy defence of Padma dkar po's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* which will be discussed below. His eight volume Collected Works also contains biographies of several 'Brug pa masters including Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bzang po, and Mi pham Bkra shis blo gros and the Fifth 'Brug chen Dpal bsam dbang po (1593–1641).

<sup>1007</sup> This master adopted the lifestyle of an itinerant yogi and is best remembered for his songs of spiritual realization, as collected, for example, in the *Mi pham blo gros rgya mtsho'i nyams mgur*.

<sup>1008</sup> This 'Brug pa master was a personal tutor to the First Zhabs drung of Bhutan. He is known as a Kālacakra master whose writings on the Kālacakra calendrical system formed the basis for the Bhutanese calendar. See his notes summarizing Kālacakra *Dus kyi 'khor lo'i 'chad thabs kyi zin bris legs bshad gsal ba'i me long* and the compilation of his calendrical works comprising *Gdan dus thun mong gi rtsis gzhi*; *Rtsis gzhung dus thun mong gi nges pa gsar du bkod pa dang bcas pa'i lag len lhan thabs gsal ba'i sgron me*; and *Gdan dus thun mong gi dus rtsis bltas chog dpyod ldan rig pa*.

<sup>1009</sup> Little is known about this figure except that he was regarded as the reincarnation of the crazy saint (*smyon pa*) 'Brug pa kun legs (1455–1529).

1615)<sup>1010</sup> who was the First 'Brug pa Yongs 'dzin Rin po che. Padma dkar po's final days were spent in a hermitage made of branches south of Gsang sngags chos gling where he is said to have uttered his final words: "I shall be in retreat for seven days. These times are very inauspicious and I can no longer sustain myself here. But I shall be reborn very soon." He died on the seventh day of retreat at age sixty-six.

Soon after his death, a dispute over his succession ensued between two factions, each selecting a different authentic reincarnation of the master as the legitimate claimant to the 'Brug chen throne. In the words of Gene Smith:

The recognition of his rebirth was the subject of a bitter dispute; the majority of the monks advocated for the son of the prince of 'Phyong rgyas, while the house of Rwa lung and their supporters laid claim on behalf of the heir of 'Brug. The long and heated struggle led to a decision by the Sde srid Gtsang pa in favour of the 'Phyongs rgyas candidate, Dpag bsam dbang po (1593–1641), and the flight to Bhutan in 1616 of the Rwa lung candidate, Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594–1651).<sup>1011</sup>

The 'Brug pa tradition was henceforth subdivided into the Northern 'Brug pa (*byang 'brug*) sect(s) in Tibet headed by the Rgyal dbang 'Brug pa and the Southern 'Brug pa (*lho 'brug*) branch that is based in Bhutan and headed by the Shabdrung (*zhabs drung*) incarnations.

#### THE BASIC FRAMEWORK: *MAHĀMUDRĀ* AND THE UNITY OF THE TWO TRUTHS

Padma dkar po identifies *mahāmudrā* as the abiding nature of mind or the unconditioned ultimate that is fully realized only when delusion (*'khrul pa*) stemming from the basic ignorance (*ma rig pa*) or nonrecognition (*rang ngo ma shes*) of this reality is dispelled. A crucial point in his teachings is that the recognition of this ever-present *mahāmudrā* need not be sought independently of the thoughts, sensations and feelings that manifest in ordinary mind. This is because such phenomena are differentiated manifestations of an abiding common ground—the nature of mind itself—emerging from it like waves on the surface of the ocean. To recognize these phenomena for what they truly are—expressions of mind's unborn nature—is to rediscover the single ground (*gzhi gcig*) of their arising and ceasing. Following a distinction introduced some three hundred years earlier by the founder of the so-called Upper 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud tradition Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal

<sup>1010</sup> He was a famous 'Brug pa scholar and practitioner who enjoyed the patronage of the Phag mo gru pa family.

<sup>1011</sup> Smith 2001, 83.

(1213–1258)<sup>1012</sup> and further developed by the Second 'Brug chen Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor (1428–1476), Padma dkar po maintains that although this ground of human reality is by nature (*gshis*) undifferentiated and empty of any intrinsic essences, its manifestation (*gdangs*) aspect makes possible the complex diversity of dualistic perceptions (*gnyis snang*) that are characterized, on the conventional level, in terms of the oppositional categories between self and other (*bdag/gzhan*), I and mine (*nga/ngar*), and mind and appearance (*sems/snang*). Together, reality's unborn nature (*gshis*) which cannot be established as anything and its unceasing manifestation (*gdangs*) which can arise as anything, emerge as the unity of appearance and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*).<sup>1013</sup> This unity, which is otherwise known as the “inseparability of the two truths” (*bden gnyis dbyer med*), is identified as a common doctrinal thread linking Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna, and Mahāmudrā discourses. In each of these systems, recognizing the unity of essence of manifestation, the empty essence and luminous nature, is a matter of perceiving the ultimate within the conventional, the unconditioned within the conditioned, and thereby avoiding the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, of existence and nonexistence.

Padma dkar po presents and defends this view of inseparable unity within a set of overlapping Buddhist frameworks of inquiry, the most important being the accounts of the nature of reality (ontology), liberating knowledge (epistemology), and the Buddhist path (soteriology). In articulating the nature of reality, Padma dkar po adopts another key distinction introduced by Yang dgon pa—between *mahāmudrā* as the mode of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*) and *mahāmudrā* in the mode of delusion (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*). Padma dkar po employs this distinction in a number of works in order to articulate a disclosive view of goal-realization and to structure various Mahāmudrā presentations belonging to the Coemergent Unity (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*), Equal Flavour (*ro snyoms*), Four Yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) and Integration and Transference (*bsre 'pho*) cycles. Yang dgon pa had introduced this distinction in his *Trilogy of Mountain Teachings* (*ri chos skor gsum*) to clarify ground *mahāmudrā* in the context of a cycle of retreat instructions aimed at directly introducing (*ngo sprad*) retreatants to the experience of *mahāmudrā*, the abiding nature of mind that underlies the flux of deluded thoughts and emotions. Padma dkar po, in the more polemically fervid climate of his own age, redeployed the distinction in order to clarify key points of 'Brug pa Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā exegesis and to show how these share common doctrinal ground

<sup>1012</sup> *Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung gi lhan thabs chen mo*, Yang dgon gsung 'bum vol. 3, 713: *gshis ci yan ma yin pa stong pa | mdangs 'gags med du gsal ba snying rje | et passim*. See also *Bar do 'phrad sgrol gyi gzhung gdams pa*, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 717 where Yang dgon pa identifies essence with *dharmakāya* and manifestation with the two form *kāyas* (*rupakāya*). On the life of Yang dgon pa, see Stearns 2000, 6–25. Miller 2013, 18–41, and Smith 2001, 46–48.

<sup>1013</sup> *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan*, in *Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtan*, PKsb vol. 21, 588<sub>4-5</sub>: ...*gshis skye ba med pas cir yang ma grub pa la | gdangs 'gag pa med pas cir yang 'char bas snang stong | gsal stong sogs 'jog pa thams cad khyad med do ||*

with a number of influential Buddhist theories of knowledge, truth and emptiness. It is within these varying doctrinal contexts that he delineates the view that there is ultimately but one truth or reality (*bden pa gcig*)—one ground (*gzhi*) or dimension (*dbyings*)—which nonetheless admits of virtually limitless distinctions on the conventional level, the most important among these being the two truths (*satyadvaya*). Making liberal use of the metaphor of a white conch that is perceived as various shades of yellow under the influence of jaundice<sup>1014</sup>, he argues for the primacy of this enduring reality and describes it as what remains when distorted perceptions are cleared away. The path to dispelling them is disclosive insofar as what is revealed in the event of goal-realization is, strictly speaking, only newly discovered and not newly produced.

### EMPTINESS AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE THREE TURNINGS

Padma dkar po's emphasis on the inseparable unity of the two truths (*bden gnyis zug 'jug*) as aspects of a single ground, and the disclosive nature of the path that reveals it, could tempt one to expect that he would endorse an Other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) view along with a strictly subitist (*cig car ba*) approach to goal-realization which privileges a nonconceptual mode of salvific knowledge. Yet this is patently not the case. At one point, Padma dkar po argues that discourses describing the presence of buddha nature in sentient beings need not bring Gzhan stong into the equation at all.<sup>1015</sup> In another instance he explicitly asserts that his own tradition is Rang stong. This declaration occurs in an important treatise on the hermeneutics of the three turnings entitled *Eliminating Doubts About the Three Stages of the Dharmacakra* (*Chos 'khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*) in which Padma dkar po identifies the third and final turning of the Wheel of Dharma with the teachings that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic essence and beyond extremes of existence and nonexistence. These are

<sup>1014</sup> This metaphor has been widely used both in India and Europe with reference to a person whose view is distorted, either literally or metaphorically (as in the “jaundiced view” or “jaundiced eye” of one who has a jaundiced view of things). The analogy is based on the assumption that victims of acute jaundice not only *look* yellow (due to pigmentation of the skin and whites of the eyes caused by too much bilirubin in the bloodstream) but may also *see* yellow, i.e., see objects as having a yellowish hue. There does not appear to be any medical basis for this ‘seeing yellow’ since bilirubin yellows the white part of the eyes (sclera) but does not affect parts of the eye responsible for colour perception.

<sup>1015</sup> *Nalanda mkhan po'i dris lan*, PKsb vol. 12, 4883: “In explaining that buddha nature exists in the continuum of a sentient being, it does not appear to be necessary to go into Gzhan stong. *sems can gyi rgyud la bder gshegs snying po yod par bshad pas gzhan stong du 'gro dgos pa'i nges pa mi snang* | Padma dkar po goes on to state that Mar pa, Mi la and Sgam po pa, Gling ras pa, Gtang pa rgya ras and others maintained a Apratiṣṭhāna view whose two divisions “nonfoundationalism of continuity” (*rgyun rab tu mi gnas*) and “nonfoundationalism of unity” (*zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas*) were the purport of Maitrīpa's teachings. *byams mgon gyis mdo rgyan du | de bzhin nyid ni thams cad la | khyad par med kyang dag gyur pas | de bzhin gshegs nyid de yi phyir | 'gro kun de yi snying po can | zhes gsungs pa lta bur 'dod pa yin | mar mi Dwags gsum | phag gru | gling ras | rgya ras la sogs pa lta ba rab tu mi gnas pa yin | de la'ang rgyun rab tu mi gnas pa dang | zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas pa gnyis 'byed pa Maitrīpa'i dongs pa* |



epitomized by Nāgārjuna’s so-called \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka teachings on lack of intrinsic essence (*niḥsvabhāva*) and having no thesis (*pratijñā*)<sup>1016</sup> which he considers philosophically akin to the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka approach in the sense that both serve to overturn all metaphysical views by going beyond the extremes of existence and nonexistence.<sup>1017</sup> Commenting on Nāgārjuna’s MMK XIII.8 which states

Emptiness is declared by the victors to be  
The purgative<sup>1018</sup> of all [metaphysical] views.  
But those for whom emptiness is a view  
Are declared to be incurable<sup>1019 1020</sup>.

Padma dkar po proceeds to declare “my own tradition is Rang stong” (*bdag gi lugs ni rang stong*). This view he contrasts with the view of “those who have fallen into a one-sided position known as Gzhan stong”. This in turn he equates with the view of opponents criticized by Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* who, on the one hand, falsely imagine conditioned things to be empty in the sense of nonexistent but who, on the other hand, “falsely imagine an intrinsic essence of things for the purpose of [establishing] a locus of that [emptiness].”<sup>1021</sup> Padma dkar po goes on to explain, in line with the MMK and Apratiṣṭhāna Mahāmudrā teachings, that the sense of the term “emptiness” in his tradition (*rang lugs stong pa nyid kyi sgra’i don*) is precisely that of “dependent arising” (*pratītyasamutpāda*).<sup>1022</sup>

<sup>1016</sup> On the understanding of “thesis/proposition” (*pratijñā*) in Nāgārjuna’s philosophy, see Westerhoff 2009, 25–39; 2010, 61–65. On its use in Madhyamaka literature in general, see Ruegg 1983, 213–15; 1986, 232–35. Nāgārjuna’s “no-thesis” statements have been interpreted in many ways by later commentators, both as a claim about reality and about language (communication).

<sup>1017</sup> After quoting Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti on these principles of essencelessness and thesislessness, the *Chos ’khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, PKsb vol. 7, 330<sub>1</sub> states: “Since one transcends all [extremes] of existence and nonexistence, one sees the Apratiṣṭhāna[vāda] Madhyamaka (*rab tu mi gnas dbu ma*). It is the undermining of all [metaphysical] views.” *yod med kun las ’das pas na || rab tu mi gnas dbu ma mthong || lta ba thams cad zlog pa yin ||*

<sup>1018</sup> We here follow the sense of the Sanskrit *niḥsaraṇam* (Tib. *nges par ’byin pa*) as “a remedy to get rid of”, i.e., a purgative. See Monier-Williams s.v. *niḥsaraṇa*.

<sup>1019</sup> Sanskrit term *asādhya* has various meanings including [1] unable to be completed or accomplished, [2] not susceptible of proof, and [3] incurable or irremediable. The Tibetan rendering as *bsgrub tu med pa* seems to follow either [1] or [2] but the context suggests [3] as the more natural reading.

<sup>1020</sup> MMK XIII.7–8 (Ye 2011 ed.): Skt.: *śūnyatā sarvadr̥ṣṭīnām proktā niḥsaraṇam jinaiḥ | yeśām tu śūnyatādr̥ṣṭis tāt asādhyaṇ babhāṣire ||* [8]; Tib.: *lta kun nges par ’byung bar gsungs || gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba || de dag bsgrub tu med par gsungs ||* [8]

<sup>1021</sup> See Padma dkar po, *Chos ’khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, ibid. 330<sub>3–5</sub>, as discussed above, 30 and n. 41.

<sup>1022</sup> *Chos ’khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, PKsb vol. 7, 330<sub>5</sub>: *rang lugs stong pa nyid kyi sgra don gang yin na | rten cing ’brel bar ’byung ba’i sgra’i don te |*

It may be gathered from the foregoing discussion that Padma dkar po's endorsement of Rang stong and rejection of Gzhan stong may be attributed, in part at least, to his philosophical allegiance to the two anti-foundationalist Madhyamaka traditions that were equally sweeping in their rejection of epistemic and ontological foundations. We may recall that Padma dkar po seems to have stood virtually alone amongst Tibetan exegetes in presenting the Svātantrika and \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka traditions as subdivisions of the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka, where the majority of his coreligionists had identified Apratiṣṭhānavāda (or at least one subsect of it) with \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka, and the Māyopamādvayavāda with Svātantrika-Madhyamaka.<sup>1023</sup> The reason he gives for this atypical classification is that Svātantrika and \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka traditions share with the Apratiṣṭhāna tradition the common aim to eradicate all discursive elaborations. The primary difference between them is that the Svātantrika believes that this can be achieved through reasoning based on reliable epistemic procedures, whereas \*Prāsaṅgika does not, seeking instead to simply point out internal contradictions in the opponents' positions.<sup>1024</sup> In this connection, it may also be recalled that the Apratiṣṭhānavāda was precisely the Madhyamaka tradition on which Maitrīpa's Amanasikāra teachings were based.<sup>1025</sup> Given that Padma dkar po moreover identifies Gzhan stong with Cittamātra, specifically the Alīkākāravāda line, and that Cittamātra schools were rejected root and branch by the Apratiṣṭhānavādins, his Rang stong advocacy begins to appear all but inevitable. To complete the picture, we must take into account Padma dkar po's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* critique of the Gzhan stong system of the Jo nang pa which will be analyzed in some detail below. To put it simply, the two most prominent strands of Gzhan stong—those of Shākya mchog ldan and Dol po pa—were considered philosophically untenable to Padma dkar po for various reasons. Yet, we must not forget that Padma dkar po had, in this same text, repudiated the Dge lugs pa's Rang stong view—unquestionably the most

<sup>1023</sup> See above, 39 f. See also Seyfort Ruegg 2000 and Almogi 2010.

<sup>1024</sup> *Dbu ma'i gzhang lugs gsum gsal bar byed pa nges don grub pa'i shing rta*, PKsb vol. 9, 349<sub>2-4</sub>: "The Apratiṣṭhāna tradition does not have any positive determinations or verifications of its own, but undermines the claims made by others. It is two-fold: [1] The Svātantrikas are those who negate the claims of others by relying on reasoning that eradicates discursive elaborations on the basis of validation through three modes of valid means of cognition; [2] The Prāsaṅgikas are those who negate the wrong notions of others through presenting [their own] claims as reasons [for their rejection] and [accordingly] do not accept validation through three kinds of valid means of cognition." *rab tu mi gnas pa'i lugs kyis rang la yongs gcod dam bsgrub bya gang yang med la gzhan gyis khas len bzlog pa la gnyis te | tshul gsum tshad mas grub pa las byung ba'i spros pa gcod byed kyi rigs pa la brten nas gzhan gyi khas len 'gegs pa ni rang rgyud pa yin la | tshul gsum tshad mas grub par khas mi len zhing | khas blangs rtags su bkod nas gzhan gyi log rtog 'gegs pa ni thal 'gyur ba yin no ||*

<sup>1025</sup> See in this regard Almogi 2010 (16) in which the author discusses Vajrapāṇi's identification of the meditation of mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*) with the meditation of Apratiṣṭhānavāda: "The non-[focusing of] attention (or: non-mentation, *yid la mi byed pa: amanasikāra*) that is devoid of false imputation, false depreciation, and attachment [in regard to phenomena] is the meditation [of Apratiṣṭhānavāda]. [To be sure, reaching a state of] total blankness (lit. 'becoming [like] inanimate matter') as a result of holding an annihilationistic view in regard to all [external] objects and [thus no longer] experiencing [phenomena] is [considered by it] a stain in meditation [that should be avoided]."

prominent and influential Rang stong view at the time—on the grounds that it propounds an eternalist view of the conventional and nihilistic view of the ultimate. All this helps to explain Padma dkar po’s qualified espousal of Rang stong and his more general reluctance to claim allegiance to either side of the Rang stong/Gzhan stong divide.

We can gain some idea of why Padma dkar po seemed disinclined to side with either position by looking at his hermeneutics of the three turnings. In his treatise on the three turnings, he sharply criticizes the diametrically opposed Rang stong and Gzhan stong based interpretations of these *dharmacakras*.<sup>1026</sup> These, he suggests, are supported by dubious attempts to assign specific scriptural corpora to the last two turnings on the basis of spurious textual evidence and in order to support a particular philosophical bias. In particular, he objects to citing, on the basis of the *Samdhinirmocana* sūtra, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures as doctrinal support for the middle turning—which he calls the fallacy of a nihilist position (*phyogs chad skyon*)—while taking the *Samdhinirmocana* itself as the basis for the final turning. Padma dkar po concludes: “Those Rang stong thinkers [maintain] that the middle [turning] is of definitive meaning and the final [turning] is of provisional meaning, [while] Gzhan stong thinkers [maintain] the opposite of that.”<sup>1027</sup> In Padma dkar po’s eyes, these mutually exclusive stratagems to align early promulgations of Buddhadharma and scriptural corpora with present-day sectarian views results in a “great heap of fallacies” (*skyon gyi phung po chen po*). His own view is that the last two turnings both taught the philosophy of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras—a view also expressed in the Mantrayāna—while the *Samdhinirmocana* expounded both Madhyamaka and Cittamātra views.<sup>1028</sup>

The bridging of Madhyamaka and Mantrayāna views was central to Padma dkar po’s hermeneutics and makes a fitting note on which to embark upon a more detailed analysis of his Mahāmudrā exegesis. Commenting on the relationship between the Cause-oriented Sūtra vehicle and Goal-oriented Mantra Vehicle, Padma dkar po explains that “when it comes to views for negating objects of negation, since there is no higher level than Madhyamaka, there is no difference [between them]. But if you consider whether or not there is *any* difference at all, there is. In regard to positive determination or affirmation, the [Mantrayāna] speaks of ‘coemergent wisdom’ in light of the experiences of coemergence, wisdom, the swift bliss of union, and the encounter with the actual tantra [as ground] which is to be attained. In such a way, the bliss of the skillful means of union is taken as the path, and the goal is thereby directly

<sup>1026</sup> On Padma dkar po’s criticism of the arbitrary allocations of scriptures to the three turnings in order to justify favoured doxographical positions, see Brunnhölzl 2004, 538–39.

<sup>1027</sup> *Chos 'khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, PKsb vol. 7, 345; *tha mar mdo sde dgongs 'grel sogs 'dzin cing | rang stong ngo snyam pa dag gis bar pa nges don dang | tha ma drang don | gzhan stong ngo sems pa dag gis de bzlog ste |*

<sup>1028</sup> See Brunnhölzl 2004, 539.

realized.”<sup>1029</sup> In the final analysis, the so-called sūtric approach concerns itself with what is to be removed (*spang bya*), whereas the tantric approach deals with what is to be encountered (*sprad bya*). Their corresponding negative and affirmative styles of determination are integral to these soteriological aims.

## HERMENEUTICS OF MAHĀMUDRĀ AS GROUND AND PATH

At the core of Padma dkar po’s Mahāmudrā hermeneutics is the issue of how one can understand *mahāmudrā* as both the abiding nature of human reality and the source of all error and delusion. His principal objectives in addressing this issue are both doxographical and soteriological. On the doxographical side, he is interested in showing how different sūtric and tantric strands of Buddhist thought are interwoven in a nongradual Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā model of the path emphasizing the reconciliation of the two truths, of emptiness and appearance, or of essence (*gshis*) and manifestation (*gdangs*), by directly recognizing their inseparability. On the soteriological side, Padma dkar po is concerned with articulating how the conditions for the possibility of both error and freedom are present within *mahāmudrā* as ground (*gzhi phyag rgya chen po*) and how the possibility of freedom from error depends on *mahāmudrā* as path (*lam phyag rgya chen po*). In this regard, the way he presents and defends *mahāmudrā* as the *fons et origo* of Buddhist thought and praxis hinges on the long-standing Buddhist issue of how to distinguish and reconcile the conditioned and unconditioned elements of human existence so that the aspirant may eventually discern the unconditioned in and through the conditioned.

It is worth noting that Padma dkar po devoted considerably less attention to the minutiae of Indo-Tibetan buddha nature theories and controversies than the other authors considered in this study. Although he often drew attention to the basic disclosive model of immanent buddha nature as shared interpretive framework linking a number of sūtric and tantric Buddhist discourses that variously refer to an immanent condition of mind and reality which is to be progressively revealed by eliminating what obscures it, it would appear that he preferred to steer clear of the often acrimonious debates over the status of buddha nature and buddha-qualities that had preoccupied so many of his coreligionists.

<sup>1029</sup> *Chos ’khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod*, PKsb vol. 7, 345<sub>6</sub>–346<sub>2</sub>: ... ‘bras bu’i theg par bzahag la || rgyu’i theg pa dang ’di gnyis | don ’jug rig ngor khyad med kyang || rnam par dpyad pa | dgag bya ’gegs pa’i lta ba la dbu ma las phul sa med pas khyad med | ’o na khyad med pa zhig gam snyam na yod de | yongs gcod dam sgrub pa la | lhan cig skyes | ye shes | sbyor bde myur dang rgyud dngos sprod thob bya la lhan cig skyes pa’i ye shes zhes smra bas dang | de lta bu la sbyor ba’i thabs bde ba lam du byed pa dang | des ’bras bu mngon sum du ’gyur ba myur ba’i khyad ni bsdu pa yin la | ...

## THE TWO FACES OF MAHĀMUDRĀ: THE MODES OF ABIDING AND ERROR

The Mahāmudrā exegesis of the Fourth 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592) makes frequent use of a key distinction between *mahāmudrā* as the mode of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*) and *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error or delusion (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*)<sup>1030</sup> that was first introduced by Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa (1213–1258), illustrious founder of the Yang dgon subsect of the so-called Upper 'Brug pa (*stod 'brug*) Bka' brgyud tradition.<sup>1031</sup> The distinction is outlined in Yang dgon pa's influential *Trilogy of Hermit Teachings* (*Ri chos skor gsum*),<sup>1032</sup> a comprehensive and elaborately structured cycle of Mahāmudrā instructions to be used by yogins in retreat.<sup>1033</sup> Yang dgon pa is credited with introducing this distinction not only by Padma dkar po himself but also by the latter's disciple Mkhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645)<sup>1034</sup> in a lengthy defence of his master's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*<sup>1035</sup>

<sup>1030</sup> The translation of these technical terms requires careful attention. While the first term assumes a relation of identity between *phyag chen* and *gnas lugs*—viz., *mahāmudrā* is the mode of abiding, the second term assumes a relation of difference between *phyag chen* and *'khrul lugs*—*mahāmudrā* is not the mode of error, though it is specified as being a precondition of the latter and discoverable within it. This clarification was emphasized in post-classical defences of the distinction by Padma dkar po and his disciple Sangs rgyas rdo rje.

<sup>1031</sup> As noted above (347 f.), the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud lineage originated with Gling ras pa Padma rdo rje (1128–1188) and his disciple Gtsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo rje (1161–1211), and later subdivided into three branches: [1] the Upper 'Brug (*stod 'brug*) established by Gling ras pa's disciple Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258), [2] the Middle 'Brug (*bar 'brug*) established by Gling Gtsang pa rgya ras's disciple Lo ras pa Dar ma dbang phyug (1187–1250), and [3] the Lower 'Brug (*smam 'brug*) established by Gtsang pa rgya ras himself. Yang dgon pa counted Rgod tshang pa as one of his four principal teachers and developed this master's distinctively nongradualist style of Mahāmudrā teachings and practices. The Upper 'Brug pa tradition, and the teachings of Rgod tshang pa and Yang dgon pa in particular, exerted a profound influence on later Bka' brgyud masters such as 'Ba' ra ba Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang, Dwags po Bkra' shis rnam rgyal, Padma dkar po, and Mi bskyod rdo rje. Mi bskyod rdo rje's high regard for this tradition is discernable in three works (see MKsb vol. 19) dedicated to presenting and defending it: *Rje rgod tshang pa'i ro snyoms sgang dril*, *Mos gus phyag chen gyi khrid zab mo rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i lugs*, and *Rgyal ba yang dgon pa'i ngo sprod bdun ma'i khrid yig*.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ri chos* is a contraction of *ri khrod pa'i chos*, “teachings for hermits” (*ri khrod pa*), i.e., those who have renounced worldly concerns (*tshe blos btang ba'i ri khrod pa*) and taken up practices of virtue and meditation in mountain retreats.

<sup>1033</sup> An early occurrence of *ri chos* in a text title is a short vademecum by Sgam po pa's student Phag mo gru pa (1110–1170), the *Ri chos bdud rtsi bum pa*, that is preserved in his Collected Works, *Phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, 389–97. Following Yang dgon pa's use of *ri chos* to designate his popular cycle of retreat instructions, it was widely used by Tibetan masters including the Rnying ma pas Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645–1667), Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755), and 'Jigs med gling pa (1729–1798), the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud author Don grub nyi ma (1831–1880), and the Karma Bka' brgyud master Karma chags med (1613–1678). A large number of works styled *ri chos* have been composed in the past two centuries.

<sup>1034</sup> An eminent scholar, Sangs rgyas rdo rje's eight volume Collected Works contain expositions of 'Brug pa doctrine as well as biographies of several 'Brug pa masters including Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bzang po, Mi pham Bkra shis blo gros, and the Fifth 'Brug chen Dpal bsam dbang po (1593–1641).

<sup>1035</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces bya ba'i bstan bcos la Rtsod pa spong ba'i gtam srid gsum nram par rgyal ba'i dge mtshan*, in *The Collected Works of Mkhas-dbang Sangs rgyas-rdo-rje*, vol. 4, 293–636.

which he composed in response to a critical review of this treatise by the Sa skya critic Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho (1523–1596).<sup>1036</sup> Sangs rgyas rdo rje there devotes several pages to clarifying the sense of the distinction and defending its legitimacy, particularly in regard to the contentious idea of “*mahāmudrā* in the mode of error.”

As an innovative interpretation and classification of ground *mahāmudrā*, the distinction between two modes of *mahāmudrā* can be traced from Yang dgon pa (1213–1258), through 'Ba' ra ba Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang (1310–1391), 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor (1428–1476), Padma dkar po himself, and his disciple Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645). It should be noted that the more general distinction between modes of abiding and error (*gnas lugs*) and ('*khrol lugs*) are also attested outside the Bka' brgyud tradition in the writings of the Jo nang founder Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361)<sup>1037</sup> and the Rnying ma systematizer Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308–1364)<sup>1038</sup>, though neither author relates the distinction specifically to Mahāmudrā teachings. Living roughly a half century after Yang dgon pa, it is likely that both masters encountered the distinction in Yang dgon pa's influential Ri chos cycle<sup>1039</sup> and adapted it to their own doctrinal aims.

In fact, it was Dol po pa's sharply drawn distinction between the modes of abiding and error—along with a cluster of related dichotomies—that was taken as the main target of Padma dkar po's lengthy critique of the Jo nang account of the two truths in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* which he presents under the rubric “*mahāmudrā* in the mode of error” ('*khrol lugs phyag chen*). The Jo nang theory of error is there criticized on the grounds that it disregards the fundamental unity of the conventional and ultimate truths, of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, downgrading the former and absolutizing the latter. The theory is likewise charged with violating Nāgārjuna's central teaching on the inseparability of emptiness and dependent arising. This critique is translated and discussed below.<sup>1040</sup>

<sup>1036</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i dka' 'grel sbas don gnad kyi snying po gsal byed Phyag chen rtsod spong skabs kyi legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer*. In *The Collected Works of Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho*, vol. 5, 111–206.

<sup>1037</sup> See, for example, his *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, Peking 1998, 418<sub>4</sub> f. and *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel*, Paro 1984, vol. 1, 599<sub>6</sub> f., 612<sub>5</sub> f. et passim.

<sup>1038</sup> For example, in his *Rdzogs pa chen po sgyu ma ngal gso'i bsdus don man dā ra ba'i phreng ba*, 582<sub>5</sub>–6, Klong chen pa uses the distinction as headings to discuss: [1] the primordial abiding mode (*gdod ma'i gnas lugs*) of the nature of mind (*sems nyid*), [2] the errancy mode ('*khrol lugs*) of dualistic ignorance (*ma rig gzung 'dzin*), and [3] the unreal mode of appearing during errancy due to the power of latent tendencies of subject and object [duality]: *dang po la gsum ste | sems nyid gdod ma'i gnas lugs | ma rig gzung 'dzin gyi 'khrol lugs | gzung 'dzin bag chags kyi dbang gis 'khor ba sna tshogs su 'khor bas 'khrol dus bden med kyi snang lugs so ||*

<sup>1039</sup> In this regard, it may be noted that Klong chen pa received Yang dgon pa's Ri chos cycle from his main preceptor Kumārarāja (Tib. Ku ma rā dza), and also that the title of Dol po pa's most famous work, the *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, identifies it as a “Hermit Teaching” (*ri chos*).

<sup>1040</sup> A critical edition and translation of Padma dkar po's critique is included in Volume II, 157 f.

To understand how Yang dgon pa and Padma dkar po interpreted the two modes of *mahāmudrā*, it may be useful to begin by looking at some of the traditional meanings and uses of each of the terms in the distinction. We can then turn to Yang dgon pa’s specific use of the distinction in the context of his Mahāmudrā instructions, and finally consider how Padma dkar po, revisiting the distinction some three centuries later, redeploys it, within the polemically divisive intellectual atmosphere of his own time, to articulate and defend a view of *mahāmudrā* emphasizing the inseparable unity (*yuganaddha*) of the two truths. In doing so, Padma dkar po also establishes its doctrinal affiliations with certain sūtric and tantric innatist ideas concerning buddha nature, the nature of mind, and the ground, and employs it as powerful model for accounting for the age-old Buddhist problem of how error and confusion adventitiously arise within a medium that is itself invariant and unconditioned.

#### MAHĀMUDRĀ AS THE MODE OF ABIDING (*GNAS LUGS PHYAG CHEN*)

The first term in Yang dgon pa’s distinction, *gnas lugs phyag chen*, is well-attested in Tibetan Mahāmudrā exegesis where it was widely employed as a quasi-synonym of *mahāmudrā*, both as a descriptor of the ground and goal of Buddhist soteriology and as a designation of certain teachings concerned with it. In this regard, it is possible to distinguish three overlapping contexts of usage: [1] as a technical term, [2] as a doxographical construct, and [3] as a thematic rubric.

As a technical term, *gnas lugs phyag chen* is used as a virtual synonym of ground *mahāmudrā* (*gzhi phyag chen*). The first part of the compound *gnas lugs* is a term widely deployed in Tibetan religio-philosophical works to refer to the abiding (*gnas*) condition, mode or nature (*lugs*) of phenomena.<sup>1041</sup> In terms of lexicography, *gnas lugs* and its close relative *dngos po’i gnas lugs* (Skt. *vastuvṛtta*) are ubiquitous in Tibetan canonical translations of Indian works. According to Negi’s *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*<sup>1042</sup>, *gnas lugs* has been used to render a number of Sanskrit terms among which the following are worth mentioning:

<sup>1041</sup> The terms *gnas lugs*, *gnas tshul* and *gnas bzugs* are used to refer respectively to a mode/condition, way/manner and state/continuance of abiding. These terms are closely related to the terms *yin lugs*, *yin tshul* and *yin bzugs* which refer to a mode, way or state of being. Colloquially, *gnas lugs* refers to a state of affairs.

<sup>1042</sup> See Negi s.v. *gnas lugs*. See also Miller 2013 and Broido 1984. Broido criticizes Herbert Guenther’s attempt to interpret *dngos po’i gnas lugs* as an existential category (a mode of being) in line with the European existential tradition and instead recommends defining it as “a kind of insight” (p. 11) that is available to the *cig car ba*. This interpretation misses the point of Padma dkar po’s construal of *dngos po’i gnas lugs* as the abiding ground of both error and freedom and his discussions of its mental and corporeal dimensions where it is characterized both as a prediscursive mode of awareness and as the somatic condition of its possibility.

[1] *stṭhiti*—definitions include ‘abiding’, ‘staying’, ‘continuance in being’, ‘standing upright’, ‘any situation, state, position or abode’, ‘remaining or being in any state or condition’, and ‘that which continually exists’.<sup>1043</sup>

[2] *vr̥tta* or, more specifically, *vastuvr̥tta* (Tib. *dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs*), is a pan-Indian philosophical term that is broadly defined as “the actual fact”, “the real matter”.<sup>1044</sup> It was given more specific definitions by Indian philosophical traditions in line with their differing views of reality. In Indian *pramāṇa* traditions, for example, *vastuvr̥tta* has the sense of “real entities”. In the Sāṃkhya school, it connotes “nature of reality” in keeping with this tradition’s dualism between nature and spirit.<sup>1045</sup> The lexical association of *gn̄as lugs* with the Sāṃkhya idea of *vastuvr̥tta* as unconscious nature is strikingly different from the understanding of *vastuvr̥tta* (*dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs*) that developed in Indo-Tibetan Mahāmudrā systems. There it comprises both psychic and somatic<sup>1046</sup> aspects and is thus broadly classified in terms of the abiding modes of reality of mind and body (*sems/lus dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs*).<sup>1047</sup>

[3] *saṃniveśa*—definitions include ‘assembly’, ‘situation’, ‘open place’, ‘foundation’, ‘assembling together’, ‘entering or sitting down together’, ‘inclusion’<sup>1048</sup>; Negi

<sup>1043</sup> These are among the definitions given in Monier-Williams and Böhtlingk s.v. *stṭhiti*.

<sup>1044</sup> See Negi s.v. *dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs* and Monier-Williams and Böhtlingk s.v. *vastuvr̥tta*.

<sup>1045</sup> On this view, the active but unconscious nature, represented by the feminine principle *prakṛti*, exists in separation from the inactive but conscious spirit, represented by the masculine principle *puruṣa*.

<sup>1046</sup> See Willa Miller’s illuminating analysis of Yang dgon pa’s interpretation of the concept *dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs* with special attention to how it figures in the author’s “somatic theory of enlightenment” which takes the body as “the essential ground of the salvific path” in her PhD thesis *Secrets of the Vajra Body: Dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs and the Apotheosis of the Body in the Work of Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa*. Harvard University, 2013.

<sup>1047</sup> An important Indian Mahāmudrā source for these psychic and somatic dimensions of *vastuvr̥tta* is the \**Pravacanottaropamā* (Tib. *Bka’ dpe phyi ma*), a short text by the siddha-pañḍita Nāropa based on his understanding of instructions (on the six yogas of Nāropa) received from his guru Tilopa. The abiding mode of reality is there identified with the human body as the matrix of somatic processes conducive to spiritual awakening such as energy channels (*nāḍi*) and seminal *bodhicitta*. It is also identified as the locus of unborn and unceasing great wisdom (*ye shes chen po: mahājñāna*) wherein ordinary mind is brought to rest. *Bka’ dpe phyi ma* (D 2332) 545<sub>5-6</sub>: “The personal instructions received from Tilopa on the east bank: [1] the abiding mode of reality, [2] the path, and [3] the stages of coming to fruition. Among these, regarding [1] the abiding mode of reality, [A] the body (*lus*) comprises the five perfect awakenings ([*mngon par*] *byang chub* : [*abhi*] *sambodhi*), the energy channels (*rtsa* : *nāḍi*), the [seminal] *bodhicitta* (*byang chub sems*), and the impure substances and conceptuality. Such somatic phenomena are the working basis. [B] Regarding procedures for resting the mind, [having its] basis in the body (*lus gn̄as*) is great wisdom because it is the essence free from arising and cessation. [2] The path comprises the Generation and Completion [stages].”... *shar phyogs ngogs kyi te lo pa’i* || *zhal sngar gdams pa mn̄os pa ni* || *dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs lam dang ni* || *’bras bu skye ba’i rim pa’o* || *de la dn̄gos po’i gn̄as lugs ni* || *lus ni byang chub rnam lnga dang* || *rtsa dang byang chub sems dang ni* || *mi gtsang rdzas dang rnam rtog gis* || *lus kyi chos ni gn̄as pa yin* || *de la sems kyi gn̄as thabs ni* || *lus gn̄as ye shes chen po ste* || *skye ’gag bral ba’i ngo bo yin* || *lam la bskyed dang rdzogs pa’o* || ...

<sup>1048</sup> See Monier-Williams and Böhtlingk s.v. *saṃniveśa*.



gives as an example “the distinctive assemblage or ensemble (*sanniveṣaviśeṣa* : *gnas lugs kyi khyad par*) of the three aspects of happiness, sorrow and delusion”<sup>1049</sup>.

[4] *saṁsthāna*—definitions include ‘being’, ‘standing’, ‘abiding’, ‘standing still or firm’, ‘abode’, ‘dwelling-place’, ‘nature’, ‘essence’, ‘there-being (Dasein)’, ‘condition’.<sup>1050</sup>

If these Sanskrit antecedents of *gnas lugs* tell us more about how Tibetan lexicographers rendered the term than about how Tibetan thinkers may have interpreted and deployed it, they do shed interesting light on the complex history of a term that continued to take on a wide range of meanings and associations in the Tibetan intellectual world, not least of all in Mahāmudrā traditions.

In these traditions, the term *gnas lugs phyag chen* figures as one of many terms for goal-realization and it is in this sense semantically akin to a wide range of descriptors such as the actual abiding nature of reality (*dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs*)<sup>1051</sup>, coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), and mind as such (*sems nyid*). 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje characterizes Yang dgon pa's “mahāmudrā as the abiding mode” as a continuum (*rgyun chags pa*) that “remains unchanging from beginningless *saṁsāra* through endless *nirvāṇa*,” and qualifies it as “the nature (*rang bzhin*) or abiding mode (*gnas lugs*) of all phenomena” that can be ascertained solely in the context of mind.<sup>1052</sup> Interpreting it as a term with wide-ranging doctrinal affiliations, Padma dkar po later aligns it with a number of core Buddhist soteriological ideas that includes the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*), coemergent nature (*rang bzhin lhan cig skyes pa*), natural luminosity (*rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal*), buddha nature (*de bzhin*

<sup>1049</sup> See Negi s.v. *gnas lugs*.

<sup>1050</sup> See Monier-Williams and Böhtlingks.v. *saṁsthāna*.

<sup>1051</sup> See, for example, Rtse le sna tshogs rang grol's *Chos thams cad kyi snying po phyag rgya chen po'i don yang dag pa rab tu gsal bar byed pa di ma med pa'i sgron ma*, *gzhi dngos po gshes kyi gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba ste*, in *Mkhas grub chen po rtse le sna tshogs ran grol mchog gi gsung gdams zab 'ga' zhig phygs gcig tu bsgrigs pa*, 172<sub>5</sub>–173<sub>1</sub>: “[First,] a concise indication of the meaning of ‘view’ in terms of ground mahāmudrā, the actual abiding mode of reality, both of freedom and error/delusion.” *gzhi phyag rgya chen po dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs 'khrul grol gnyis kyi sgo nas lta ba'i don mdor bstan pa...*

<sup>1052</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig*, *Kun dga' dpal 'byor gsung 'bum* vol. 2, 1686: “How is mahāmudrā described? It is described as the nature or abiding mode of all phenomena. How is this ascertained? It is ascertained solely in the context of mind. How is it taken as the path? All phenomena consisting of sights and sounds are taken as the path. How is the goal attained? Existence and appearance manifest as the play of the three kāyas.” *phyag rgya chen po gang la zer na | chos thams cad kyi rang bzhin nam | gnas lugs la zer | de gtan la gang du 'bebs snyam na | sems nyag gcig gi steng du gtan la 'bebs | lam du gang 'khyer na | snang grags kyi chos thams cad lam du 'khyer | 'bras bu ci ltar thob nyam na | snang srid sku gsum gyi rol par 'char ro ||*

*gshegs pa'i snying po : tathāgatagarbha*), the spiritual potential (*rigs : gotra*), and the all-ground (*kun gzhi : ālaya*).<sup>1053</sup>

Rtse le sna tshogs rang grol (b. 1608), a scholar-practitioner equally well-versed in Mahāmudrā and Rnying ma traditions, connects this concept not only with non-tantric ideas of buddha nature and tantric ideas of immanent buddhahood, but also with the Rnying ma Rdzogs chen idea of an originally pure essence (*ngo bo ka nas dag pa*)—a primary mode of being (*yin tshul*) and awareness that antedates the emergence of ignorance and error.<sup>1054</sup> He goes on to identify this with buddha nature of non-tantric Buddhism, with innate buddhahood of tantric Buddhism, and finally with the Rdzogs chen concept of originally pure and empty essence (*ngo bo ka nas dag pa*). This serves as a prelude to his comparison of Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen accounts of the mode of error (*'khrul lugs*). The author concludes his short discussion by emphasizing the harmony between all these doctrinal systems (*chos lugs thams cad mthun*) in their accounts of how error arises from a primordially undifferentiated ground.

As a doxographical construct, *gnas lugs phyag chen* is commonly used to refer to a tradition of mind-oriented Mahāmudrā teachings that is traced from Saraha to Śavaripa and Maitrīpa and through their Tibetan successors. For example, Rtse le Sna tshogs rang grol identifies *gnas lugs phyag chen* as an epithet for one of the two major strands of Indian Mahāmudrā that Sgam po pa disseminated: [1] the Saraha-Maitrīpa tradition which also goes by the names ‘Awareness-Emptiness Mahāmudrā’ (*rig stong phyag rgya chen po*) and ‘Mental Nonengagement’ (*yid la mi byed pa : amanasikāra*), and [2] the Tilopa-Nāropa tradition of Bliss-Emptiness Mahāmudrā (*bde stong phyag rgya chen po*).<sup>1055</sup>

<sup>1053</sup> *Rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snying po'i rnam par bshad pa*, PKsb vol 24, 377<sub>2-6</sub>: 'ga' zhig tu thams cad stong pa 'od gsal dang | gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po dang | rang bzhin lhan cig skyes pa dang | bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po zhes pa la sogs pa'i ming du mas gdags par mdzad do || rang bzhin de nyid 'gyur ba med kyang snang ba'am | rnam pa dang bcas pa nyid kyis ma dag pa ltar snang ba'i gnas skabs su 'khor ba'i phung khams skye mched sogs ji snyed pa'i gzhi gyur pas | kun gzhi zhes bya zhing | sgrib pa'i cha dag pa na | de nyid de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku gsung thugs mi zad pa rgyan gyi 'khor lo'i gzhi gyur pas rigs sam | rnam pa thams cad pa'am | dbang po thams cad pa zhes bya'o || de ltar yang lang kar gshegs pa las | sems ni rang bzhin 'od gsal te || de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po dge |

<sup>1054</sup> See, for example, his *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i phyogs nas dri ba la lan du bgyis pa*, 403<sub>3</sub>–404<sub>2</sub>, where the author describes *gnas lugs phyag chen* as the ever-present mode of being (*yin tshul*) or dwelling (*bzhugs tshul*), an expanse beyond discursive elaborations (*spros pa thams cad las 'das pa'i dbyings*), wherein self-awareness recognizes its own abiding nature as it really is, coemergent ignorance and error having not yet emerged. He goes on (404<sub>1-2</sub>) to link this with relevant Rdzogs chen terminology: “In the context of Rnying ma Mantra[yāna], it is called the ‘originally pure essence’ (*ngo bo ka nas dag pa*) or ‘being free directly in the [state of] Samantabhadra’ (*kun tu bzang po zhig thog tu grol ba*), whereas in our own Mahāmudrā context, is designated as ‘mahāmudrā in the abiding mode’ (*gnas lugs phyag chen*).” *gsang sngags rnying ma'i skabs tshor | ngo bo ka nas dag pa'am | kun tu bzang po zhig thog tu grol ba zhes zer la | phyag rgya chen po'i rang skabs su ni | gnas lugs phyag chen du ming btags mod lags...*

<sup>1055</sup> *Smin byed kyi dbang dang grol lam*, 84<sub>3</sub>–85<sub>1</sub>: “In India, Nāropa together with his guru Tilopa gave priority to skillful means among the two aspects of means and insight (*thabs shes*). They took coemergent wisdom of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong lhan skyes kyi ye shes*) as Mahāmudrā. This tradition of going to the heart of the

The use of *gnas lugs phyag chen* as a thematic or interpretive category to present and structure subject matter seems to have been largely confined to the Mahāmudrā treatises of Yang dgon pa and Padma dkar po, though we have indicated that the more general rubrics *'khrul lugs* and *gnas lugs* were at times used by scholars of other traditions such as Dol po pa and Klong chen pa, to present and organize the views of their own traditions.

#### MAHĀMUDRĀ IN THE MODE OF ERROR (*'KHRUL LUGS PHYAG CHEN*)

If the technical term *gnas lugs phyag chen* had long been used uncontroversially by Bka' brgyud exegetes as a descriptor, doxographical construct and thematic rubric, its counterpart *'khrul lugs phyag chen* was a contested neologism introduced by Yang dgon pa to serve a more specific philosophical and soteriological purpose. An indication of this purpose is given by Padma dkar po's disciple Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645) in his defence of his teacher's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*. He there defends *'khrul lugs phyag chen* against criticism by the Sa skya critic Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho (1523–1596) who rejected the idea as “a flawed idea (*skyon*) to be dispensed with because it is not validated by reasoning”.<sup>1056</sup> More specifically, Klu sgrub rejects Yang dgon pa's interpretation on the basis of Sa paṇ Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's (1182–1251) criticisms of certain nongradual *mahāmudrā* teachings current amongst the Dwags po Bka' brgyud traditions of his time. This is interesting when one considers both that Yang dgon pa counted Sa paṇ as one of his four root teachers and also that the biographical sources on Yang dgon pa give no indication of any interpersonal or sectarian tension between teacher and student.<sup>1057</sup> Be this as it may, sectarian differences

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path of skillful means through direct experience was taken up by Mar pa, Mi la, Ras chung and others. Maitrīpa and his teacher Śavaripa (*ri khrod dbang phyug*), along with the latter's teacher Saraha, gave priority to insight and emptiness (*shes rab stong pa nyid*) which they termed ‘Awareness-Emptiness Mahāmudrā’ or ‘Amanasikāra’. This Mahāmudrā system which propounded Mahāmudrā in terms of the real wisdom (*don gyi ye shes*) which is only the uncontrived natural flow termed “mental nonengagement” continued from Mar[pa] to Mi[la] and the incomparable Sgam po widely propagated it.” *rgya gar du yang nā ro pa dang de nyid kyi bla ma til li pa dang bcas pa ni | thabs shes gnyis las thabs gtso bor mdzad de | bde stong lhan skyes kyi ye shes la phyag rgya chen por bzhed cing | nyams len kyang thabs lam la gnad du bsnun par mdzad pa'i phyag srol mar pa mi la ras chung sogs kyi 'dzin pa dang | mai tri pa dang de'i bla ma ri khrod dbang phyug | de'i bla ma sa ra ha dang bcas pas ni shes rab stong pa nyid gtso bor mdzad de | rig stong phyag rgya chen po'am | a ma na si kā ra ste | yid la mi byed pa ces bya ba ma bcos sor 'dzag kho na'i don gyi ye shes la phyag rgya chen por bzhed pa'i phyag srol mar mi nas brgyud de mnyam med sgam po pas spel bar mdzad la ||*

<sup>1056</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i dka' 'grel sbas don gnad kyi snying po gsal byed Phyag chen rtsod spong skabs kyi legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer*, in *Klu sgrub rgya mtho gsung skor* vol. 5, 146<sub>4-5</sub>: “In short, in view of [Sapaṇ's] claim that [to attain] *mahāmudrā* it is necessary to depend on wisdom and the stages of empowerments, ‘*mahāmudrā* in the abiding mode’ appears to be a flawed idea that [should be] dispensed with: the statement ‘not verified by reasoning’ is alone sufficient [to make the case]’. *mdor na phyag chen ye shes dbang rim gang rung la ltos dgos par khas blangs pa la | 'khrul lugs phyag chen skyon la gtong par snang ste | rtags ma grub ces pa gcig pus chog go |*

<sup>1057</sup> See Millar 2013, 31–36 for an interesting account of this teacher-student relationship and the influence of Yang dgon pa's vajra body (*rdo rje'i lus*) teachings on early Sa skya masters.

certainly did loom large in Sa paṇ's writings and Klu sgrub does not hesitate to cite certain pronouncements in Sa paṇ's *Sdom gsum rab dbye* to the effect that *mahāmudrā* can only be realized as the fourth and culminating phase in the Buddhist tantric series of four *mudrās* (*Sdom gsum rab dbye* 3.176–77) which themselves depend upon receiving the tantric empowerments along with formal tantric practices of the Generation and Completion stages (ibid. 3.179).

In this regard, it has recently been demonstrated by Klaus-Dieter Mathes that Sa paṇ's criticisms of Tibetan nongradual Mahāmudrā teachings promising those of sharp acumen a less conceptually- and ritually-mediated path to goal-realization by way of direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to the nature of mind—a path which could in some cases circumvent the elaborate system of tantric empowerments and stages of realization—were based on a misinterpretation (intentional or otherwise) of a key passage of the *Caturmudrānvaya*. The passage in question from Sa paṇ's *Sdom gsum rab dbye* reads as follows:

In his *Caturmudrā[nvaya]*, noble Nāgārjuna said this:  
If, through not having known the *karmamudrā*,  
One remains ignorant of the *dharmamudrā*,  
It is impossible for one to understand  
Even the name *mahāmudrā*. (*Sdom gsum rab dbye* 3.178)

Mathes points out that Padma dkar po had correctly shown in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*<sup>1058</sup> that the above passage is not attested or supported in the *Caturmudrānvaya* which says something altogether different. What the relevant passage of this text in fact states, on Padma dkar po's reading of it, is that only the uncontrived *dharmamudrā* (which gives rise to the coemergent nature), and not the contrived union with a *karmamudrā* (the tantric consort), can be the cause of *mahāmudrā*. This is said to follow from the logical premise that there must be a typological concordance between causes and their effects: it is only from a cause of a specific kind (e.g. a rice grain) that a result (fruit) of this same kind (e.g. a rice sprout) can arise. Hence, because something of a contrived nature cannot be the cause of something that is uncontrived by nature, sexual union with a contrived *karmamudrā* or tantric consort cannot be a cause of uncontrived *mahāmudrā*, whereas the uncontrived *dharmamudrā* can.<sup>1059</sup> In corroborating Padma dkar po's rejection of Sa paṇ's interpretation on the basis of an extant Sanskrit edition of the *Caturmudrānvaya*, Mathes at the same time settles a recent dispute over the meaning of Sa skya Paṇḍita's passage by two Tibetanists, Michael Broido

<sup>1058</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, 61.8–66.10.

<sup>1059</sup> See Mathes 2013 for a detailed account of this controversy along with supporting references and quotations.

and David Jackson<sup>1060</sup>, neither of whom consulted any Sanskrit version of the text. The implications of this correction are far-reaching: for, when the scriptural source of Sa paṇ's restrictive definitions of what counts as valid *mahāmudrā* doctrine and practice is interpreted correctly, there is very little to support his influential rejection of nongradual Mahāmudrā systems and the special methods they employ, such as the Guru's direct introduction.

Padma dkar po's responses to Sa paṇ's criticisms were well-known to his student Sangs rgyas rdo rje who does not hesitate to defend Yang dgon pa's siddha-inspired nongradual Mahāmudrā interpretations, and his teacher's assimilation of them, against the Sa skya critic Klu sgrub rgya mtsho. Sangs rgyas rdo rje begins his defence of '*khrol lugs phyag chen*' by confirming that it was "Yang dgon pa who [first] emphasized it as a term and convention (*ming dang tha snyad*)".<sup>1061</sup> He proceeds to quote the opening line of a passage that Yang dgon pa had "appended to a discourse" on the '*khrol lugs phyag chen*'. The passage in question is Yang dgon pa's testimonial validation of his experience of *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error that occurs in his *Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung ba rin po che 'bar ba* immediately following his explication of '*khrol lugs phyag chen*'. In it we are given a rare glimpse of the creative inception of an idea and a vivid example of the validation of doctrinal innovation by means of first-personal attestation. We include here the opening section of the passage:

All you children, consider [this]! By arriving fully at an understanding of this *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error, I swallowed *saṃsāra* whole and made a round trip journey to buddhahood.<sup>1062</sup> I sealed appearance and existence and overturned *saṃsāra* from its depths. Not finding amidst the phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* so much as a hair tip of anything to reject, they were taken as the shifting display (*yo langs*) of the three spiritual embodiments (*kāyas*).<sup>1063</sup>

Sangs rgyas rdo rje goes on to unravel the meaning of this cryptic testimonial:

<sup>1060</sup> See Broido 1987 and Jackson 1990.

<sup>1061</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces bya ba'i bstan bcos la rtsod pa spong ba'i gnam srid gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i dge mtshan*, in *Sangs rgyas rdo rje gsung 'bum* vol. 4, 434<sub>2-3</sub>.

<sup>1062</sup> Sangs rgyas rdo rje ends the quotation here. We have included the remainder of the passage.

<sup>1063</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces bya ba'i bstan bcos la rtsod pa spong ba'i gnam srid gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i dge mtshan*, in *Sangs rgyas rdo rje gsung 'bum* vol. 4, 434<sub>2-4</sub>: '*khrol lugs phyag rgya chen po'i ming dang tha snyad la rtsal 'don mdzad mkhan rgyal ba yang dgon pa yin te khong gi gsung 'phros su | ngas 'khrol lugs phyag rgya chen po 'di la go ba legs par thebs pas 'khor ba la khyur mid rgyab | sangs rgyas la nyin khugs btang ba yin zhes gsungs 'dug |* The passage ascribed to Yang dgon pa (the first part is given in full here) is found, with minor variation, in *Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung ba rin po che 'bar ba*, *Yang dgon gsung 'bum* vol. 1 484<sub>1</sub> right after his explanation of the '*khrol lugs phyag chen*' (see below): *bu kun sems shig | ngas ni 'khrol lugs phyag rgya chen po de ka go bas | 'khor 'das la khyur mid rgyab | sangs rgyas la brnyen bkur byas | snang srid rgya thebs su song | 'khor ba dong nas sprugs | 'khor 'das kyi chos la dor rgyu skra'i rtse mo tsam cig kyang ma rnyed pas | sku gsum gyi yo langs byas pa<sup>a</sup> yin no ||* <sup>a</sup>text: *ba*

In the post-composure state of yogis who have seen the abiding condition face to face by depending on the practice of Unsurpassed Guhyamantra[yāna], the constellation of previous latent tendencies may resurface as the reflected images of thoughts and emotions, arising as the whole spectrum of their unobstructed modes of expression. But when [these yogis] fully recognize the nature [of these thoughts and emotions] without reacting to them unreflectively in the manner of ordinary people, and thus take [them] as the creative energy (*rtsal*) of their practice, then these [thoughts and emotions] are displayed from the very start as the interdependent [aspects] of the two form embodiments (*rūpakāya*). This was emphasized with those words [of Yang dgon pa]. From the standpoint of what appears as error, there are afflictive emotions such as aversion. [But] from the standpoint of recognizing their nature, they are *mahāmudrā* [in the form of] the mirror-like wisdom and the rest.<sup>1064</sup>

Now, on Sangs rgyas rdo rje interpretation, Yang dgon pa's idea of “*mahāmudrā* in the mode of error” is perfectly intelligible to the tantric yogi who has come “face to face” with *mahāmudrā* because it clarifies how this abiding mode remains discernable in all post-composure experiences by virtue of its pervasive, invariant nature. Stated otherwise, the fleeting thoughts and feelings that resurface in post-meditation due to residual karmic imprints/tendencies (*bag chags*) are, in the words of Yang dgon pa, the “shifting display (*yo langs*) of the three *kāyas*,” and thus available to the yogin as the creative energy (*rtsal*) of practice. Recognized as they are, this flux of thoughts and feelings dissipate on their own. Yang dgon pa's interpretation had previously been metaphorically described by the Second 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje in terms of “error being liberated in its own source, like ice naturally melting into water,” with the implication that “apart from recognizing what error really is, one [need] not seek wisdom as something else.”<sup>1065</sup> The point of these authors is that one does not discern the three *kāyas* in spite of the shifting flux of thoughts and feelings that surface but in and through them. As Yang dgon pa later explains in clarifying the sense of “innate ignorance”, the three *kāyas* generally escape notice not because they are too remote

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid. 434<sub>5</sub>–435<sub>2</sub>: *gsang sngags bla med kyi nyams len la brten nas gnas lugs kyi rang zhal gzigs pa'i rnal 'byor pa rnams kyi rjes thob tu | sngon gyi bag chags tsho nam rtog dang nyon mongs kyi gzugs brnyan du lhongs te ma 'gags pa'i 'char sgo ji snyed 'byung yang | de la tha mal pa bzhin rang gar mi spyod par | rang bzhin yongs su shes pa'i nyams len gyi rtsal du khyer nas gzugs sku gnyis kyi rten 'brel de thog nas sgrig pa la de skad du bsnyad pa ste | 'khrul pa ltar snang ba'i cha nas zhe sdang sogs nyon mongs | rang bzhin shes pa'i cha nas me long lta bu'i ye shes sogs phyag chen |*

<sup>1065</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig, Kun dga' dpal 'byor gsung 'bum* vol. 2, 166<sub>2</sub>: ...*chu dang chub rom ngang gi zhu ba ltar | 'khrul pa rang sar grol ba'am | 'khrul pa'i de nyid shes pa las gzhan pa'i ye shes logs su mi 'tshol te | ...*

but because they are too close,<sup>1066</sup> like the eye one sees through but does not see. In other words, they are ‘transparent’ not in the sense of being ‘self-evident’ but in the opposite sense of being ‘see-through’.

Turning to the more philosophical interpretations by Padma dkar po and Sangs rgyas rdo rje, *mahāmudrā* in its abiding mode is adopted as a framework to account for the basic problem of how error and delusion arise within an unconditioned, invariant experiential continuum. Stated concisely, although ground *mahāmudrā*, the nature of mind, is not subject to modification or adulteration and remains just as is, distortion and delusion nonetheless occur. Now, this problem had long been addressed by earlier Tibetan thinkers, perhaps most rigorously within the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) tradition in response to the question “does error exist in the ground?”<sup>1067</sup> It is noteworthy that this very question is raised and addressed by Padma dkar po himself in different contexts of *Mahāmudrā* exegesis, and with occasional deference to ’Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje’s treatment of the problem.

The problem for these thinkers was how to reconcile adventitious error with an abiding ground which is said to be inherently pure and free from error. Returning to Rtse le Sna tshogs rang grol’s illuminating comparison of Yang dgon pa’s distinction with other Buddhist doctrinal systems (exoteric and esoteric), we may make note of the affiliation he draws between the Great Seal (*phyag chen*) distinction between *gnas lugs phyag chen* and *’khrul lugs phyag chen* and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) distinction between the abiding nature of the ground (*gzhi’i gnas lugs*) and adventitious error (*glo bur gyi ’khrul pa*). In clarifying the *Rdzogs chen* distinction, he observes that the abiding nature of the ground is the originally pure (*ka dag*) empty (*stong pa*) essence (*ngo bo*), whereas adventitious error arises due to the ground’s spontaneously present (*lhun grub*) nature (*rang bzhin*) and all-pervading (*kun khyab*) responsiveness (*thugs rje*). “In short,” he concludes, “when it comes to the ways of ascertaining the three [aspects of] ground, path and fruition, all these doctrinal systems (*chos lugs*) are in accord, and letting the ground manifest as the path is the most important path”.<sup>1068</sup>

<sup>1066</sup> This is also how Mi bskyod rdo rje clarifies the sense of this analogy in his *Hwa shang dang ’dres pa’i don mdzub tshugs su bstan pa*, MKsb vol. 15, 1085<sub>2-3</sub>: “For example, as is said in worldly talk, due to being too close, the eye cannot see itself by itself...” *dper na ’jig rten gyi kha ngag tu | nye drags pas mig gis mig ma mthong ba lta bur gyur te | ...*

<sup>1067</sup> On Rnying ma responses to the question of whether or not error exists in the primordial ground (*gdod ma’i gzhi de la ’khrul pa yod dam med*), see Higgins 2013.

<sup>1068</sup> *Nges don phyag rgya chen po’i phyogs nas dri ba la lan du bgyis pa Yid bzhin nor bu’i do shal*, *Rtse le sna tshogs rang grol gsung ’bum* vol. 404<sub>2</sub>–405<sub>4</sub>: “Not recognizing the nature of that [*mahāmudrā* in the abiding mode], coemergent ignorance occurs, as when one is obscured by one’s own shadow, in a manner similar to the arising of patina on gold. Through the power of the seeds of error and *samsāra* progressively unfolding, sentient beings roam around in *samsāra* and thus, in the state of wandering in error (*’khrul ’khyams gyur pa’i skabs*), due to the invariance endemic to the essence of the ground, error may be reversed and vanquished [by the] three [factors of] the teacher, the instructions and diligent application because one is endowed with the opportunity for freedom...” The author here provides supporting quotations from the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Śrīmālādevī-*

We may note here the extent to which this Rdzogs chen account of essence, nature and responsiveness (*ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje*) parallels Yang dgon pa's analysis of ground *mahāmudrā* in terms of essence, nature and characteristics (*ngo bo rang bzhin mtshan nyid*), an analysis that is also adopted by later Mahāmudrā exegetes, an influential example being Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang gi don* stanza 1.1.<sup>1069</sup> At any rate, the influence of Rdzogs chen thought on Yang dgon pa's Mahāmudrā exegesis is unmistakable. We see it not only in the context of this distinction, but in his use of distinctly Rdzogs chen terminology such as *ye shes rtsal rdzogs* etc. This influence is not surprising when we consider his family and religious background. 'Gos Lo tsā ba informs us in the *Deb ther sgom po* that Yang dgon pa's family lineage featured many adepts of the Rnying ma tradition, including his own parents.<sup>1070</sup> 'Gos lo also reports that Yang dgon pa was introduced to Buddhism at age five when the Rnying ma master and *Guhyagarbha* specialist Sangs rgyas Mi bskyod rdo rje (b. 12<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>1071</sup> arrived in his home town of Dgon pa lha gdong in Southern La stod in the guise of a beggar and was recognized as an incarnation by the young boy. The Rnying ma master proceeded to adopt the precocious child as his spiritual son. Although Sangs rgyas Mi bskyod rdo rje is not counted among Yang dgon pa's four principal masters—Ko brag pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1170–1249), Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258), Sa paṇ (1182–1251), and 'Bri

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*simhanāda* on the idea of innate buddha nature and from the *Hevajra* tantra concerning innate buddhahood. He continues: “There are immeasurable such statements among the sūtras, tantras and treatises. In this regard, in Rdzogs chen this [arising of ignorance and error within the unchanging ground] is described in detail in terms of “spontaneously present nature” (*rang bzhin lhun grub*) and “all-encompassing responsiveness” (*thugs rje kun khyab*) and according to our own Mahāmudrā, it is given the name “mahāmudrā in the mode of error” (*'khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po*). Therefore, in short, when it comes to ascertaining this in terms of ground, path and fruition, all these doctrinal systems are in accord, and letting the ground manifest as the path is the most important path...” *de'i rang bzhin ma rtogs par rang gi grib mas rang nyid bsgrub pa ltar | lhan skyes kyi ma rig pa gser la g.ya' skyes pa bzhin du byung ste 'khrul zhing 'khor ba'i sa bon rim can du 'phel ba'i dbang gis sems can rnams 'khor bar 'khyams shing | de ltar 'khrul 'khyams gyur pa'i skabs na yang gzhi'i ngo bo la 'gyur ba med pa'i dbang gis 'khrul pa ldog tu btub cing | bla ma dang gdams ngag brtson 'grus gsum 'joms ma grol ba'i skal ba dang ldan pa'i phyir | ... gzhan yang mdo rgyud bstan bcos rnams nas lung dpag med mchis shing | 'di la rdzogs chen du ni rang bzhin lhun grub dang thugs rje kun khyab sogs kyi rgyas bshad dang phyag chen rang las ni 'khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po sogs ming du btags pa mdzad phyir | mdo na gzhi lam 'bras gsum gtan la 'bebs tshul ni chos lugs thams cad mthun cing gzhi lam mngon du byed pa lam gal che ba...*

<sup>1069</sup> See Volume II, 118–19. In this stanza, Rang byung rdo rje describes the ceaseless play of beginningless mind in terms of its pure essence, luminous nature and unimpeded aspects.

<sup>1070</sup> Roerich 1976, 688.

<sup>1071</sup> This most likely refers to La stod Mi bskyod rdo rje, alias Sman lung pa Mi bskyod rdo rje or Mnga' bdag nyang Mi bskyod rdo rje (b. 12<sup>th</sup> century). He is identified in Bdud 'joms rin po che's *chos 'byung* as one of the five principal disciples of the Rnying ma master Nyang ral Nyi ma'i 'od (1124–1192) who passed on the transmitted precepts (*bka' ma*) of the Rnying ma tradition. See Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, 759. He is also identified as one of the foremost disciples of the Rnying ma treasure revealer (gter ston) Chos kyi dbang phyug (1212–1270), though this would have to have been at a fairly old age. See *ibid.* 770. This Mnga' bdag nyang Mi bskyod rdo rje is ascribed as the author of three commentaries included in the Rnying ma Bka' ma collections (e.g., *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 71, 5–499, 519–636, and 667–62).



gung Spyān Inga Grags pa 'byung gnas (1175–1255)<sup>1072</sup>—'Gos Lo tsā ba mentions him as an important early influence.<sup>1073</sup>

#### YANG DGON PA ON THE TWO MODES OF MAHĀMUDRĀ

The distinction between two modes of *mahāmudrā* is a keystone in Yang dgon pa's Mahāmudrā teaching, locking its various elements into place. In his Ri chos cycle, it is typically presented as a subdivision of the first of the three basic categories of *mahāmudrā* as ground (*gzhi*), path (*lam*) and goal (*'bras bu*) in order to clarify how this ground *mahāmudrā* is both an abiding condition and the condition of possibility of error and obscuration. More specifically, it is presented in the context of the signless (*mtshan med*) aspect of the Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) meditation belonging to the path of liberation (*grol lam*) and is, in this context, styled as a special path (*khyad par gyi lam*) as distinct from the common path (*thun mong gyi lam*) teachings that precede it in the Ri chos cycle.<sup>1074</sup> The diagram on the following page clarifies the place of the distinction within Yang dgon pa's Ri chos systematization of *mahāmudrā*.

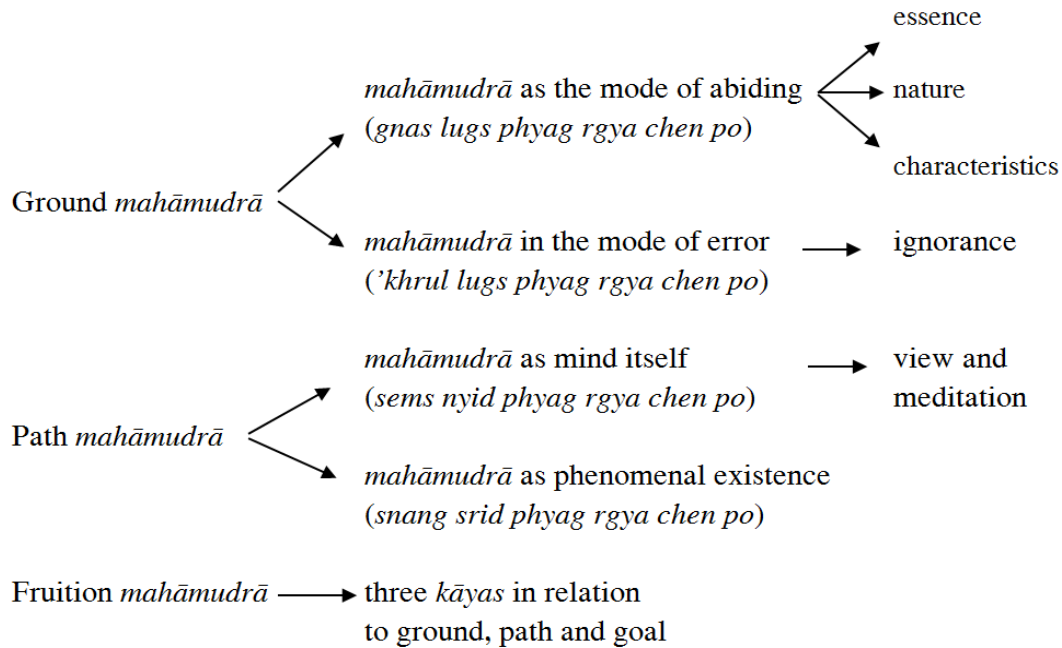
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<sup>1072</sup> Miller 2013, 25–38.

<sup>1073</sup> Roerich 1976, 689–90. He was particularly renowned for his *Guhyagarbha* (GGT) exegesis. See his *Gsang ba snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don*, in *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* vol. 71, 528<sub>3</sub> ff.

<sup>1074</sup> The imageless (*mtshan med*) Completion Stage meditation is an objectless meditation that typically follows the Completion Stage meditation having images (*mtshan bcas*). The former takes as its frame of reference the energy channels, currents and potencies (*rtsa rlung thig le*). In this context, the Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) follows deity visualizations of the Generation Stage (*bdkyed rim*), bringing an understanding that what manifests in visualization is empty, having no intrinsic essence. The details of Yang dgon pa's highly original Mahāmudrā system go beyond the scope of this work, but it is worth noting that the special Mahāmudrā teachings mentioned here belong to, and presuppose knowledge of, a complex sequence of tantric teachings.

*Mahāmudrā* as ground, path and goal according to Yang dgon pa's  
*Ri chos Yon tan kun 'byung ba Rin po che 'bar ba*



Following the direct style of oral transmission common to many pre-fourteen century Mahāmudrā discourses, Yang dgon pa imparted this complex cycle of Mahāmudrā teaching in order to provide his circle of close disciples with a series of instructions for the practice and realization of *mahāmudrā*. With this purpose and this audience in mind, Yang dgon pa gave scant attention to establishing connections with classical Buddhist philosophical and doxographical systems. His treatment therefore differs markedly in scope, style and content from later scholastic appropriations of his teachings by masters such as Padma dkar po who were writing for a much wider audience and at a time when questions of legitimacy loomed large. Our focus is at this juncture confined to determining the scope and significance of Yang dgon pa's distinction and assessing the function it played within the author's *Ri chos Trilogy*. A good place to start is his *Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung ba Rin po che 'bar ba* where he offers the following introduction:

The first [*mahāmudrā* as ground] is two-fold: [1] *mahāmudrā* as the abiding mode of reality and [2] *mahāmudrā* in the mode of delusion. [1] The first is known as “the abiding mode of reality as the ground” (*gzhi dngos po'i gnas lugs*) “the way of dwelling of mind as such” (*sems nyid kyi bzhugs tshul*), “a buddha's enlightened intent” (*sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa*), “mind as such in minded beings” (*sems can*

*gyi sems nyid*), and “the authentic nature of the knowable” (*shes bya gnyug ma’i gshis*). It is triply present as essence, nature and characteristics.<sup>1075</sup>

Noteworthy here are Yang dgon pa’s identifications between *mahāmudrā* as the mode of abiding and the nature of mind and the nature of reality. It is important to reiterate that Yang dgon pa makes no attempt here or elsewhere in the Ri chos corpus to explicitly connect this *gnas lugs phyag chen* with buddha nature theory, though his successors such as Padma dkar po would make a point of drawing attention to their common doctrinal ground.

How are we to understand Yang dgon pa’s silence on this theoretical connection? Clearly *not* because buddha nature ideas were unknown or unimportant to him, for *tathāgata-garbha* doctrines were well-known and widely accepted by Tibetans from as early as the eighth century. We propose that his silence must instead be attributed to the primarily *practical* orientation of the Ri chos teachings which employ philosophical ideas and categories mainly to clarify issues of soteriological praxis, but with little attempt to defend or substantiate them by means of the standard means of authentication—scripture and reasoning.

Turning his attention to *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error, Yang dgon pa states:

As for *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error, the abiding mode in its self-manifestation is empty in essence, and [this] emptiness is imbued with the quintessence of awareness. Since this [empty awareness] which has been primordially present as the inseparable unity of the three *kāyas* emerges together (*lhan cig skyes pa*) with ‘one-self’, there is the basic nonrecognition that constitutes ignorance because if the “by whom” is not recognized, then “by oneself” is not recognized. And if “who” is not recognized, then “oneself” is not recognized. [Thus] when one does not recognize oneself as one really is, ... then that constellation of cognitions based on nonrecognition—which are like [trying to] point out forms in the dark—is called ‘coemergent ignorance’.<sup>1076</sup>

<sup>1075</sup> *Ri chos yon tan kun ’byung ba rin po che ’bar ba, Yang dgon bka’ ’bum*, vol. 1, p. 479.3 f: *dang po la gnyis te | gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po dang | ’khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po’o || dang po gzhi dngos po’i gnas lugs sems nyid kyi bzhugs tshul | sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa | sems can gyi sems nyid | shes bya gnyug ma’i gshis de ngo bo rang bzhin mtshan nyid gsum du gnas te |*

<sup>1076</sup> *Ibid.*, *Yang dgon bka’ ’bum*, vol. 1, p. 481<sub>3-5</sub>: *’khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po ni | gnas lugs rang snang ngo bo stong zhing | stong pa rig pa’i snying po can | sku gsum dbyer med du ye nas gnas pa de rang dang lhan cig skyes pas ma rig pa’i ngo ma shes te | gang gis ngo ma shes na rang gis ngo ma shes | gang ngo ma shes na rang ngo ma shes ji ltar ngo ma shes na... mun pa la gzugs bstan bzhin ngo ma shes pa’i shes pa tshogs pa de lhan cig skyes pa’i ma rig pa’o |*

Mahāmudrā in the mode of error is here characterized as an impaired view, which the author further qualifies in terms of innate or coemergent ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa*) and reifying or conceptually fabricated ignorance (*kun tu brtags pa'i ma rig pa*). He interprets the first as an innate *nonrecognition* whereby one does not recognize one's nature as it is. Because this nature is so intangible—being free from the subject-object dichotomy and therefore inaccessible to representation by thought and language—it goes unrecognized, like the eye that is unable to see itself.<sup>1077</sup> As indicated above, *mahāmudrā* in its abiding condition goes unseen not because it is too remote but, rather, because it is so close and intangible that we see right through it. In short, it is “transparent” not in the self of being self-evident but in the contrasting sense of being see-through, and not readily discernable. Reifying ignorance is interpreted as an acquired *misrecognition* whereby one recognizes one's nature as other than it is. It may be traced to the incipient phase of self-alienation from basic awareness whereby “from emptiness [come] discursive elaborations, from appearance [comes] grasping objects, and from awareness [comes] grasping a self. In that way, depending on the ‘self’ there is the ‘other’ and thus self-manifestation is grasped objectively. From the aspects of self and other arise the three [afflictive emotions] of attachment, aversion and delusion. One thus accumulates karma and experiences its maturation.”<sup>1078</sup>

Yang dgon pa here explains that even when it goes unrecognized, one's abiding condition remains invariantly and primordially present as the unity of the *dharmakāya*, *sambhōgākāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*, like forms in the dark which remain fully present even when they are completely or partially unseen. On this view, even the mind's most hellish visions are but vivid manifestations of the three spiritual embodiments (*trikāya*):

While experiencing the most far-reaching manifestations of confusion—the torments of hell—they are vividly present [in] self-luminous self-awareness as the essence of three *kāyas*. Not recognizing them as such, they are taken as “hell” and one fails to fully understand them. Recognizing them as they are, the hell-vision of awareness is relinquished. Without having to search elsewhere, this very hell-vision of awareness is subsumed by the three *kāyas*. This is precisely what is known as ‘*mahāmudrā* in the mode of error’.<sup>1079</sup>

<sup>1077</sup> *Yang dgon bka' 'bum*, vol. 1, p. 481<sub>6</sub>.

<sup>1078</sup> *Yang dgon bka' 'bum*, vol. 1, p. 482<sub>1-3</sub>: *de la kun tu brtags pa'i ma rig pa ni | ma rig pa la tshoms mun ne bsdad na gti mug cig pa las mi 'byung ba la | gshis rig par gnas pa des de ma thag log par khyu rig nas stong pa las spros pa byung | snang ba las yul du bzung | rig pa las bdag tu bzung | der bdag la ltos nas | gzhan byung bas rang snang la yul du bzung | der bdag gzhan gyi cha las chags sdang rmongs gsum skyes | der las bsags | las la rnam pa smin par myong ste |*

<sup>1079</sup> *Yang dgon bka' 'bum*, vol. 1, p. 483<sub>7-484</sub><sub>1</sub>: *'khrul snang gi mthar thug dmyal ba'i sdug bsngal myong ba'i dus na yang rang rig rang gsal sku gsum gyi ngo bor krong nge gnas te | ngo ma shes pas dmyal bar bzung ba ma*

The very reflexivity of this error of non-self-recognition means that its reversal—the path of freedom from error—also occurs of its own accord when thoughts and emotions are recognized for what they are. Elaborating on this boot-strapping model of error and freedom, Yang dgon pa characterizes the Buddhist path as a “self-occurring path whereby the vital quintessence takes its own course” (*lam rang byung snying po'i rang 'gros*) and he further specifies this as his own special doctrine (*yang dgon pa'i khyad chos*). This is a path that unfolds spontaneously from the first instant of nondual awareness. The following passage summarizes Yang dgon pa's view of *mahāmudrā* as the path, the process whereby its abiding mode is discerned in and through the mode of error.

Whatever crops up is in essence the manifestation of clarity and emptiness, uncorrupted and unblemished. When that is first present as emotions or thoughts, but later recognized for what it is, [these emotions and thoughts] have not passed into wisdom or emptiness. From the very start, even while abiding, they abide in emptiness.<sup>1080</sup> Even while arising, they arise in emptiness. Even while being (*yin*), they are empty. Even while liberated, they are liberated in emptiness. Even while appearing, they appear in emptiness. Even while moving<sup>1081</sup>, they move in emptiness. There isn't a single [thought or emotion] that is not this surging wave of emptiness.

For example, when a fish swimming in middle of the ocean swims east, there is ocean. When it swims west, there is ocean. When it swims south, north, upward, downward, or wherever, there is ocean. Likewise, when a bird soars in the open sky, wherever it soars is sky. Following these examples, when a yogi of *mahāmudrā* soars freely into the expanse<sup>1082</sup> of *mahāmudrā*, whatever rises is

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*rtogs pa ngo shes nas dmyal ba'i snang rig de spangs la | gzhan nas btsal ma dgos par | dmyal ba'i snang rig de ka sku gsum du 'dus pa de ka la 'khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po zer ba yin te | ...*

<sup>1080</sup> The meaning of this and similar statements that follow is difficult to translate: it is possible to render *stong par* adverbially as “emptily” (in an empty manner) and the *yang* as the concessive “although”, thus, “Although they arise, they arise emptily”. We have opted for the locative *la bdun* “in emptiness” because it fits with the metaphors the author uses to illustrate the point (birds in the sky, fish in the sea) and the more flexible “even while” for *yang*, a term which can have either concessive or continuous connotations.

<sup>1081</sup> Yang dgon pa elsewhere defines the wandering or moving (*'gyus pa*) of thoughts as a process of superimposition. As he clarifies, both the dwelling and wandering of thoughts proceed from the single essence of Mind. Consequently, there is nothing that is not the luminosity of Mind's self-awareness, so it is not the case that one enters into meditation by suppressing or blocking this process of “wandering of thoughts”. *Yang dgon gsung 'bum* vol. 1, 226i: *gnas 'gyus gnyis la sems kyi ngo bo cig las 'dug ge | 'gyus pa zhes sgro btags pa yin | sems rang rig du gsal ba min pa med | rtog pa 'gyus pa zhes tshul bkug nas sgom la 'jug pa ni min no |*

<sup>1082</sup> *Nges phyag* has “into the centre” (*dkyil la*); *Yang dgon gsung 'bum* and *'Bri mdzod* have “into the *maṇḍala*” (*dkyil 'khor la*).

*mahāmudrā*, whatever moves is *mahāmudrā*, and anything he does is *mahāmudrā*. All that appears is *mahāmudrā*. All he experiences is *mahāmudrā*. If [mind] abides, so be it. If it wanders, so be it. If it is clear, so be it. If it is overcast, so be it. It's fine if there is mindfulness. It's fine if there is distraction. It's fine if there is depression. It's fine if there is elation. If there is confusion, so be it. If there's freedom, so be it. There is no past—you don't experience what has gone. Before is it. After is it. Now is it. The three times and no time are just this alone. At that time, the six cognitive capacities<sup>1083</sup> are [your] helpers in meditation. The appearances before the five sense gates manifest as a sacred text (*dpe char 'char*). One reaps benefit from circumstances involving the eight worldly concerns.<sup>1084</sup>

Seeing those emotions and thoughts nakedly in their very essence, they are vividly present in their raw clarity and emptiness. So, without having to eliminate an emotion on one side with its antidote on the other, emotions are their own antidotes. Amidst the conflict between the emotions themselves as they flare up and [as they are taken to be] objects to be eliminated<sup>1085</sup>, the antidote is [already] fully in play as the expressive energy of wisdom (*ye shes rtsal rdzogs*)<sup>1086</sup>, and thus *samsāra* is overturned from its depths. This “self-occurring path whereby the vital quintessence takes its own course” is the special teaching of Bla ma Yang dgon pa.<sup>1087</sup>

<sup>1083</sup> Literally “powers of the sixfold [cognitive] ensemble” (*tshogs drug gi dbang pos*). We have dropped the ergative in our translation which would be grammatically problematic.

<sup>1084</sup> The eight worldly concerns (*'jig rten gyi chos brgyad*) are: 1) gain and loss (*rnyed pa dang ma rnyed pa*) 2) fame and disgrace (*snyan grags dang ma grags*) 3) praise and blame (*bstod pa dang smad pa*) 4) pleasure and pain (*bde ba dang sdug bsngal*).

<sup>1085</sup> The conflict arises between the emotions as they present themselves prereflectively and as they are taken reflectively as objects to eliminate (*sbyang bya*).

<sup>1086</sup> This Rdzogs chen technical term is difficult to translate, and is here paraphrased. Used as an abstract noun, it conveys the innatist idea that the expressive powers of wisdom/primordial knowing (*ye shes*) are already full-fledged like the mythical garuḍa that is already full-fledged within the egg. In other words, they do not grow or mature, nor can they be developed or produced. Used as a verb, it conveys the idea of bringing these latent full-fledged expressive capacities fully into play (*rtsal du rdzogs pa*). In the present context, it is used to suggest that wisdom contains within itself the innate capacities necessary to liberate adventitious thoughts and emotions upon their arising, so antidotes need not be sought or produced elsewhere.

<sup>1087</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyis thon chos*, *Yang dgon bka' 'bum*, vol. 1, p. 226<sub>1</sub>–227<sub>5</sub>: *gang shar de ka' ngo bo so ma nyams | mdog ma bsgyur bar<sup>b</sup> gsal stong du<sup>c</sup> 'char ba yin | de la dang po nyon mongs sam<sup>d</sup> rnam rtog du yod pa la | phyis ngo shes pas<sup>e</sup> ye shes sam stong par song pa min no | thog ma nyid nas gnas kyang stong par gnas | shar yang stong par shar | yin yang stong pa yin | grol yang stong par grol | snang yang<sup>f</sup> stong par snang | 'gyus kyang stong par 'gyus<sup>g</sup> stong pa'i rba rlabs min pa cig kyang mi bdog<sup>h</sup> | dper<sup>i</sup> na rgya mtsho'i dkyil<sup>j</sup> du nya mo cig 'phyos de shar du 'phyos kyang rgya mtsho | nub tu 'phyos kyang rgya mtsho | lho byang steng 'og gar 'phyos kyang rgya mtsho'o | nam mkha' stong pa la bya gcig 'phul a de gang du 'phur ba de nam mkha' | dpe de bzhin du phyag rgya chen po'i rnal 'byor pa phyag rgya chen po'i dkyil 'khor<sup>k</sup> la kha yan du<sup>l</sup> rdeg pa de gang ltar shar kyang phyag rgya chen po | gang ltar 'gyus kyang phyag rgya chen po | ji ltar byas kyang phyag rgya chen po | snang ba thams cad phyag rgya chen po | myong ba thams cad phyag rgya chen po | de la gnas kyang chog la 'gyus kyang chog | gsal yang chog la rmugs kyang chog | dran yang chog la yengs kyang*

Yang dgon pa's description of path *mahāmudrā* as a “self-occurring path whereby the quintessence takes its own course” reflects a strikingly innatist soteriology which takes the entire spectrum of altruistic activities that comprise the Buddhist path as immanent capacities revealed and brought into play by unmediated direct perception. On this view, traversing the stages of the path is a matter of sustaining the “freshness” (*so ma*) of the first instant of nondual awareness before it gives way to the subjectivizing and objectifying mental activities which set in motion the chain of actions and reactions known as *samsāra*.<sup>1088</sup> This is a decidedly

*chog | bying yang chog la rgod yang chog | 'khrul yang chog la grol yang chog | 'das pa med | 'da' ma myong sngar yang 'di ka | phyis kyang 'di ka | da lta'ang 'di ka kha bgyi | dus gsum dus med du | 'di ka la bgyi'o | de tsa na tshogs drug gi dbang pos bsgom gyi grogs<sup>m</sup> byed | sgo lnga'i snang ba de dpe char 'char<sup>n</sup> | rkyen 'jig rten chos brgyad kyi bogs 'don byed pa ste | nyon mongs sam rnam rtog de ka'i ngo bos gcer gyis bltas pas de ka gsal stong du rjen lhang nger shar nas | nyon mongs log gcig la gnyen po log gcig gis spangs ma dgos par | nyon mongs kho rang gi gnyen por | nyon mongs kho rang 'bar zhing spang bya mi mthun pa'i gseb nas<sup>o</sup> gnyen po ye shes rtsal rdzogs nas 'khor ba dong nas sprug pa lam<sup>p</sup> rang byung<sup>a</sup> snying po'i rang 'gros bya ba bla ma yang dgon pa'i khyad chos lags so ||<sup>a</sup> Yang dgon bka' 'bum: skyes pa'i; <sup>b</sup>mdog ma bsgyur bar om. in Nges don phyag chen and 'Bri gung mdzod chen; <sup>c</sup>Nges don phyag chen: rjen; <sup>d</sup>am om in Yang dgon gsung 'bum; <sup>e</sup>ngo shes pas om. in Nges don phyag chen and 'Bri gung mdzod chen; <sup>f</sup>Nges don phyag chen and 'Bri gung mdzod chen: ba <sup>g</sup>Nges phyag and 'Bri mdzod: 'gyu ba stong 'gyu | <sup>h</sup>'Bri mdzod: 'dog; <sup>i</sup>Nges phyag abridges this section. <sup>j</sup>Yang dgon gsung 'bum: gling; <sup>k</sup>Nges phyag: dkyil; <sup>l</sup>du om. in Nges phyag and 'Bri mdzod; Yang dgon gsung 'bum: sgom rog byed; <sup>m</sup>'Bri mdzod: sgom rogs byed; <sup>n</sup>'Bri mdzod: dpe '[?] char 'char; <sup>o</sup>Nges phyag and 'Bri mdzod: na; <sup>p</sup>Yang dgon gsung 'bum: mam; <sup>q</sup>Yang dgon gsung 'bum: rang 'byung*

<sup>1088</sup> *Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung gi lhan thabs chen mo*, in *Yang dgon bka' 'bum*, vol. 3, p. 706: “Awareness in the first moment is not fabricated by anyone. In the self-unfoldment of the abiding mode, the complete path of omniscience directly manifests without error—this is known as “the self-occurring path whereby one’s quintessence takes its own course.” In this regard, when one sees nakedly before one’s eyes [something] like a pot, in the first moment that it vividly manifests without objective reference in the triple mode of appearance, awareness and emptiness (*snang rig stong*): [1] Since attachment or aversion to an object has not yet arisen and since *karma* has not yet accrued, there is the training in morality (*tshul khrims*); [2] Since the notion of the apprehended object has not yet arisen, there is the training in concentration (*ting nge 'dzin*). [3] And since one recognizes it as it is, i.e., as objectless, there is training in insight (*shes rab*). The three trainings are thus naturally completed. [1] Since there is no grasping an object, there is generosity (*sbyin pa*) without attachment. [2] Since there is no mental engagment, there is ethical conduct (*tshul khrims*) that relinquishes nonvirtue. [3] Since there is no identification of characteristics, there is patience (*bzod pa*). [4] Since whatever appears and the direct recognition of its clarity and emptiness are simultaneous, there is diligence (*brtson 'grus*). [5] Since there are no concepts based on dualistic beliefs, there is concentration (*bsam gtan*). [6] And since one knows things as they are without object, there is insight (*shes rab*). The six perfections are thus naturally completed. Its nature (*gshis*), not being anything, is emptiness (*stong nyid*). Its manifestaion (*gdangs*), unceasingly luminous, is compassion (*snying rje*). The shining forth of objective appearances as divinities is the Generation Stage (*bskyed rim*). Their empty essence and nonconceptual vividness is the completion phase (*rdzogs rim*). As these [examples] show, the whole spectrum of phenomena that belong to the “path” is already complete in the first instant. And since there is no other path to search for elsewhere, we call it “path *mahāmudrā*” or “the self-occurring path whereby one’s quintessence takes its own course.” ...*shes pa skad cig ma'i thog tu sus kyang bzo ma byas pa | gnas lugs kyi rang 'gros la thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam tshangs la ma nor pa dkrong [=krong] nge ba de la | lam rang 'byung snying po'i rang 'gros zhes bya'o | de yang bum pa lta bu mig gi gcer mthong ba'i snang rig stong gsum yul med du lhang nge ba'i skad cig ma'i thog nas | yul thog der chags sdang ma skyes pas las ma bsags pas tshul khrims kyi bslab pa | yul 'dzin gyi rtog pa ma skyes pas ting nge 'dzin gyi bslab pa | yul med du rang ngo shes pa shes rab kyi bslab pa ste | bslab pa gsum tshang | yul de la 'dzin pa med pas ma chags pa'i spyin pa | yid byed med pas mi dge ba spangs pa'i tshul khrims | mtshan ma'i [ngos]<sup>a</sup> zung du med pas bzod pa | snang ba gang shar ba dang*

radical soteriological model. By grounding liberating knowledge in the transsubjective sources of morality and meaning, it regards prereflective capacities for thinking and acting as being existentially prior to the voluntaristic modes of knowledge and conduct that derive from them. This primacy of intransitive prethematized liberating knowledge over transitive-thematized modes would become a cornerstone of Padma dkar po's analysis of the two styles of soteriological knowledge.

#### PADMA DKAR PO'S TRANSPOSITION OF YANG DGON PA'S DISTINCTION

On first glance, one of the more noteworthy features of Padma dkar po's assimilation of Yang dgon pa's distinction is the extent to which he has transposed this teaching from an idiom of direct personal instruction into the more scholastic register of second-order philosophical exposition.<sup>1089</sup> Although Padma dkar po does use the distinction in one of his spiritual songs to express the natural and carefree quality of *mahāmudrā* experience<sup>1090</sup>, the content and contexts are otherwise mostly exegetical and, in some cases, also distinctly polemical. This notable change in discursive content is accompanied by an equally radical shift in communicative persona<sup>1091</sup>—from the role of a yogi giving immediate verbal expression to a

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*gsal stong rang ngo shes pa dus mnyam pas brtson 'grus | gnyis 'dzin gyi rtog<sup>b</sup> pa med pas bsam gtan | yul med du rang ngo shes pa shes rab | pha rol tu phyin pa drug tshang | gshis ci yang ma yin pa stong pa | mdangs 'gags med du gsal ba snying rje | yul snang lha ru lam me ba bskyed rims | de'i ngo bo stong zhing rtog med du lhang nge rdzogs rims | de yis mtshon te lam gyi chos ji snyed pa thams cad | skad cig ma'i thog na tshang zhing | de las logs su lam gzhan du btsal du med pas | lam phyag rgya chen po dang | lam rang 'byung snying po'i rang 'gros zhes bya'o | <sup>a</sup>addit.; <sup>b</sup>text has rtogs; <sup>c</sup>text has la*

<sup>1089</sup> A more rigorous attempt to account for these stylistic differences would have to examine the sweeping changes that had occurred in Tibetan religio-cultural milieu between the 13th and 16th centuries with the ascendancy of large monastic institutions and consolidation of sectarian traditions, and consider how these altered the roles and expectations imposed on these two 'Brug pa hierarchs, both as lineage holders and preceptors. It would also have to assess the extent to which their contrasting discursive styles followed standard Indian literary genre distinctions between root (*mūla*) text (prose, poetry, song etc.) and commentaries (*vyākhyā* etc.) or treatises (*śāstra*). While such an account obviously exceeds our abilities and the scope of this work, a more general comparison of their modes of expression is here undertaken to help clarify some of the more conspicuous differences in the scope and content of the two author's works.

<sup>1090</sup> *Dpal padma dkar po'i rdo rje'i glu'i 'phreng ba snga ma*, PKsb vol. 20, 417<sub>3-5</sub>: "Carefree and at ease—freely at ease in the range of *mahāmudrā*'s abiding mode. Carefree and at ease—the specific characteristics of *saṃ-sāra*'s error mode are freely at ease in awareness. Carefree and at ease—whatever now manifests is freely at ease in being groundless and rootless. Carefree and at ease—the appearances of the sixfold [cognitive] ensemble are freely at ease in the space of illusion." *blo bde po gu yangs pa gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po'i ngang du blo bde po gu yangs pa || blo bde la gu yangs pa 'khrul lugs 'khor ba'i rang mtshan rig pa blo bde po gu yangs pa || blo bde po gu yangs la da lta gang shar gzhi med rtas bral blo bde po gu yangs pa || blo bde po gu yangs pa tshogs drug snang sgyu ma'i klong du bde po gu yangs pa ||*

<sup>1091</sup> On types of communicative persona in literature ranging from more to less immediate, see Albert Hofstadter's essay "On the Interpretation of Works of Art," *The Concept of Style*. ed. Berel Lang. Cornell University Press, 1987, 104–33. As Hofstadter observes, "[i]n any communication, taking it as a whole, there is implicit the overall persona whose communication is represented as being. This persona occurs inside the communicative form as part of the meaning it embodies... [It is] a necessary condition of the intelligible unity



lived experience he has had or (in the case of spontaneous utterances) is in the process of having, to the more narratively mediated role of a commentator.<sup>1092</sup> As a rule, the claims to legitimacy of a commentator tend to be more doctrinal and philosophical than testimonial, based as they are on well-established traditional Buddhist canons of scriptural (*āgama*) and rational (*yukti*) validation.<sup>1093</sup> In Yang dgon pa's case, both the discursive context and norms are markedly different. Because the distinction was directly communicated to his circle of disciples and subsequently codified within a cycle of structured esoteric precepts (*man ngag*) intended for retreatant yogis, the testimonial account of his own transformative experience was considered a sufficient verification of their relevance and validity. At this stage, the personal authority of a charismatic teacher takes precedence over arguments from scriptural and rational authority favoured by later generations. And, in this vein, Yang dgon pa adopts

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of the communicative form. It is the representation, inside the form, of the communicating subject, the one with whom communication is an act of *com-munion* [italics mine].” Variations in degrees of mediacy in communicative persona correspond in various ways to degrees of cognitive distance separating the direct, existential, involvement in a situation from more distant empathetic and spectatorial forms of acquaintance.

<sup>1092</sup> The contrast between the modes of expression of two authors can be further clarified by means of a parallel distinction between ‘description’ and ‘explanation’. See Higgins 2006, 273–74. We are here indebted to Lambert Schmithausen’s (1981, 200) distinction between an “immediate verbalization of an actual experience” and “the secondary transformation of such a primary verbalization effected for logical, doctrinal or even tactical reasons.” We can characterize a description as the primary articulation, verbally and conceptually, of an actual experience one is having or has had. Where the available words and concepts in their possible semantic combinations are inadequate to convey the experience, articulacy requires the creation of new words or the use of old words in new combinations and/or with new connotations. Language here has a creative and expressive function that goes beyond mere representation. We see something like this at work in Yang dgon pa’s creation of new expressions to convey *mahāmudrā* as ground and path. ‘Explanation’ refers to any concept, proposition or theory that attempts to go behind an experience, to account for it or legitimize it in terms of something other than it, and often for purposes extraneous to it, be they doctrinal, polemical, logical or whatever. This explanatory function is paramount in Padma dkar po’s treatments where Yang dgon pa’s distinction features not *primarily* as descriptions or evocations of *mahāmudrā* experience but rather in interpretive frames for explaining and legitimizing a philosophical view of *mahāmudrā* as the unity of the two truths and of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and also for criticizing rival interpretations. It would be remiss to make this distinction between description and explanation a categorical one. Indeed, every primary articulation depends on well-established discursive practices with their own sedimented semantic, grammatical and explanatory rules. Likewise, every explanation, by virtue of its rootedness in the referential ground of language, discloses something about the world. The distinction between primary and secondary articulations is therefore more a matter of degree than of kind.

<sup>1093</sup> Yang dgon pa’s documented teachings are at times preceded by vocative utterances in the imperative mood (see above, “All you children, consider [this!]”). As Hofstadter 1987 observes (p. 108–9), the word “When someone says to us, “Behold!” or “Consider!” we ordinarily suppose that person, the speaker, intends to be identified with the person incorporated in the meaning. Ordinary communication that intends to be sincere, not deceptive, presupposes that the person in the communicative process is identical with the person presented in the communicative medium—identity of actual person with persona. But once the process gets beyond its most primitive immediacy, the two are easily separated. So, when the context becomes “‘Behold!’ Thus spoke Merlin the magician as he waved his wand,” the larger communication’s presented persona is not Merlin but the narrator.” Put simply, the use of words “Consider!” or “Behold!” in the imperative mood address the consciousness of the hearer directly, offering a solicitation to discover the meaning of the utterance for oneself. Such utterances call attention to something not by *telling* but by *showing*.

an immediate communicative persona to describe and convey in the imperative mood a content that was imbued with the meaning of human experience.<sup>1094</sup>

Some three centuries later, in the more polemically charged intellectual climate of central Tibet in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Padma dkar po (1527–1592) revives Yang dgon pa's distinction and redeploys it as a powerful philosophical paradigm for articulating and defending a view of Dwags po Mahāmudrā emphasizing the unity (*zung 'jug*) or inseparability (*dbyer med*) of the two truths—the conventional and ultimate—and for thereby reconciling essence (*gshis*) and manifestation (*gdangs*). In doing so, he also seeks to clarify philosophical issues that he considered to be central to Dwags po Bka' brgyud pa exegesis and to defend them against a variety of criticisms and rival views.

#### INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MAHĀMUDRĀ DISTINCTION

Padma dkar po takes up Yang dgon pa's distinction in several treatises which represent a broad range of Mahāmudrā and tantric contexts. Those of his treatises containing significant philosophical treatments of Yang dgon pa's distinction are here listed, along with pertinent bibliographic information, in the order of their occurrence in the Darjeeling (1973) edition of Padma dkar po's Collected Works:

- [1] *Lam zab kyi rnam par bshad pa zab lam gyi snye ma*, vol. 10, 333–464: 352<sub>5</sub> f.: a detailed exegesis of 'Brug pa Dkar brgyud pa *guru yoga* practice written at Gnyal Yangs pa can at behest of A'o Mgon po, the chos mdzad ruler of Rkyen;
- [2] *Skyes bu gsum gyi lam gyi mchog rin po che'i 'phreng ba*, vol. 10, 537–603: 570<sub>1</sub> f.: a commentary on Phag mo gru pa's path summary *Skyes bu chen po'i lam rim*;
- [3] *Dpal kye'i rdo rje'i spyi don grub pa'i yid 'phrog*, vol. 15, 365–549: 400<sub>6</sub> f.: a general summary of main points of doctrine and practice in the *Hevajra* tantra written at Rgyal byed tshal in Gtsang;
- [4] *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, vol. 21, 7–370: 62<sub>4</sub> f.: a detailed exegesis and polemical defence of main lines of Mahāmudrā theory and practice followed by the 'Brug pa Dkar brgyud pa tradition; written at Gnyal Yangs pa can at the behest of Sgam po pa Spyan snga Bkra shis rnam rgyal, Bla ma 'od zer dbang phyug and Gzhan phan chos skyong bde legs;

<sup>1094</sup> Hofstadter *ibid.* 104. Hofstadter says the following with reference to John Dewey's view of art as expressive of human experience: "Because the artwork is literally full of the meaning of human experience, it is above all the medium that is able to reach human beings in their humanness and communicate itself to them in full humanness."

[5] *Bsre 'pho'i lam dbye bsdu*, vol. 22, 303–633: 458<sub>1</sub> f.: A thematically structured summary of esoteric Mahāmudrā practices according to the *Bsre 'pho* (“Integration and Transference”) cycle of teachings of tantric yoga in the tradition of the Six Doctrines of Nāropa (*na ro chos drug*).

An analysis of the contents of these passages in light of their doctrinal contexts enables us to identify a number of overlapping soteriological schemes which Padma dkar po sought to explicate and integrate by means of Yang dgon pa's distinction. Specifically, he takes up seminal sūtric and tantric theories of reality, buddha nature, cognition, truth and error with a concern to show their complex relationships with certain lines of Mahāmudrā exegesis. Only in the lengthy treatment of the topic in the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* does Padma dkar po's objective turn decidedly polemical. This important passage is treated separately below and a translation is included in Volume II of this monograph.<sup>1095</sup>

A good starting point for understanding Padma dkar po's philosophical deployment of the distinction is a passage in his *Hevajra* tantra commentary which concludes a discussion of how the adamantine mind (*sems kyi rdo rje : cittavajra*)—an important tantric technical term in Padma dkar po's philosophical oeuvre which he identifies with buddhahood and ground *mahāmudrā*<sup>1096</sup>—remains invariant throughout the transformations it appears to undergo. For additional clarification, he draws on the Second 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje's distinction between the ground proper (*gzhi*) which is without error and the temporal(ized) ground (*dus gzhi*) which is identified as the precondition of error. To support this view, Padma dkar po cites Yang dgon pa's distinction between the two modes of *mahāmudrā*, and then links these with the sūtric idea of buddha nature as being obscured by adventitious stains and the similar tantric idea of immanent buddhahood:

Therefore, Rgyal ba'i dbang po stated that there is no error in the ground, [yet] there is error during the temporal ground (*dus gzhi dus nas*). And Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa spoke in terms of “*mahāmudrā* in its abiding mode” and “*mahāmudrā* in the mode of error”. As for the meaning of this: in short, this adamantine mind (*sems kyi rdo rje : cittavajra*) is precisely the nature, buddhahood. When obscured by adventitious stains, there is *saṃsāra*. Once these distortions have been cleared

<sup>1095</sup> See below, 385.

<sup>1096</sup> *Dpal kye'i rdo rje'i spyi don grub pa'i yid 'phrog*, in PKsb vol. 15, 399<sub>3</sub>: “Since this adamantine mind is perfect buddha[hood], ground and goal are inseparable. Since that is personally realized by each, it is called ‘path’. Since even that personally realized self-awareness is not apart from that [adamantine mind], it is called the ‘inseparability of ground and path’ and ‘inseparability of path and goal’.” *de lta bu'i sems kyi rdo rje nyid rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas yin pas gzhi 'bras dbyer med || de so so rang gis rtogs par byed pas lam so so rang rig de yang de las gzhan ma yin pa'i phyir gzhi lam dbyer med dang || lam 'bras dbyer med ces bya ste |*

away, one will attain the goal of *nirvāṇa* in which one does not remain [either in *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*] (*apraṭiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*). As the *Hevajratāntra* [II, iv, 69] states:

Sentient beings are actually buddhas  
Though [their nature is] shrouded by adventitious obscurations.  
When these obscurations clear, they are indeed buddhas.<sup>1097</sup>

In his detailed *Kālacakra* commentary, Padma dkar po explains 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje's distinction between the errorless ground (*gzhi*) and error-engendering temporal ground (*dus gzhi*) by means of a standard Indian example of epistemological error, the case of seeing a rope as a snake: "In that regard, a stippled rope has not become a snake, yet the mind that mistakes it for a snake imputes it as a snake. Likewise, the superimposition of something as other than [its] mode of being appears as that [to] the agent who succumbs to committing [this] error due to habituation to that [superimposition]." <sup>1098</sup>

These philosophical themes are further elaborated in his *Structured Summary of Integration and Transference* (*Bsre 'pho'i lam dbye bsdu*) in support of the Madhyamaka and tantric thesis that ultimate truth (*don dam pa'i bden pa*) is accessible only through conventional truth (*kun rdzob kyi bden pa*), and is not a metaphysical absolute lying above and beyond it. A clear statement of this is found in a discussion of the Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) of Mahāmudrā practice leading to a nonideational experience of *mahāmudrā* in its abiding mode. For Padma dkar po, Yang dgon pa's distinctions between two modes of *mahāmudrā* and between essence and manifestation help to clarify the inseparability of the two truths by interpreting the ultimate, *mahāmudrā*, as both the abiding ground of human reality and the condition of possibility of all appearance and error:

[The ultimate] has in this way been explained as the ground of [both] the pure and impure, inasmuch as its unchanging essence (*gshis*) constitutes the reason for its natural purity, [while] its [unimpeded] manifestation (*gdangs*)<sup>1099</sup> may occur in any

<sup>1097</sup> Ibid., 401<sub>4</sub>–402<sub>1</sub>. *de'i phyir rgyal ba'i dbang pos | gzhi la 'khrul pa med de dus gzhi dus nas 'khrul pa zhes gsungs pa dang | rgyal ba yang dgon pas | gnas lugs phyag chen dang 'khrul lugs phyag chen zhes gsungs pa yang don 'dis yin la | mdor bsdu na | sems kyi rdo rje 'di nyid rang bzhin sangs rgyas | glo bur gyi dri mas bsgribs pa la 'khor ba | de sbyar ba byas pa las 'bras bu mi gnas pa'i mya ngan las 'das pa'i go 'phang du 'gyur pa yang 'di nyid las | sems can rnam ni sangs rgyas nyid | 'on kyang glo bur dri mas bsgribs | de nyid bsal na sangs rgyas nyid | ces gsungs pa'i phyir ro ||*

<sup>1098</sup> *Mchog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas rnam par phye ba gsang ba thams cad bshad pa'i mdzod*, PKsb vol. 13, 60<sub>3</sub>–4; *de yang thag khra sbrul du ma 'gyur te sbrul du 'khrul pa'i blos sbrul du btags pa bzhin no || de bzhin gnas tshul las gzhan du sgro 'dogs pa ni 'khrul par byed du 'jug mkhan de la zhen pas der yang snang ste |*

<sup>1099</sup> See the *Bsre 'pho'i lam dbye bsdu* (PKsb vol. 22, 453<sub>2–6</sub>) where the author discusses "the unimpeded manifestation and unchanging nature of the ultimate truth" (453<sub>2</sub>). *don dam pa de'i gdangs 'gag pa med pa dang | gshis 'gyur ba med pa'o ||* Padma dkar po compares these two aspects of ultimate truth to space which is

way whatsoever. By virtue of this [account], on the side of the condition of ignorance, it is what possesses stains.<sup>1100</sup> Consequently, there is no error in the ground (*gzhi*), but there is error during the temporal ground. In this regard, Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa introduced the distinction between *mahāmudrā* as the mode of abiding and *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error.<sup>1101</sup>

In his *Explanation of the Profound Path* (*Lam zab kyi rnam par bshad pa*), he relates the two modes, in typically syncretistic fashion, with [1] the non-tantric Mahāyāna distinction between phenomena (*dharmin*) and their nature (*dharmatā*), [2] with the Tathāgatagarbha conception of *\*sugatagarbha* that “dwells within a sheath of manifold stains” (*dri ma dgu’i shubs na gnas pa*), and [3] with tantric notions of ever-present innate buddhahood such as ‘adamantine mind of awakening’ (*byang chub kyi sems*), ‘primal buddha’ (*dang po’i sangs rgyas*) as well as tantric accounts of consciousness in the analogous dying and Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) practices leading to the realization of luminosity. Such phenomena, he explains, must be understood to be empty of their respective intrinsic essences (*rang rang ngo bos stong pa*).<sup>1102</sup> The two modes of *mahāmudrā* are in this way linked with the unity of luminous clarity and emptiness:

[The *dharmatā* that is empty of own(-nature)] is also called the “spiritual element possessing [modes of] consciousness” or “suchness possessing stains” as a “great

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unchanging in essence and yet unimpeded in manifestation since it “makes room for anything” (*gang gis kyang go ’byed pa*): “Due to its unimpeded manifestation, it makes everything possible. In that way it is explained as the ground of the manifold.” (ibid., 453<sub>3-4</sub>) *gang gis kyang go ’byed pa nam mkha’ yin pa bzhin || gdangs ’gag pa med pas thams cad du rung | des ’di du ma’i gzhi bshad |* For Padma dkar po, emptiness is understood not only as a lack of intrinsic essence but also as pure possibility. It is in this sense said to be endowed with all aspects (*rnam kun ldan pa*) and imbued with compassion and wisdom. (ibid., 453<sub>5</sub>)

<sup>1100</sup> In other words, Mahāmudra in the mode of error is equivalent to buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) which is traditionally described as thusness (*tathatā*) possessing stains.

<sup>1101</sup> *Bsre ’pho’i lam dbye bsdu*, in PKsb vol. 22, 458<sub>2-4</sub>: *de bas gshis ’gyur med nyid rang bzhi dag pa yin pa’i rgyu mtshan du song | gdangs gang du yang rung bas dag ma dag gi gzhi bshad de’i dbang gis ma rig pa’i rkyen ngor dri bcas | de’i phyir gzhi ’khrul med dang | dus gzhi dus nas ’khrul pa | ’di la rgyal ba yang dgon pas | gnas lugs phyag chen dang | ’khrul lugs phyag chen gyi rnam dbye mdzad do |*

<sup>1102</sup> *Lam zab kyi rnam par bshad pa*, PKsb vol. 10, 351<sub>4</sub>–352<sub>4</sub>.

emptiness”<sup>1103</sup> or “darkness” (*mun can : tama*)<sup>1104</sup> or “imminence” (*nye bar thob pa : upalabdha*)<sup>1105</sup>. From the perspective of its intrinsic essence being free from all biases, it is without nature. Hence, by stating “Mind is no-mind: mind’s nature is luminous,” [the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* 5b.1–2]<sup>1106</sup> establishes that everything is empty or luminous. Precisely this is translated as “coemergent wisdom” (*lhan cig skyes pa’i ye shes*) based on the [Sanskrit] term *sahaja* (“coemergent”). As for this being present, it is *mahāmudrā* in the abiding mode. As for the former [aspects, they] are *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error.<sup>1107</sup>

We have so far indicated the extent to which Padma dkar po not only adopted Yang dgon pa’s distinction but also adapted it to his own philosophical aims to elucidate the inseparable unity of the two truths and of appearance and emptiness and to thereby trace a common doctrinal thread running through Mahāyāna, Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā discourses. We can now look more closely at how he redeploys this distinction to provide justification for the “unity of truth” thesis and to defend it against rival views.

#### MAHĀMUDRĀ AND THE UNITY OF THE TWO TRUTHS

In a section of Padma dkar po’s commentary on Phag mo gru pa’s *Stages of the Path of the Great Individual* (*skyes bu chen po’i lam rim*)<sup>1108</sup> devoted to “dispelling error on the

<sup>1103</sup> Great emptiness (*stong pa chen po*) occurs in the penultimate stage of the dying process during which one’s mental and physical world disintegrates. This process is mirrored in Completion Stage practices wherein the reification of the physical body dissolves into the experience of an insubstantial illusory body (*sgyu lus*). The dying process is generally described in *Bar do* (Intermediate state) literature as involving the following stages: whitish illumination (*snang ba*), the reddish diffusion of light (*mched pa*) and the darkness (*mun can : tamas*) of imminence (*nyer thob : upalabdhī*) which may prefigure the dawning of the state of luminosity (*’od gsal : prabhasvāra*). For an overview of the parallel process in Completion Stage practice, see Tucci 1980, 61–62.

<sup>1104</sup> See previous note. In the context of *Kālacakra* sādhana, “darkness” is one of the signs of attainment that manifest before luminosity is realized. See *Sekkodeśa* 26, Orofino 1994, 133 (Skt.) and 62–63 (Tib.).

<sup>1105</sup> Imminence also occurs as the seventh of eight signs (*brtags brgyad*) that manifest during the yogic attainment of the illusory body (*sgyu lus*) which resembles the stages of dying. It is called ‘imminence’ or ‘near-attainment’ (*nyer thob*) because it is a state in which luminosity (*’od gsal*) is about to dawn.

<sup>1106</sup> The corresponding passage from the Sanskrit are given in Schmithausen 1977, 41 as lines E.b.1–2 *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvārā ||*

<sup>1107</sup> *Lam zab kyi rnam par bshad pa*, PKsb vol. 10, 352<sub>5</sub>–353<sub>2</sub>: *rnam par shes pa dang bcas pa’i khams sam dri bcas de bzhin nyid la stong pa chen po’am mun can dang | nye bar thob pa zhes kyang bya’o || rang gi ngo bo nyid phyogs thams cad dang bral ba’i cha nas rang bzhin med pa ste | sems ni sems ma mchis te sems kyi rang bzhin ’od gsal ba’o || zhes pas thams cad stong po’am ’od gsal du bzhas | de kha sa ha dza’i sgra las lhan cig skyes pa’i ye shes su bsgyur ba’i yin no || gnas ’di la gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po | snga ma la ’khrul lugs phyag rgya chen po ||*

<sup>1108</sup> This is the *Skyes bu gsum gyi lam gyi mchog rin po che’i ’phreng ba* (*Precious Garland: The Best of the Paths of the Three Individuals*).

path” (*lam ’khrul pa sel ba*), he begins with the topic of “ascertaining the view of the two truths” (*bden gnyis kyi lta ba gtan la phab*).<sup>1109</sup> Here, within the framework of a structured summary of the essentials of the Mahāyāna path, Padma dkar po uses the distinction between modes of abiding and error to reinforce his central thesis that the conventional and ultimate truths are ultimately commensurable. In a series of responses to questions, he explains how the abiding mode or ground is nothing whatsoever and yet makes everything possible, including the adventitious arising of dualistic perceptions. This being the case, the joy of *nirvāṇa* must be understood not as something achieved but rather as what remains, even if it has no ontological status, when the wholly unreal adventitious factors that obscure it are purified away. Therefore, error does not exist in the mode of abiding any more than water exists in a mirage or is able to slake one’s thirst.

[Query:] What is necessary to become free from the sufferings of *saṃsāra* and attain the joy of *nirvāṇa*? [Reply:] It is necessary to purify away error. It is necessary to destroy error. Apart from conventionally calling this very purification or destruction of error “attaining the joy of *nirvāṇa*,” there is [actually] nothing to be achieved (*bsgrub rgyu*) on the side of the “joy of *nirvāṇa*”

[Query:] What is necessary in order to purify away error? [Reply:] It is necessary to recognize the mode of being (*yin lugs*) of error. It is necessary to understand [its] mode of abiding (*gnas lugs*).

[Query:] Then what are the mode of abiding and the mode of error like? [Reply:] The ground which is the fundamental abiding mode of reality (*gzhi dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs*)—the nature of phenomena, the complete purity of suchness—is nothing that can be established in any way as entities or characteristics; it is like the centre of the sky. That is “ultimate truth”.

Thus, from within the sphere of that *dharmadhātu* which is like the centre of the sky, propelled by ignorance as cause and the five [karmic] winds as conditions, awareness mistakes its essence (*ngo bo rig pa ’khrul pa*) such that subject and object manifest as the whole variety of deluded perceptions (*’khrul pa’i snang ba*). These are experienced as the variety of joys and sorrows etc. of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. For example, it is like the adventitious arising of clouds in the clear sky or the adventitious arising of turbidity in clear water. In that way, the conventional, lacking any mode of being, nonetheless appears, like a mirage. At the very time of arising, it is empty like the moon [reflected on] water.

<sup>1109</sup> This is the first of three topics; the second is “practicing the cultivation of [their] unity” (*zung ’jug gi sgom pa nyams su blangs*) and the third is “engaging in the conduct of the six perfections” (*phar phyin drug gi spyod pa la ’jug pa*).

[Query:] How is this abiding mode present? [Reply:] It is present as the nonduality of appearance and emptiness, like a conch shell and its whiteness. Moreover, just as when water appears in a mirage one cannot enjoy even a single drop of water, so too error does not exist in the mode of abiding.<sup>1110</sup>

Padma dkar po concludes that appearance and emptiness, the mode of error and abiding, are inseparable, for “just as one does not know how to discriminate a conch shell from its whiteness, so one does not know how to discriminate the appearance of phenomena from emptiness which is the nature of phenomena.”<sup>1111</sup> To say that one discovers the ultimate *in* the conventional means really that one discovers the ultimate *in the absence of* the conventional or ‘pseudo’ reality. Herein lies the unity of the two truths or, more precisely, the unity of truth/reality. When we look more carefully at the coiled snake, we see it is only a stippled rope after all. The snake never in any sense existed in the rope, though the rope was a necessary condition of its being misperceived as a snake.

Here, it is critically important to try to understand the sense of “unity” (*zung ’jug* : *yuganaddha*) that Padma dkar po endorses. It may be helpful to introduce a distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical kinds of unity: By symmetrical unity we mean a relationship wherein two relata (say, *x* and *y*) stand to one another in some type of symmetrical relation (correlation) either of identity ( $x = y$ ) where *x* is the same as *y*, or reciprocal determination ( $x \Leftrightarrow y$ ) where *x* and *y* are co-determined by one another or require one another for their very definition. By asymmetrical unity we mean a relationship of unity wherein two relata stand to one another in an asymmetrical relation of ontological priority such that one (*x*) is a condition of possibility for the other (*y*). To expand on a traditional metaphor, waves are not different from the river from which they emerge but they do derive from it. On this

<sup>1110</sup> *Skyes bu gsum gyi lam gyi mchog rin po che*’i *’phreng ba*, PKsb vol. 10, 570<sub>1</sub>–571<sub>3</sub>: *’khor ba*’i *sdug bsngal dang bral nas mya ngan las* *’das pa*’i *bde ba thob par byed pa la ci dgos na* | *’khrul pa* *’dag dgos* | *’khrul pa* *’jig dgos* | *’khrul pa dag pa’am zhig pa de kha la mya ngan las* *’das pa*’i *bde ba thob pa ces tha snyad du btags pa las mya ngan las* *’das pa*’i *bde ba logs na bsgrub rgyu med* | *’khrul pa* *’dag par byed pa la ci dgos na* | *’khrul pa*’i *yin lugs shes dgos* | *gnas lugs go dgos* | *’o na gnas lugs ci* | *’khrul lugs ci lta bu snyam na* | *gzhi dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs chos nyid de bzhin nyid kyi rnam par dag pa nam mkha*’i *dkyil lta bu dngos po dang mtshan ma gang du yang grub pa med pa*’i | *de ni don dam pa*’i *bden pa*’o | *de ltar chos dbyings nam mkha*’i *dkyil lta bu de*’i *ngang nas rgyu ma rig pas byas* | *rkyen rlung lngas byas nas ngo bo rig pa* *’khrul pas gzung* *’dzin* *’khrul pa*’i *snang ba sna tshogs su shar te* | *’khor ba dang mya ngan las* *’das pa*’i *bde ba dang sdug bsngal la sogs pa sna tshogs nyams su myong ba yin te* | *dper na nam mkha*’i *dangs pa la sprin glo bur du byung ba’am chu dangs la rnyog ma glo bur du byung ba lta bu* | *de bas na kun rdzob ni yin lugs med pa la snang ba smig rgyu lta bu* | *snang ba*’i *dus nyid na stong pa chu zla lta bu* | *gnas lugs ji ltar gnas na snang ba dang stong pa nyid gnyis su med par gnas pa dung dang dung gi dkar po lta bu* | *de yang smig rgyu la chur snang ba*’i *dus nyid na chu thigs pa gcig kyang yod ma myong ba bzhin* *’khrul pa gnas lugs la med pa ste* |

<sup>1111</sup> *Ibid.*, 571<sub>3</sub>: *dung dang dung gi dkar po* *’byed mi shes pa bzhin* | *chos can snang ba dang chos nyid stong pa nyid* *’byed mi shes pa ste* |



logic of asymmetrical unity, thoughts *are dharmakāya* to the extent that they derive from it and have no independent existence apart from it.

#### ASYMMETRICAL UNITY AND RIVAL TRUTH THEORIES (JO NANG AND DGE LUGS)

Padma dkar po's interpretation of Yang dgon pa's distinction as an asymmetrical entailment relation according to which the mode of abiding (as essence) is the condition of possibility of the mode of error (in manifestation) had important implications for how he responded to rival truth theories. In his *Treasury of Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*), he uses the distinction to structure his presentation on the topic of ascertaining the view of *mahāmudrā*—namely the view of the inseparability of appearance and existence (*snang srid dbyer med*)—and to advance, under the *'khrul lugs phyag chen* rubric, a lengthy criticism of Jo nang truth and error theories. To put it succinctly, the two modes of *mahāmudrā* are discussed under the first of three sections comprising [1] the view (*lta ba*) of coemergent mind as such, [2] meditation (*sgom pa*) on coemergent appearances, and [3] their fruition (*'bras bu*) in the inseparability of appearance and existence.<sup>1112</sup> The reader is referred to the translation and critical text of this section in Volume II.<sup>1113</sup> The following overview restricts its focus to doctrinal points that are important for understanding Padma dkar po's *yuganaddha* thesis and some of his objections to the rival positions.<sup>1114</sup>

Padma dkar po summarizes the meaning of “*mahāmudrā* in its abiding mode” by quoting 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje's statement that “all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are nothing other than the true reality of mind (*sems kyi de kho na nyid*)”. He proceeds to identify this *mahāmudrā* which is mind's true reality with “coemergent wisdom” (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), “natural awareness” (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), “primordial knowing (*gdod ma'i shes pa*), and *dharmakāya*. The true reality of mind is further described as the “all-inclusive ground” of dependent arising and emptiness that remains free from all partial aspects, being unadulterated by all imputations and deprecations.

Turning to *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error, which is said to account for “how from that [unitary abiding mode] there occurs a splitting off into *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*,” Padma dkar po launches into a synopsis and criticism of Jo nang theories of truth, error, cognition,

<sup>1112</sup> More specifically, the two modes of *mahāmudrā* form the two headings under the first of three sections under the broad rubric “A precise explanation of the methods of ascertaining how [*mahāmudrā* is present]” that is itself entitled “Ascertaining the view with the key points of *dharmakāya*—coemergent mind as such”. This is followed by two sections entitled “Ascertaining meditation with the key points of *dharmakāya*—coemergent appearance”, and “Culminating in fruition through key points concerning the inseparability of the coemergence of appearance and existence.”

<sup>1113</sup> See Volume II, translation: 157–68, critical edition: 168–75.

<sup>1114</sup> See in particular Padma dkar po's discussion of it in Volume II, 165–68.

and emptiness and the approach to liberating knowledge commensurate with these. We are told that his synopsis “summarize[s] the essence of the [Jo nang] doctrinal system as it has been presented in many treatises”. Among these, it has been possible to identify some likely sources on which he based his summary: the *Ri chos skor gsum* of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) and three works presenting and defending Jo nang doctrine entitled *Bde gshegs snying po'i rgyan gyi 'khrul 'joms*, *Bstan pa spyi 'grel gyi rnam bshad Dgongs pa rnam gsal yid kyi mun sel*, and *'Od gsal rgyan gyi bshad pa yid kyi mun sel* composed by one of Dol po pa's two major disciples, Gnyag dbon Kun dga' dpal (1285–1379).<sup>1115</sup> Padma dkar po's criticism should be viewed in light of the growing rejection at this time of certain foundationalist presuppositions of Jo nang Gzhan stong ontology voiced by scholars within the Dge lugs pa, Karma bka' brgyud pa, and Sa skya pa schools. A common target of the criticisms was the Jo nang view of ultimate reality or buddha nature as a timeless metaphysical absolute that completely transcends dependent arising and is therefore wholly separate from conventional reality. This was generally repudiated on the grounds that it goes against the shared Madhyamaka and Mantrayāna cornerstone of avoiding extreme positions of existence and nonexistence and their aim to ascertain the inseparability of the two truths.

How scholars specifically responded to different Gzhan stong views—the two most influential at this time being those of Dol po pa and Shākya mchog ldan—depended to a large extent on perceived doxographical identifications. In his autobiography, Padma dkar records that he once replied to questions by a Gzhan stong proponent named Lha mthongs Bshes gnyen rnal rgyal (b. 1512)<sup>1116</sup>—a Karma Bka' brgyud student of Mi bskyod rdo rje who had just returned from a sojourn in Nepal—about whether or not there was a difference between the Gzhan stong views of Jo nang and Shākya mchog ldan. Padma dkar po explained, as had Mi bskyod rdo rje, that there was a precise difference in their respective exegetical styles since Shākya mchog ldan's exposition was a pure tradition of “Cittamātra that Proclaims Aspects are False” (*alīkākāravāda cittamātra : sems tsam rnam rdzun pa*)<sup>1117</sup> whereas the Jo

<sup>1115</sup> Another famous Jo nang master during this period was Kun dga' grol mchog (1507–1566) though he appears to have not written much on the Gzhan stong doctrine. According to Stearns (2010, 60): “From the period after Dolpopa's immediate disciples up until the time of Kunga Drolchok (1507–1566), very few texts are available that were written by Jonang masters concerned with the shentong view and other issues raised by Dolpopa. And Kunga Drolchok just mentions the shentong in a few of his texts. This situation would change only with the writings of Tāranātha, who began to revive the tradition around the beginning of the seventeenth century.” Note that Padma dkar po was already 48 years of age at the time of Tāranātha's birth.

<sup>1116</sup> On this letter of reply to Bshes gnyen rnam rgyal, which provides evidence of strained relations between 'Brug pa and Karma Bka' brgyud traditions at this time, see above, 25 n. 29, 345 f.

<sup>1117</sup> On this identification of the Gzhan stong view with the Alīkākāravāda school of Cittamātra philosophy, see Padma dkar po's *Sher phyin gyi lung la 'jug pa'i sgo*, PKsb vol. 7, 4284: *'dis gzhan stong pa'i lta ba rtogs | rnam rdzun pa'i grub mtha' snyogs pa yin no* | The terms Nirākāra[vāda] (*rnam med*) and Alīkākāra[vāda] (*rnam rdzun*) were both used to designate a Cittamātra branch that maintained the nonexistence of true mental representations (aspects), or maintained that such representations are false. By contrast, the terms Sākāra[vāda] (*rnam bcas*) and Satyākāra[vāda] (*rnam bden*) were used with reference to a Cittamātra branch that maintained the existence of

nang pa exposition was mixed up with Mantra[yāna] (*sngags dang 'dres*).<sup>1118</sup> This is an observation of no small significance given that it was *as* a certain Mantrayāna-based view of emptiness—more specifically in the context of *Kālacakra* hermeneutics—that Padma dkar po criticizes the Jo nang view of Gzhan stong. Interestingly, he does not mention the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV) at all, though it was the other principal source for Jo nang interpretations of Gzhan stong. This silence perhaps again reflects Padma dkar po's general reluctance to wade into the ever-deepening quagmire of Tibetan buddha nature debates.

The following table schematically presents the central dichotomies between the two truths and their associated modes of cognition and emptiness as outlined in Padma dkar po's overview of the Jo nang system in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*:

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representations, or that such representations are true. On the terminology for these traditions, see *Dbu ma'i gzhung lugs gsum gsal bar byed pa nges don grub pa'i shing rta*, PKsb vol. 9, 346<sub>5</sub>–347<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>1118</sup> *Sems dpa' chen po padma dkar po'i rnam thar thugs rje chen po'i zlos gar*, PKsb vol. 3, 451<sub>3–5</sub>. See Stearns 1999, 346–47 n. 243. Tāranātha (1575–1634), born in Padma dkar po's 48<sup>th</sup> year, would compose an interesting text outlining twenty-one points of difference between the Gzhan stong traditions of Dol po pa and Shākya mchog ldan. See Mathes 2004.

Basic Dichotomies in Jo nang Theories of Truth, Emptiness and Cognition  
according to Pad ma dkar po's *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*

|                | CONVENTIONAL   | ULTIMATE   |
|----------------|--|--|
| TWO TRUTHS     | <b>conventional truth</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- conditioned</li> <li>- arises and ceases; perishable</li> <li>- dependently arisen (via causes/conditions)</li> <li>- temporal</li> <li>- self-empty (<i>not</i> other-empty)</li> <li>- effable: accessible to thought &amp; language</li> <li>- amenable to inference/analogies</li> <li>- nature of suffering</li> <li>- <i>saṃsāra</i></li> </ul> | <b>ultimate truth</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unconditioned</li> <li>- beyond arising &amp; cessation; imperishable</li> <li>- beyond dependent arising</li> <li>- atemporal (beyond moments)</li> <li>- other-empty (<i>not</i> self-empty)</li> <li>- ineffable: beyond thought &amp; language</li> <li>- not amenable to inference/analogies</li> <li>- beyond suffering, immutable great bliss</li> <li>- great <i>nirvāṇa</i></li> </ul> |
| BUDDHA NATURE  | <b>adventitious stains</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- deceptive, unreal</li> <li>- obscurations</li> </ul>   | <b>buddha nature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- undeceptive, real</li> <li>- permanent, unchanging buddha qualities</li> </ul>   |
| EMPTINESS      | <b>conventional emptiness</b> (self-emptiness) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emptiness that is <i>not dharmakāya</i></li> <li>- emptiness without aspects</li> </ul>  | <b>ultimate emptiness</b> (other-emptiness) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emptiness that <i>is dharmakāya</i></li> <li>- emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects</li> </ul>  |
| COGNITION      | <b>consciousness</b> ( <i>rnam shes</i> )<br>conceptual thoughts ( <i>rnam rtog</i> )  | <b>wisdom</b> ( <i>ye shes</i> )<br><i>dharmakāya</i> ( <i>chos sku</i> )  |
| GROUND         | <b>all-ground consciousness</b> ( <i>kun gzhi rnam shes</i> )<br>- ground of clearing process ( <i>sbyangs gzhi</i> )  | <b>all-ground wisdom</b> ( <i>kun gzhi ye shes</i> )<br>- stains to be cleared away  |
| THREE NATURES  | <b>imagined and relative natures</b> ( <i>rang stong</i> )   | <b>perfect nature</b> ( <i>gzhan stong</i> )   |
| WORLD          | <b>outer</b> world and <b>inner</b> inhabitants: adventitious  | <b>other:</b> genuine <i>dharmatā</i> , <i>tathāgata</i> garbha  |
| THREE TURNINGS | <b>first and second dharmacakra</b> as <i>rang stong</i>   | <b>third dharmacakra</b> as <i>gzhan stong</i>   |
| UNITY          | <b>conventional unity</b> of appearance & emptiness (pertains to adventitious stains)  | <b>ultimate unity</b> of appearance & emptiness (pertains to buddha nature)  |
| SOTERIOLOGY    | <b>object to be purified away</b> ( <i>sbyang bya</i> )  | <b>goal of purification</b> ( <i>sbyang 'bras</i> )  |

In the opening passage of his summary of Jo nang views in the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, Padma dkar po neatly outlines the central dichotomy between the two truths that he identifies as the central presupposition underlying the remaining Jo nang views he analyzes (as schematized in the above table):

Ultimate truth is without origination and destruction and unconditioned because it is beyond dependent [arising]. Conventional truth having the nature of origination and destruction is conditioned insofar as it depends upon causes and conditions. Great *nirvāṇa* is well and truly beyond all suffering together with its causes; it is uninterrupted, uncontaminated bliss supreme. Of the two aspects of consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), consciousness is something to be discarded and is similar to darkness, blackness and poison; it is conventional and self-empty (*kun rdzob rang stong*). Self-originated wisdom is similar to nectar or facets of radiant splendour; since it is not something to discard, it is ultimate and other-empty (*don dam gzhan stong*).<sup>1119</sup>

The Fourth 'Brug chen in this way identifies the basic dichotomy between the conventional and ultimate truths and their associated phenomena as a doctrinal keystone of the Jo nang philosophical edifice. "It is said [by Jo nang pas] that there is a very great difference between the two truths, and between the pairs '*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*' and 'consciousness and wisdom', together with their respective self-manifestations."<sup>1120</sup> This is certainly consistent with Dol po pa's repeated description of the conventional and ultimate as two "great kingdoms" (*rgyal khams chen po*) "having nothing to do with each other."<sup>1121</sup> According to Padma dkar po, this dichotomy has significant repercussions not only for the school's theories about mind, truth, and emptiness, but also for its approach to meditation and liberating knowledge in the arena of spiritual praxis. For, if the Absolute completely transcends dependent arising—being beyond "matter and moments"<sup>1122</sup>—and is empty of everything other (*gzhan stong*) than its true, immutable nature, then its attainment must consist, on the one hand, in a denial of the conventional which is treated as something to discard akin to "darkness, blackness and poison,"<sup>1123</sup> and, on the other had, in a metaphysical transcendence leading above and beyond time, thought, and the entire nexus of dependent arising. For many Tibetan Buddhists, this

<sup>1119</sup> See Volume II, translation: 158–59, critical edition: 169.

<sup>1120</sup> See Volume II, translation: 159, critical edition: 170.

<sup>1121</sup> See for example *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, Peking 1998, 418<sub>4</sub> f.; *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel*, Paro 1984, vol. 1, 599<sub>6</sub> f., 612<sub>5</sub> f. et passim.

<sup>1122</sup> See Volume II, translation: 161, critical edition: 171.

<sup>1123</sup> *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel* 658<sub>3</sub> ff.

type of world-denying absolutism invited comparison with the Brahmanical postulate of a transworldly cosmic Absolute which lies above and beyond the sphere of human reality.<sup>1124</sup>

The dichotomy between the conventional and ultimate has as its subjective corollary an epistemic dualism between mundane consciousness (*rnam shes*) and transcendent wisdom (*ye shes*): “The self-manifesting<sup>1125</sup> of consciousness, being conventional, does not transcend the moments and sufferings of the three realms because [its] projections due to *karma-kleśa* are of the nature of suffering. [However,] the self-manifesting of self-occurring wisdom, being ultimate, *does* transcend the moments and sufferings of the three realms because it is not produced by any causes and conditions and is uninterrupted bliss supreme that is devoid of suffering.”<sup>1126</sup> Whereas consciousness and its self-manifestation are inherent in expressions by thought and language and thus amenable to the sphere of reasoning, self-occurring wisdom and its self-manifestation transcend the mentalistic-linguistic horizon and are therefore “truly beyond the sphere of reasoning.”<sup>1127</sup>

These epistemic and ontological dichotomies resurface in Dol po pa’s buddha nature theory wherein buddha nature is an idomitable and imperishable essence wholly separate from the adventitious stains of mind and mental factors comprising the three realms.

Essential to these views of reality, mind and buddha nature is the dichotomy between two distinct kinds of emptiness: [1] a conventional emptiness which does not transcend dependent arising and [2] an ultimate emptiness which does transcend dependent arising.<sup>1128</sup> Padma dkar po summarizes the Jo nang position as follows:

In this regard, [1] the first is phenomenal, adventitious, coreless, fictitious and deceptive because it is empty of its own intrinsic nature (*rang rang ngo bos stong*) [and thus] conventional emptiness. [2] The second is the immutable nature of phenomena and therefore a true nature, real and non-deceptive because it is not self-empty (*rang gis mi stong*) but it is empty of the conventional which is other than itself [and thus] ultimate emptiness.<sup>1129</sup>

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<sup>1124</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1963.

<sup>1125</sup> The Tibetan term *rang snang* has two senses that are often difficult to distinguish: “auto-manifestation”—how appearances present themselves—and “personal perception”—how phenomena are present to oneself.

<sup>1126</sup> See Volume II, translation: 159, critical edition: 169.

<sup>1127</sup> See Volume II, translation: 159, critical edition: 170.

<sup>1128</sup> See Volume II, translation: 162, critical edition: 172.

<sup>1129</sup> See Volume II, translation: 159, critical edition: 170.

In further distinguishing these two kinds of emptiness, the Jo nang pas maintain that conventional emptiness is not *dharmakāya* but rather self-empty and phenomenal because it cannot be established as a fundamental abiding nature and therefore does not withstand critical assessment, whereas ultimate emptiness is *dharmakāya*, the other-empty nature of phenomena, because it can be established as a fundamental abiding nature and therefore does withstand critical assessment. In sum, “there is a very great dichotomy between self-empty *saṃsāra* that does not transcend dependent arising and other-empty *nirvāṇa* that does transcend dependent arising.”<sup>1130</sup>

Moving on to his criticism of these Jo nang theories of reality, cognition, buddha nature and emptiness, Padma dkar po traces the dichotomies in terms of which they are formulated to an underlying Gzhan stong position that assumes a nihilistic stance regarding the conventional and an eternalist stance regarding the ultimate:

This doctrinal position of yours has assumed a nihilist view vis-à-vis all that is [held to be] self-empty (*rang stong*) or conventional (*kun rdzob*) [but] an eternalist view in accepting all that is ultimate to be something real. Because it is thereby incompatible with the impartial explanations concerning the ultimate (*don dam*) in both the synopsis of views of the chapter on Inner [*Kālacakra*]<sup>1131</sup> and the *Summary of Yoga* [i.e., *Vimalaprabhā*], it is not at all admissable.<sup>1132</sup>

In short, the conventional is downgraded to the status of a superfluous fiction while the ultimate is elevated to the status of a permanent metaphysical absolute. Padma dkar po’s criticisms of specific Jo nang views comes down to a more general objection to its hypostatization of so-called ultimate phenomena—such as the emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvākāravopetāśūnyatā*) and luminosity (*prabhāsvaratā*)—and concomitant downgrading of so-called conventional phenomena—thoughts, emotions, and dependently arisen phenomena in general. Underlying this upgrading of the ultimate and downgrading of the conventional is the predication of existence on the ultimate side and of nonexistence on the conventional. In Padma dkar po’s eyes, this polarization runs counter to what Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and Mahāmudrā traditions all take to be central doctrinal claims: the unity (*zung ’jug*), nonduality (*gnyis med*), or coemergence (*lhan cig skyes pa*) between conventional and ultimate truths, and between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and the view that emptiness and lack of intrinsic nature apply equally to conventional and ultimate reality.

<sup>1130</sup> See Volume II, translation: 164, critical edition: 173.

<sup>1131</sup> This likely refers to the *Vimalaprabhā*’s detailed subcommentary on the second *patala* (*adhyatmapatala*) of the *Kālacakra* referred to in Tibetan as *dri med ’od kyi nang le’i ’grel bshad*.

<sup>1132</sup> See Volume II, translation: 166, critical edition: 174.

From this shared “middle way” vantage point, conventional phenomena are neither opposed to nor incompatible with ultimate reality. Rather they are seen as partial expressions of its underlying emptiness and dynamism, like waves on water, or as distorted manifestations of it, akin to jaundiced vision. We can again discern in these kindred *expression* and *distortion* models the ongoing attempt to mediate the traditional tension between differentiation and identification trends regarding the relationship between mundane and supramundane orders of cognition and reality.

Turning his attention to Jo nang views on liberating knowledge, the Fourth 'Brug chen arrives at a crucial point of divergence between the Dwags po Bka' brgyud and Jo nang views on the relationship between conceptual thought and nonconceptual realization. In his view, how one understands this relationship has far-ranging soteriological ramifications. Let us consider for a moment his summation of the Jo nang account of Bka' brgyud view of meditation: “When by beholding any afflictive emotions that arise one recognizes them to be without nature, the very objects to relinquish have become [their own] antidote without having to seek anything on the side of antidotes.”<sup>1133</sup> In this formulation we can readily recognize the type of Mahāmudrā precept taught by Yang dgon pa and other Bka' brgyud masters that Padma dkar po is at pains to defend. On this account, whatever thoughts and emotions arise *should* indeed be regarded not as objects to discard (*sbyang bya*) but as creative expressions or distorted manifestations of the empty *dharmakāya* through which the latter may be nonetheless discerned. Among the most audacious examples of such a precept, and certainly the most famous and contentious, was Sgam po pa's instruction that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”.

Responding critically to the view that emotions are their own antidote upon recognizing their unborn nature, the Jo nang posit a fundamental difference between the knowledge that recognizes emotions to be without nature and the emotions themselves: “The understanding that emotions have no nature is included on the side of the antidotes of the emotions, but it is not the case that it is not different from the emotions. The afflictive emotions that had arisen previously and the subsequent insight that understands them to be without nature are different from the standpoint of time, different from the standpoint of essence, and different from the standpoint of function.”<sup>1134</sup> By contrast, Padma dkar po identifies this as one more example of letting useful distinctions congeal into bogus dichotomies:

<sup>1133</sup> This Bka' brgyud precept is criticized by Dol po pa in his *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i rang 'grel*, *Dol po pa gsung 'bum*, Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1984, vol. 1, 657<sub>6</sub>–658<sub>3</sub>. He there argues that “because this consciousness is diametrically opposed to *dharmakāya*, it can never be *dharmakāya*” (*rnam shes 'di ni chos kyi sku'i mi mthun phyogs yin pa'i phyir chos sku gtan nas ma yin no*) (658<sub>2-3</sub>). See also Stearns 2010, 299–300. See also Dol po pa's *Lha rje tshul khrims 'od la gdams pa*, in *Dol po pa gsung 'bum* (Delhi: Shedrup Books, 1992), vol. 8, 4a<sub>4-5</sub> where he similarly attributes the claims that thoughts are *dharmakāya* and afflictive emotions are wisdom etc. to not adequately differentiating natural luminosity (*rang bzhin 'od gsal*) from adventitious stains (*glo bur dri ma*). See Stearns 2010, 108–10.

<sup>1134</sup> See Volume II, translation: 164, critical edition: 173.



[T]hose who talk about “recognizing the nature of emotions” explain that during the very appearing of emotions, one should recognize them to be without nature. Were that not so, then what would be the point of determining whether or not they are [recognized as they are] in and by self-awareness itself (*rang gyis rang rig par*)? Therefore, [this insight] will never feature in the opponents’ position. [Rather,] thinking that “the Gzhan stong of this tradition is proclaimed within the [tantric] trilogy of [Bodhisattva] commentaries<sup>1135</sup>,” they make false accusations, not seeing that it is legitimate to criticize [their position] even by recourse to scriptures of the Vehicle of Characteristics.<sup>1136</sup>

Padma dkar po will not admit of any ontological absolute that would be an exception to the Madhyamaka maxim that all phenomena lack any intrinsic essence. “Since it is explained in the great commentary to the synopsis (*mdor bsdus*) of the *Summary of Yoga* [*Vimala-prabhā*] that even a buddha’s wisdom is without intrinsic essence, in what way can an ultimate Gzhan stong be established?”<sup>1137</sup>

#### THE GROUND OF TRUTH

In his criticism of Jo nang views, it becomes clear that it is not the distinctions *per se* that are problematic for Padma dkar po but their reification. It may be observed that almost all of the key Jo nang distinctions (summarized in the above table) have well-established Indian Buddhist pedigrees, with the possible exceptions of Dol po pa’s influential distinction between all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) and all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*)—which conveniently weds the Buddhist *jñāna/vijñāna* distinction with the distinction between unconditioned and conditioned grounds (*ālaya*)—and his more contentious differentiation between conventional and ultimate emptiness. It is no exaggeration to say that the kinds of distinctions that are so explicitly drawn in Jo nang exegesis have long been central to Buddhist soteriological thinking. One need only consider the important clarificatory role served by key Buddhist distinctions such as *saṃsāra/nirvāṇa*, *laukika/lokattara*, *saṃvṛtti/paramārtha*, *vijñāna/jñāna*, and *manasikāra/amanasikāra* to appreciate the extent to which Buddhist thought has resorted to, and been guided by, such distinctions. In this regard, Padma

<sup>1135</sup> The Bodhisattva commentarial trilogy (*byang chub sems dpa’i ’grel pa bskor gsum*) refers to three important Indian Buddhist tantric commentaries: [1] Puṇḍarīka’s *Kālacakra* commentary entitled *Vimalaprabhā*; [2] Vajrapāṇi’s *Cakrasaṃvara* commentary entitled *Lakṣhābhīdhānādudhitalaghutantrapīṇḍārthavivatāṇa*, and Vajragarbha’s *Hevajra* commentary entitled *Hevajrapīṇḍārthatīkā*. On these commentaries, see Callahan 2007, 269–70 and 405, n. 877.

<sup>1136</sup> See Volume II, translation: 167, critical edition: 174.

<sup>1137</sup> See Volume II, translation: 166, critical edition: 174.

dkar po's thinking is hardly an exception, since it too is firmly grounded in soteriological differentiations of this kind.

Padma dkar po's critique of the Jo nang position is perhaps best understood in light of his own distinctive position on the nature and role of soteriological distinctions. This turns out to be a matter of crucial importance, not least of all because the way a given doctrinal system construes such distinctions and the relationships between their terms will determine whether and in what sense it even qualifies as a "middle way". For Padma dkar po, when thinking gravitates toward accepting one side of the relationship to the detriment or exclusion of the other, it has veered off the middle way which avoids extremes of acceptance and rejection, existence and nonexistence. More to the point, when this one-sidedness (*phyogs gcig*) takes the form of absolutizing the ultimate and downgrading the conventional—a move he associates with the Jo nang pas—it leads to a world-denying absolutism. No better in his view is the Dge lugs pa proclivity to establish the ultimate as an emptiness consisting in nothing whatsoever, a nonaffirming negation, while leaving the world of entities intact on the conventional side. For Padma dkar po, such a view expands the scope of negation too far on the ultimate side, excluding the originary dynamism of human reality, but not far enough on the conventional side since it lets the natural attitude toward worldly things go unchallenged. Earlier in the treatise, Padma dkar po had characterized the Dge lugs pa view as follows:

[For] Dge ldan pas, "without nature" (*rang bzhin med pa*) means that [1] *ultimately* there is nothing at all, like a barren woman's son, and that [2] *conventionally* all entities never are nonexistent. For that reason, [the Dge ldan] say that "the extreme of existence is eliminated by appearance and the extreme of nonexistence by emptiness." In this regard, [the Dge ldan pas] have fallen to the sides of both of eternalism and nihilism. They have succumbed to a nihilist view regarding the ultimate and an eternalist view regarding the conventional. And by explaining the acceptability of maintaining these two stances, they do not know [how] to eliminate one-sided positions in terms of a unitary ground.<sup>1138</sup>

In his critique of Padma dkar po's treatise, the Dge lugs pa scholar Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532–1592) vociferously denies that Dge lugs pas subscribe to the view that "conventionally, all entities never become nonexistent" while "ultimately there is nothing at all", arguing that "ultimately nonexistent" is different from "ultimate *qua* nonexistence":

<sup>1138</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, 105<sub>2-4</sub>: *de yang dge ldan pa | rang bzhin med pa'i don gyis don dam par cang med mo gsham gyi bu lta bu dang | rang bzhin med pa'i don gyis kun rdzob tu dngos po tham cad med par nam yang mi 'gyur ba zhig ste | de'i rgyu mtshan gyis snang bas yod mtha' dang | stong pas med mtha' sel lo zhes zer ro || 'di ni rtag chad gnyis ka'i phyogs su lung ste | don dam chad pa dang | kun rdzob rtag ltar song zhing phyogs gnyis su gzung rung bshad pas gzhi gcig gi steng du phyogs lung sel ma shes so ||*

[Query:] Then, how are things maintained? [Reply:] ‘Ultimately nonexistent’ (*don dam par med pa*) and ‘inherently nonexistent’ (*rang bzhin gyis med pa*) have the same meaning. The point here is that since “ultimately existent” and “inherently existent” [also] are synonymous, there is no false denial that all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are *ultimately* nonexistent and *conventionally* existent. And by virtue of this point, [we maintain that] “the extreme of existence is eliminated by appearance and the extreme of nonexistence by emptiness”. So it is also not a case of not knowing [how] to eliminate imputations and deprecations with regard to the single ground. Therefore, one must precisely distinguish that “ultimately nonexistent” (*don dam du med pa*) is not “ultimate *qua* nonexistence” (*don dam med pa ma yin pa*).<sup>1139</sup>

Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan is concerned here to defend the Dge lugs view that all phenomena are ultimately nonexistent and conventionally existent insofar as inherent natures are perceived only conventionally but not ultimately. These clarifications aside, the rebuttal does not address Padma dkar po’s central worry, namely, that the terms ‘conventional’ and ‘ultimate’ are here being wrongly used to posit incommensurable ontologies—conventionally existent and ultimately nonexistent states of affairs. In his eyes, there is only a single mode of being, a unitary empty ground, that is perceived *as it is not* while under the influence of ignorance and karmic tendencies, and *as it is* when this influence has ceased. When misperception is operative, this mode of being is called ‘conventional’ (superficial or pseudo reality); when not operative, it is called ‘ultimate’. Padma dkar po attempts to chart a middle course between the Jo nang-like extreme of assuming a nihilist view of the conventional and an eternalist stance regarding the ultimate and the Dge lugs-like extreme of adopting an eternalist stance regarding the conventional and a nihilist stance regarding the ultimate. In either case, to the extent that heuristic distinctions have hardened into incommensurable categories, the slide into eternalist and nihilist views becomes all but inevitable.

Padma dkar po concludes his discussion of Yang dgon pa’s distinction in the *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod* with a synoptic presentation of ground, path and fruition *mahā-mudrā* according to his own tradition. He begins with the aforementioned distinction between the abiding modes of reality (*dnegos po’i gnas lugs*) of body and mind, which he aligns with

<sup>1139</sup> *Byang chub sems ’grel gyi rnam par bshad pa’i zhar byung ’brug mi pham padma dkar pos phyag chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba’i gan mdzod ces par rje tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa’i gsung lan*, in *Dgag lan phyogs sgrigs*, 612<sub>7-12</sub>: ‘o na ji ltar ’dod ce na | don dam par med pa dang rang bzhin gyis med pa don gcig | de’i gnad kyis don dam du yod pa dang rang bzhin gyis yod pa don gcig pas | ’khor ’das kyi chos thams cad don dam par med cing kun rdzob tu yod pa bsnyon du med cing | de’i gnad kyis snang bas yod mtha’ dang stong pas mtha’ stong pas med mtha’ sel la | gzhi gcig la bltos pa’i sgro skur sel mi shes pa yang ma yin no || des na don dam du med pa dang don dam med pa ma yin pa’i khyad par zhib tu phyed dgos so ||

the traditional categories of adventitious stains and buddha nature, respectively. The former, he says, is “posited in the context of error” and thus is held to possess adventitious stains. “As for the abiding mode of reality of the mind, it is that purity itself, being primordially pure, which is, from this perspective, “natural purity” (*rang bzhin gyis dag pa*) as it is known in common parlance”.<sup>1140</sup> He explains:

Although not established, even as something adventitious, neither in essence nor manifestation, it [nonetheless] appears in essence and manifestation and is accordingly described in these terms. As examples, it is similar to what, in a thangka painting, appears to be in relief, with protruding [foreground] and receding [background]<sup>1141</sup>, or like a [white] conch that appears to be yellow to one afflicted with bile disease [such as jaundice]. This yellowness is not established either in the essence of the conch shell or the manifestation of the conch shell, and yet there are causes for something to appear to one afflicted with bile disease and also reasons why the ailment clears [when] the methods to progressively alleviate it [are applied].<sup>1142</sup>

In the same way that the “yellowness” of the conch has never existed in essence or manifestation because it is not present in the perception of a conch shell for a person not afflicted by the disease, so also error has never existed for one who sees reality as it is. In accounting for how error (e.g., “yellowness”) nonetheless arises both in essence and manifestation, Padma dkar po traces the source of error to a mistaken identification of the definiendum, i.e., the thing which exemplifies a term or definition (*mtshan gzhi*): whereas *dharmakāya* is the true definiendum, a conceptual construct is taken as the definiendum, as in the instance of “grasping the very conch that is imputed as yellow as the definiendum, both in seeing the conch as yellow and not seeing the conch as yellow.”<sup>1143</sup> Conventional truth consists in taking the imputation for the case in point, confusing the map with the terrain.

Padma dkar po concludes that the two truths are inseparable because they share a single unchanging ground or definiendum—variously identified as *dharmakāya*, mind’s adamant

<sup>1140</sup> See Volume II, translation: 167, critical edition: 174.

<sup>1141</sup> This refers to the illusion of three dimensions on a flat, two dimensional surface that is achieved in painting through effects such as overlapping of objects and figures, changes in their relative sizes and placements (smaller is farther), shading, linear perspective (the illusion that objects grow smaller and converge toward a “vanishing point” at the horizon line), and atmospheric perspective which operates when objects placed in upper part of painting, and understood to be farther away, are given less contrast, detail and texture. On the history of the representation of three-dimensional space in the two-dimensional surface of a painting, see Damisch, Hubert (1994). *The Origin of Perspective*, Translated by John Goodman. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

<sup>1142</sup> See Volume II, translation: 167, critical edition: 174–75.

<sup>1143</sup> See Volume II, translation: 168, critical edition: 175.

nature, *mahāmudrā* in its abiding mode. The difference between the ground and what obscures it is compared to the changeless sky and our shifting perspectival perceptions of it as it becomes overcast by clouds:

At the time the sky has clouds, it has not changed from [when it was] unobscured because, if it was altered, then it would not be able to become cloudless [again]. Therefore, just as it is demonstrated that the sky remains unchanging from its own side (*rang ngos nas*), though the ways of seeing it change, so also since there is no error within the adamantine [nature] of mind (*sems kyi rdo rje*) in its own right (*rang ngos la*), error does not exist in the ground. If error existed in the nature, one would not be able to clear [what obscures it], just as charcoal cannot be turned white, even when it is cleansed with streams of milk.<sup>1144</sup>

This type of explanation could not avoid certain objections. For example, an opponent could ask whether, in grounding the tantric and Madhyamaka “unity of truth” theory in this robust “single ground” thesis which maintains that error does not exist in the ground, Padma dkar po had not veered from his middle way onto the cul de sac of irreconcilable differences between truth and error, reality and illusion, along the lines of Dol po pa. One could well be led to such a conclusion by the author’s claim that the mode of error and delusion is wholly incidental and parasitic upon the ultimate reality or ground from which it has derived and deviated. One consideration that would appear to rule out such a verdict is Padma dkar po’s perspectival account of the two realities, where both are claimed to be conventions reflecting different standpoints and neither can be said to be truly established:

In terms of this [ground] itself, in the context of [it] being taken like [something] mutable, it is the abiding mode of reality of the body and posited as conventional truth. In the context of seeing is as immutable, it is the abiding mode of reality of the mind and posited as ultimate truth. At the time this ground [seems] to have undergone change, it has not [actually] turned bad. At the time it is understood as changeless, it has not become good. Since it therefore remains just as it is, there is no reason to distinguish between the two truths. This is presented as the “inseparability of the two truths”.<sup>1145</sup>

As Padma dkar po sees it, the two truths are inseparable not only in the sense that the conventional has never existed independently of the ultimate, but also in the sense that both are equally without inherent nature and beyond discursive elaboration. To reify the two truths

<sup>1144</sup> See Volume II, translation: 168, critical edition: 175.

<sup>1145</sup> See Volume II, translation: 168, critical edition: 175.

and posit them as separate orders of existence is to allow a useful model of reality to slide into the reality of the model. The same may be said of the two modes of *mahāmudrā*. In the final analysis, ultimate and conventional are value judgements superimposed on a groundless ground—human reality in its most ontologically primary condition—which is as little changed by them as the sky is by the clouds that drift across it. It is this elusive groundless ground, *mahāmudrā* in its mode of abiding, which remains ever-present, and ever-available to the aspirant within the state of confusion.

#### PATH MAHĀMUDRĀ AND LIBERATING KNOWLEDGE

The concern to steer a middle course between one-sided positions is discernible in Padma dkar po's views regarding the respective roles of reflective and prereflective modes of liberating knowledge in the context of the Mahāmudrā path. The author sets out to clarify how long-standing Buddhist disputes over the soteriological functions of the types of knowledge indicated by oppositional terms such as mindfulness (*dran pa*) and nonmindfulness (*dran med*), mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*) and mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed pa*), conceptuality (*rnam par rtog pa*) and nonconceptuality (*rnam par mi rtog pa*), need to be reconsidered in light of the dialectical character of the awakening process itself. Central to this process is a creative tension—addressed as a dialectical mediation on the part of the aspirant—between reflective and prereflective modes of awareness, where each is seen to play a vital role in the changing contexts of one's intellectual-spiritual itinerary. In clarifying the dialectical tension between such pairs of terms, Padma dkar po adopts what we have termed *soteriological contextualism* in order to demonstrate how each of the terms in these dyads may be accorded either positive or negative valuations depending upon the specific soteriological contexts in which they occur. For example, attention or mindfulness (*dran pa : smṛti*) in the sense of introspective monitoring may be a beneficial mental factor for the beginner who must learn to focus his or her mind, but an obstacle for the yogin intent upon realizing unborn suchness. This insight allows Padma dkar po to show the extent to which Buddhist soteriology requires finding a viable balance—a Middle Way (*dbu ma'i lam*) or unity (*zung 'jug*)—between transitive-voluntary and intransitive-involuntary modes of awareness by skilfully applying each at the appropriate points on the path of awakening. To gravitate toward either pole in this tension field is to lose the necessary balance. In developing these ideas, Padma dkar po provides valuable clarifications of key Mahāmudrā terms for liberating knowledge such as mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed pa*), nonmindfulness (*dran med*), and natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), in some cases tracing the semantic history of such terms through various layers of doctrinal development.

## NONCONCEPTUAL KNOWING IN THE SHADOW OF THE BSAM YAS DEBATE

As was the case with Mi bskyod rdo rje, some of Padma dkar po's most notable insights concerning conceptual and nonconceptual forms of liberating knowledge were advanced in response to Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) criticisms of contemporary Dwags po Bka' brgyud contemplation trends. Looking back on the legacy of Indian siddha-based Mahāmudrā teachings and Sa paṇ's criticisms of certain Tibetan assimilations of them, Padma dkar po strongly rejects any connection between the context-specific Mahāmudrā practices of nonmindfulness and mental nonengagement endorsed in Dwags po Bka' brgyud systems and the type of meditation involving the perpetual suppression of thought and activities that had been associated (legitimately or not) with Heshang Moheyan. This is the tenor of Padma dkar po's *A Discussion to Quell Criticism (Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam)*<sup>1146</sup>, the title work in a collection of critical rejoinders, that was written in response to Sa paṇ's statement in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* 3.167 that “there is no difference between your Mahāmudrā [tradition] and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) of the Chinese tradition except for the change in terminology from ‘ascent from below’ and ‘descent from above’ [to ‘gradualist’ and ‘suddenist’]”. Padma dkar po begins by reminding his reader that the common aim of Buddhist meditation—Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā cited as examples *par excellence*—is to ascertain things as they are. The content of such realization is beyond the scope of the representational thought and defies articulation by any thesis or assertion (*pratijñā*), so much so that “when it comes to expressing what the content (*don*) of this direct realization is like, even all the buddhas of the three times are at a loss for words”:

Let us analyze this [statement in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* 3.167]: the ascertainment of things as they really are depends solely on realizing the mode of abiding through direct perception because it transcends the path of extraneous words and is never within dualistic mind's sphere of operations. Thus, when it comes to expressing what the content (*don*) of this realization through direct perception is like, even all the buddhas of the three times are at a loss for words. But when it comes to putting this in language while preserving its meaning, it is said to be “free from assertions”. [In other words,] because all explanations of doxographical viewpoints apart from that [direct realization] are established through intellectual imputation, none can withstand analysis by means of reasoning. If, to that extent, there is no difference from Heshang, then since [ineffability] was declared by the Noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] father and sons concerning the occasion when all

<sup>1146</sup> See Volume II, translation: 179–88, critical edition: 188–93.

[metaphysical] views have been overcome, it would follow that they are not different from Heshang either.<sup>1147</sup>

Padma dkar po defends the legitimacy of certain nonideational forms of Dwags po Bka' brgyud meditation by showing that they share with the most efficacious forms of traditional Buddhist meditation the capacity to reveal deep features of reality that elude appropriation in thought and language. On this basis, Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā traditions agree that words and thoughts fail to capture the experience of ascertaining how things are, both concluding that it can only be negatively delimited by locutions such as “free from assertions/theses” (*khas len dang bral*). In Padma dkar po's eyes, all this provides grounds for a sober second look at why there was any debate between the Ācārya Kamalaśīla who adhered to this Madhyamaka line of thought and the Sino-Tibetan Chan and Tibetan Bka' brgyud masters who were unaccountably criticized for upholding their own versions of it. The rejoinder that Nāgārjuna and his followers made such claims in the context of ascertaining the ultimate, whereas Bka' brgyud adepts presumably did not, fails to convince Padma dkar po since it was in precisely this context that Mahāmudrā masters advocated freedom from propositions.

Padma dkar po then considers more plausible points of difference between Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā meditation and the Chan meditation associated with Heshang. First and foremost are their divergent views regarding the appropriate *soteriological context* for non-conceptual awareness. The problem with the “Heshang style” of meditation, on Padma dkar po's analysis, is that it takes the absence of mental activity (and associated physical and verbal activities) as an end itself, a single self-sufficient prescription for goal-realization. This he regards as a deviation because it crucially overlooks the role of thinking in Buddhist soteriology and thus disregards the need for those on the Buddhist path to strike a viable balance between premeditated and unpremeditated styles of soteriological knowledge and activity. By contrast, Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā meditators regard the nonconceptual as part of a broader course of salvific thought and activity and are careful to confine its role and efficacy to quite specific soteriological contexts. On the one hand, they follow the Buddhist tradition in emphasizing the nonconceptual nature of ultimate reality: at the time of ascertaining reality, all thoughts come to a standstill, leaving the experiencer bereft of words to capture the experience. On the other hand, nonconceptual awareness is seen as the provisional aim of one-pointed tranquility meditation wherein one relinquishes all identification with the ideas and objects that normally claim one's attention in order to familiarize oneself with a lucid prediscursive state of consciousness. This, as Padma dkar po notes, is something quite different from a total and perpetual cessation of thought activity:

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<sup>1147</sup> See Volume II, translation: 180, critical edition: 188–89.



Heshang claimed that when one has abandoned all virtuous activities of body and speech, one recognizes the mind by simply not thinking at all and thereby becomes free. We, on the other hand, first abandon all preoccupations and distractions in order to attain stability in tranquility, also known as ‘one-pointed mind’ or ‘non-conceptualization’ or ‘signlessness’. But if one loses oneself in this state, it is regarded as a deviation (*gol sa*). Still, if one does not have even that [nonideational tranquility], there will be no basis for accomplishing the accumulation of wisdom. Therefore, it is indispensable. One proceeds to cultivate all possible skillful means such as great compassion and so on and discerning insight by way of the unity (*yuganaddha*) of emptiness and compassion in which both [virtue and wisdom] are united. These arise and one directly recognizes the mind. It is explained that through such profound insight, the whole range of things to be relinquished are relinquished, [and everything] up to and including omniscient wisdom is thereby realized.<sup>1148</sup>

Coming to the issue at the heart of the Bsam yas controversy, the Fourth ‘Brug chen explains that “whereas Heshang [sought] to perpetually abandon bodily and verbal activities, we cultivate tranquility, not *for all time*, but only until we have grown acclimatized to it once it has arisen.”<sup>1149</sup> On this view, determining the relevant soteriological contexts for either applying or relinquishing mental activity is deemed to be of critical importance. The coordination of the two cognitive styles figures centrally in the Mahāyāna path of uniting the skillful means (*upāya*) of compassion (*karuṇā*) with the discerning insight (*prajñā*) of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). It is also indispensable, he argues, for understanding how a type of nonconceptual meditation that may pose an obstacle or obscuration in one context (Heshang-style meditation) can prove soteriologically efficacious in another (Dwags po Bka’ brgyud meditation). Accordingly, against Sa paṅ’s criticism that “certain methods of settling the mind in an uncontrived state have been explained as ‘deluded meditation’,”<sup>1150</sup> which Sa paṅ had extended to encompass Dwags po Bka’ brgyud *mahāmudrā* meditation in general, Padma dkar po replies that this amounts to taking an exception as the rule, disregarding those contexts within which nonconceptuality may be relevant and, in some cases, even indispensable.

In a variety of works, both exegetical and polemical, Padma dkar po broadly applies this type of contextualist hermeneutic to the task of clarifying the relationship between conceptual and nonconceptual styles of liberating knowledge. It is here that the clarification and reconciliation of certain pairs of contrasting terms for cognition—broadly distinguished

<sup>1148</sup> See Volume II, translation: 182, critical edition: 189–90.

<sup>1149</sup> See Volume II, translation: 184, critical edition: 191.

<sup>1150</sup> *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*, 51a. See Volume II, translation: 186, critical edition: 192.

in terms of having or not having concepts—that had been central to Buddhist discourses and debates about liberating knowledge from the earliest stages of Buddhism in India becomes paramount. Padma dkar po acknowledges that the conceptual histories of dyads such as *manasikāra/amanasikāra* (mental engagement/nonengagement), *smṛti/asmṛti* (mindfulness/nonmindfulness), *cintā/acintā* (thinking/nonthinking), *savikalpa/nirvikalpa* (conceptual/non-conceptual) had been characterized by alternating positive and negative evaluations within shifting doxographical and soteriological frameworks.

Among these dyads, he devotes special attention to the *amanasikāra* (*yid la byed pa*) and *amanasikāra* (*yid la mi byed pa*) pair not only because of its rich historical permutations in India but also because of the formative role it was alleged to play in the birth of Tibetan Buddhist civilisation. As a focal point of the Bsam yas debate, the *manasikāra/amanasikāra* dyad had become variously associated in the minds of most Tibetan Buddhists with the difference between true and false religion (*chos/chos min*), and, more specifically, with the triumph of an allegedly pure tradition of Indian scholastic Buddhism over heretical Chinese antinomianism. The terms become in this way closely intertwined with the origins and founding aims of Tibet as a Buddhist civilisation during the Imperial Period. Thenceforth, the dyad repeatedly resurfaces in a series of reformist campaigns aimed at restoring true religion by banishing allegedly deviant trends, where the terms were wielded as rhetorical weapons in the battle over claims to legitimacy. *Amanasikāra* in this way emerges as the central target of a long line of criticisms of contemplative traditions that were deemed comparable to Heshang’s Chan system of ideoclastic meditation. While space does not permit an examination of Padma dkar po’s illuminating treatments of related polarities such as *dran pa/dran med*, a brief consideration of his handling of the *manasikāra/amanasikāra* dyad will give us a good idea of his general aims and arguments in this regard.

Surveying the shifting meanings of these terms, Padma dkar po’s main objective is to determine the appropriate contexts and roles for mental engagement and nonengagement. On the basis of this contextualist hermeneutic, he interprets *amanasikāra* both as [1] “well-founded mental engagement” (*tshul bzhin du yid la byed pa : yoniśomanaskāra*)—i.e., setting one’s mind on the foundation (*yoniśaḥ : tshul bzhin pa*) that is nonorigination (*anutpāda*)—following Kamalaśīla’s lead, and [2] “mentally attending to emptiness” (*a* = nonorigination + *manasikāra*) and selflessness following Maitrīpa’s lead. Along these lines, Padma dkar po is able to establish a rapprochement between Kamalaśīla’s and Maitrīpa’s *amanasikāra* discourses—viewing the former as a prerequisite for the latter—and to then cite this as evidence that his tradition’s Mahāmudrā *Amanasikāra* tradition is fundamentally different from the ideoclastic meditative system associated with Heshang Moheyan’s eighth century Sino-Tibetan Chan teachings on mental nonengagement.

The Fourth ’Brug chen’s balancing of *manasikāra* and *amanasikāra* approaches is conciliatory and inclusive. On the one hand, he considers the goal of nonconceptual wisdom

to be ultimately discontinuous with philosophical analysis inasmuch as the nonconceptual nature of mind is structurally prior to and a precondition of conceptual thought. On the other hand, he maintains that conceptual analysis may nonetheless play a critical preparatory role in undermining the reifying constructs that conceal and distort this nonconceptual wisdom. The well-founded mental engagement advocated by Kamalaśīla is therefore regarded as a sufficient condition for the attainment of nonconceptual wisdom.

### THREE STRANDS OF *AMANASIKĀRA* INTERPRETATION IN INDIAN BUDDHISM

To provide historical and doctrinal context for Padma dkar po's syncretistic interpretation of *amanasikāra*, it is necessary to sketch in broad strokes certain features of the Indian background out of which it developed. As a number of recent studies have shown, the idea of *amanasikāra* has enjoyed a long and varied history in Indian Buddhism (as well as other Indian religions<sup>1151</sup>) that can be traced back to early Buddhist accounts of meditation preserved in the Pāli canon.<sup>1152</sup> Focusing on developments relevant to the present discussion, we can broadly discern three successive strands of *amanasikāra* interpretation within Indian Buddhism that all feature in Padma dkar po's synthesis. These roughly coincide with the three principal stages into which Buddhist doctrinal history has been traditionally divided: Early Buddhist (perjoratively termed Hīnayāna), Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

[1] EARLY BUDDHIST: In spite of the general approval of various types of mental engagement (*manasikāra*)<sup>1153</sup> in early Buddhism and the historical Buddha's own repeated injunction to "apply one's mind" (*manasi karoti*), the idea of mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*) is already well-attested as specific soteriological aim in Pāli canonical sources. In the *Majjhima-nikāya* 1.436 and *Aṅguttaranikāya* 4.425, to give two examples, *amanasikāra* is positively appraised as a nonconceptual state associated with formless meditations and linked with the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) or cessation of mind (*cittanirodha*). Specifically, the meditator is enjoined to not mentally engage in conceptions (Pāli: *saññā* : Skt. *saṃjñā*) of multiplicity but instead ponder the infinity of space so as to attain the "sphere of the infinity of space" (*ākāśānantyāyatana*).<sup>1154</sup> This marks the first formless attainment (*samāpatti*) corresponding to the fourth liberation (*vimokṣa*) wherein the meditator has transcended conceptions relating to material forms (*rūpasamjñā*). From this stage the meditator will later pass through the fourth formless state (corresponding to the seventh liberation)—the "sphere of neither conception nor nonconception" (*naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*)—which is also known

<sup>1151</sup> For example, *amanasikāra* is posited as a soteriological aim in Jain Siddha works.

<sup>1152</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1989, Higgins 2006; Mathes 2009 and 2015.

<sup>1153</sup> See Higgins 2006.

<sup>1154</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg 1989, 193–94.

as the “peak of existence” (*bhavāgra*).<sup>1155</sup> The meditator eventually attains the “state of cessation” (*nirodhasamāpatti*) of all conceptions and feelings (*saṃjñāved[ay]itanirodha*), the final stage in meditation corresponding to the eighth liberation. It is said that the meditator has at this stage achieved a simulation of *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇadṛśa*). This last point, as Seyfort Ruegg has noted, is highly significant as it foreshadows later doubts about the soteriological efficacy of a type of practice that leads only to a mere simulation of *nirvāṇa*.<sup>1156</sup>

*Amanasikāra* is also linked in early canonical sources with a concentration of mind (*cetosamādhi*) that is without mental signs (*animitta*) and that transcends the four formless spheres of infinity of space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither conception nor nonconception. After delineating this sequence, the *Cūlasuññatasutta* concludes that “...a bhikkhu, not mentally engaging in the sphere of nothingness, not mentally engaging in the sphere of neither conception nor nonconception, engages the mind in the oneness [or solitude] based on concentration of mind that is without mental signs (*animitta*).”<sup>1157</sup> It may be noted here that the explicit rejection of a *certain kind* of mental nonengagement (*viz.*, in the formless spheres) goes hand in hand with the acceptance of a *certain kind* of mental engagement (in signlessness). This type of contextual specification becomes increasingly crucial to later attempts to reconcile different types of *amanasikāra*.

Pāli canonical interpretations of *amanasikāra* in the context of the attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) were subsequently codified in *Abhidharma* accounts of the formless meditations, such as *Abhidharmakośa* 8.33. It is worth adding that the chapter on the mundane path (*laukikamārga*) of the *Śrāvakabhūmi* also reflects this tradition of deliberately “not reflecting on or mentally engaging in any conceptions” (*saṃjñāsv asmrtyamanasikāram*) in order to arrive at the state of cessation in which the mind no longer functions (*cittaṃ na pravartate*).<sup>1158</sup>

<sup>1155</sup> ‘Peak of existence’ (*bhavāgra* : *srid rtse*) describes the highest of the mundane formless meditations practiced by an Arhant. It is described as a sphere in which there is neither conceptualization nor nonconceptualization (*naivasamjñānāñjñāsaṃjñātana*) that occurs in the fourth and final formless attainment (*ārūpyasamāpatti*). This attainment either leads to the state of cessation [of all conception and sensation] (*[saṃjñāvedita]nirodhasamāpatti*) in case of the Ārya who is able to complete the stages of meditation that transcend worldliness (*lokattara*), or it represents the final destination for one unable to access this higher state and who therefore remains confined to worldly (*laukika*) states of mind. See AK 2.24 et passim and comments by Seyfort Ruegg 1989, 193–94.

<sup>1156</sup> Seyfort Ruegg 1989, 193–94.

<sup>1157</sup> See *Cūlasuññatasutta*, at *Majjhimanikāya* 3.108: *bhikkhu amanasikarivā ākiññcaññāyatanasaññāṃ amanasikrativā nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasaññāṃ animittaṃ cetosamādhiṃ paṭicca manasi karoti ekattaṃ* | This sequence of concentrations was first thought to be a path towards liberation, but the mainstream of the early Buddhist tradition came to regard liberation without insight (*prajñā*) as impossible and therefore rejected the soteriological efficacy of such an attainment. See Schmithausen 2007, 215–19 and 1981, 232–40.

<sup>1158</sup> See Deleanu 2006, vol. 1: 343 and Mathes 2009, 6.

[2] MAHĀYĀNA: A second important strand of *amanasikāra* exegesis that developed in Mahāyāna traditions in some cases expanded on the early themes of not engaging in conceptions of the multiple or in mental signs (*nimitta*). But in other cases it advanced an explicit rejection of early *amanasikāra* and related “cessation of mind” teachings as an impediment to nonconceptual wisdom (*nirvikalpajñāna*). In the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, “not mentally engaging in all mental signs” is specified as a means of entering signlessness (*animitta*), the second of the three gates to deliverance (*vimokṣadvāra*). In a similar vein, Asvabhāva states in his *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* commentary on MSA 20.29 that the aspect of signlessness (*animitta*), a state called the attainment of happiness free from conceptions of multiplicity, is attained by not mentally engaging in all phenomenal signs—be they signs of *dharma*s that are *rūpin* and *arūpin* or *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta*. However, the author goes on to explain that the bodhisattva whose mind is not distracted by focusing on other [lower] vehicles (*theḡ pa gzhan yid la byed pas sems rnam par ma g.yengs pa*) will go beyond the stains of the mental engagements of the other vehicles so as to fulfill the aims of all sentient beings by practicing the perfections and above all by attaining nonconceptual wisdom.<sup>1159</sup>

Certain early Buddhist conceptions of *amanasikāra* are denounced as actual impediments to *nirvikalpajñāna* in a number of classic Yogācāra scriptures including the commentaries on *Mahāyānasamgraha* 8.2<sup>1160</sup> and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* 485–88,<sup>1161</sup> as well as in the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*<sup>1162</sup> of the *Yogācārabhūmi*<sup>1163</sup> which closely resembles the DhDhV

<sup>1159</sup> *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāraṭīkā* D 4029, 168a<sub>5-6</sub>.

<sup>1160</sup> *Mahāyānasamgraha* 8.2: “The knowledge of bodhisattvas is the essence of nonconceptual wisdom. It consists in the abandonment of five aspects and the absence of mental representation of reality.” Tib. D 4050 349<sub>5</sub>: *byang chub sems dpa’ rnam kyi shes | rnam rtog med pa’i ngo bo nyid | rnam pa lnga ni rnam spangs shing | yang dag don la bkra’ ’dzin med |*

<sup>1161</sup> *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* 485–88 (Mathes 1996, 65): “As for comprehending the characteristics [of *nirvikalpajñāna*, it is [known] by the specific characteristics of relinquishing five aspects, *amanasikāra* and [the rest].” *mtshan nyid yongs su shes pa ni yid la mi byed pa dang... | rnam pa lnga spangs pa’i rang gi mtshan nyid kyis so |* For a German translation of full passage with the commentary of Mi pham ’jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846–1912), see Mathes 1996, 146–49. A cogent summary of these five aspects is found in the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* of the *Yogacaryabhūmi* D 4038, on which see below note 1163.

<sup>1162</sup> On this important compilation of Yogācāra materials (of which about ten percent is currently available in Sanskrit), see Delhey 2013, 532 et passim.

<sup>1163</sup> *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* D 4038, 27a<sub>1-4</sub>: “[Regarding] the statement ‘the insight that apprehends ultimate reality is nonconceptual,’ one should understand how this nonconceptuality [occurs]. Does nonconceptuality come from not mentally engaging in anything, from transcendence, from nonexistence, from a nature or from constructs concerning objective references? Now, if it derived from mental nonengagement, it would thereby be impossible to one who could be described as having well-founded mental engagement because it would absurdly follow that the same applies to those who are asleep, crazy and completely insane. If it derived from transcendence, then how would this not contradict scriptures which say that phenomena consisting in mind and mental factors spanning the three realms are conceptual.” *de kho na’i don ’dzin pa’i shes rab ni rnam par mi rtog pa yin no zhes gang gsungs pa de ji ltar rnam par mi rtog pa yin par rig par bya | ci yid la mi byed pa las sam | yang dag par ’das pa las sam | dngos po med pa las sam | rang bzhin las sam | dmigs pa la mngon par ’du byed pa las rnam par mi rtog pa yin | gal te yid la mi byed pa las yin na ni des na tshul bzhin yid la byed pa dang ldan pa zhes byar mi*

account. In these works, *amanasikāra* is elaborated as the first of five aspects<sup>1164</sup> to be abandoned in order to attain nonconceptual wisdom. The abandonment of the five aspects is even specified, in the first two works, as the defining characteristic of nonconceptual wisdom. Vasubandhu's commentary on the DhDhV passage explains that nonconceptual wisdom cannot consist merely in *amanasikāra* or else the state of mind of infants and imbeciles would be nonconceptual wisdom.<sup>1165</sup>

In the *Mahāyānasamgraha* account, it is the early Buddhist understanding of *amanasikāra* as a kind of self-induced blank-mindedness that is rejected. In his commentary on the MS passage, Vasubandhu explains, using analogies that foreshadow Kamalaśīla's criticism of (Heshang-style) *amanasikāra* in *Bhāvanākrāma* III, that “if nonconceptual wisdom consisted in the mere absence of mental engagement, it would absurdly follow that sleep, intoxication and thoughtlessness are nonconceptual wisdom.”<sup>1166</sup> Asvabhāva's commentary on the MS passage more pointedly targets the widespread identification of *nirvikalpajñāna* with *amanasikāra* as the source of such misguided practices.<sup>1167</sup> The two commentators apply the same line of criticism to the remaining four aspects in the MS passage—which pertain to other early Buddhist nonconceptual formless meditations—to conclude that one cannot attain nonconceptual wisdom by means of these worldly formless *dhyānas*.

It is important to note that alongside this negative appraisal of the early Buddhist *amanasikāra* there developed a positive Mahāyāna interpretation which was fully concordant with its conception of nonconceptual wisdom. This is of the utmost relevance to the present discussion since it anticipates the type of positive evaluations of *amanasikāra* that were a hallmark of the Buddhist Siddha tradition. Indeed, it was these two interpretive strands—Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā—that Padma dkar po weaves together in his persistent attempts to bridge these traditions.<sup>1168</sup> The most influential text for this interpretation is the

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rung ste | gnyid log pa dang | myos pa dang | rab tu myos pa rnam la yang de thal bar 'gyur ro || gal te yang dag par 'das pa las yin na ni des na kham gsum pa'i sems dang | sems las byung ba'i chos rnam ni rnam par rtog pa yin no zhes gang gsungs pa'i gzhung dang ji ltar 'gal bar mi 'gyur | gal te dngos po med pa las yin na ni des na shes rab sems las byung ba'i chos su mi 'gyur ro ||

<sup>1164</sup> Apart from *amanasikāra*, the remaining four aspects are quite different in MS and DhDh.

<sup>1165</sup> See Mathes 1996, 87 and 143.

<sup>1166</sup> D 4050, 349<sub>6</sub>: *rnam pa lnga ni yid la byed pa med pa tsam rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes nyid yin na gnyid log pa dang | ra ro ba dang | bag med pa la sogs pa yang rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes su thal bar 'gyur ro |*

<sup>1167</sup> D 4051, 532<sub>1-2</sub>: “[Query:] What is this *nirvikalpajñāna*? [Reply:] It is widely declared that it is *amanasikāra* and so forth. But were *amanasikāra* taken to be *nirvikalpajñāna*, then [states] of not mentally engaging in anything at all such as in falling asleep and intoxication would be *nirvikalpajñāna*.” *rnam par mi rtog pa de dag gang zhe na | yid la byed pa zhes bya ba sogs pa rgyas par smos pa'o | gal te yid la mi byed pa nyid rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes yin du zin | gnyid kyis log pa dang ra ro ba la sogs pa yid la ci yang mi byed pa yang rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes su 'gyur ro ||*

<sup>1168</sup> Some of the epistemological issues that arise from Padma dkar po's attempts to bridge these interpretations are taken up in Higgins 2016 (forthcoming). This article specifically addresses the question of whether

*Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, a work varyingly interpreted in Mahāyāna, tantric and siddha circles, both in India and Tibet. This text restores the status of *amanasikāra* as a valid soteriological aim. The *amanasikāra* described therein still leads to the abandonment of mental signs (*nimitta*), but these signs are no longer taken to consist only in the general flux of phenomenal sensations and ideations introspectively monitored by the early Buddhist meditator, but rather in specific erroneous thought forms that reify crucial elements of the bodhisattva path, turning them into obstacles.

The four signs to be abandoned through nonconceptual wisdom—which are also elaborated in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*<sup>1169</sup>—are those associated with ‘natural dichotomous thinking’ (*prakṛtavikalpa*), as well as three types of ‘interpretive dichotomous thinking’ (*nirūpaṇavikalpa*) that comprise wrong ideas about remedy, reality (suchness), and fruition.<sup>1170</sup> The text is careful to explain that the nonconceptuality of abandoning these mental signs through mental nonengagement is attained not by entering from the start into the nonconceptual sphere but rather as the outcome (*phala*) of a guided course of proper mental engagement (*samyammanasikāra*) that gradually purifies them away, without preconceived notions (*anabhisaṃskārata*) and deliberations (*anābhogata*).

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Kamalaśīla’s interpretation of *amanasikāra* as “*manasikāra* having emptiness as its *object*” can indeed be reconciled with Maitrīpa’s interpretation of it as “*manasikāra* having emptiness as its *nature*”. The two would seem to be diametrically opposed. We shall see that Maitrīpa had resolved *amanasikāra* as a *karmadhāraya* compound—“it is *a* (emptiness) and it is *manasikāra*, hence it is *a-manasikāra*”—in order to clarify the appositional, not possessive, relationship between *manasikāra* and *a* (emptiness). This reading allowed him to conclude that “whatever mental engagement (*manasikāra*) there is, all of it is ‘*a*’ which means that it has the nature of nonorigination (emptiness).” And this would appear to preclude any type of well-founded mental engagement (*tshul bzhin du yid la byed pa* : *yonisomanaskāra*) having emptiness as an object of knowledge (*jñeya*) since, for Maitrīpa and his siddha forerunners, all mental engagements and their objects are found to be empty, unoriginated and groundless. At stake, then, are two significantly different interpretations of *amanasikāra* that were used to support divergent views regarding emptiness and the type of knowledge that ascertains it. While the interpretation of it as “well-founded mental engagement” was used to accommodate, and in fact *privilege*, a certain kind of cognition that takes emptiness as its meditative object, siddha nondual interpretations reject *in toto* the possibility of establishing *any* such cognitions or their represented objects. To the objection that Padma dkar po’s efforts to make Mahāmudrā *amanasikāra* more acceptable to scholasticism could succeed only by glossing over crucial differences between conceptualist and nonconceptualist perspectives, Higgins (2016) proposes “that the aim of the author’s syncretism was not to elide, but to highlight, such differences by situating each within its pertinent soteriological contexts. This is the conciliatory thrust of his Madhyamaka contextualist hermeneutic vis-à-vis the polarized positions of the Bsam yas debate: to chart a ‘middle way’ that combines the virtues of each view while avoiding the vices of playing one off against the other.”

<sup>1169</sup> See Mathes 2005, 12.

<sup>1170</sup> In the *Abhidharmakośa* 1.33ab, this is one of three types of dichotomous thinking: [1] thoughts of intrinsic essences (*svabhāvavikalpa*), [2] thoughts consisting in interpretation (*nirūpaṇavikalpa*), and [3] thoughts consisting in recollection (*anusmarānavikalpa*). See also Louis de La Vallée Poussin, tr., *Vijñāptimātrāsiddhi. La Siddhi de Hiuan Tsang*, vol. 1 (Paris, Geuthner, 1928), 390 where he explains that *nirūpaṇavikalpa* has as its frame of reference putative natures that are not directly known, whether past, present or future.

The interpretations of *amanasikāra* found in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* are of singular importance, not least of all because they provided the main scriptural support for Kamalaśīla's interpretation of *amanasikāra* as “well-founded mental engagement” (*yoniso manasikāra*), one that is grounded in the discernment of reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣā*)—i.e., the selflessness of persons and phenomena—resulting from investigation by means of insight (*prajñā*).<sup>1171</sup> As he states in his first *Bhāvanākrāma*:

As it was said in the [Prajñāpāramitā]sūtra, ‘What is the perception of the ultimate? It is the non-perception of any phenomena.’ Here what is meant is just this kind of nonperception, but not a nonperception that is due to causal circumstances being incomplete or due to an *absence of mental activity* (*amanasikāra*), as when, e.g., people close their eyes or are congenitally blind... Moreover it was said in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, ‘One eliminates characteristics of form and so forth, by not mentally engaging in [any of them].’ Here too, not bringing them to mind means the nonperception when one analyzes by means of insight, and not mere absence of mental activity. For beginningless attachment to material forms and so forth is not removed merely by relinquishing mental activity, as in the unconscious state of attainment and the rest.<sup>1172</sup>

Here and in a quite similar passage in his *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭīkā*<sup>1173</sup>, Kamalaśīla denies any soteriological efficacy to *amanasikāra* when it is taken in the early Buddhist sense of mental inactivity, as exemplified by the attainment of nonconception (*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*) in the fourth formless *dhyāna*. Hence, Kamalaśīla will instead endorse a particular Mahāyāna strain of *amanasikāra* that consists in a *non-reifying discernment of things as they are* when

<sup>1171</sup> Martin Adam 2008 shows, on the basis of careful analysis of occurrences in the three *Bhāvanākrāmas*, that the compound *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is explicitly taken by Kamalaśīla to refer to the ‘discernment of reality’ and is therefore better translated in this way than as ‘correct analysis’ or similar translations which take *bhūta* adjectivally or adverbially. Of special note are: [1] Kamalaśīla's statement in *Bhāvanākrāma* III (Tucci 1971, 517–19), following his identification of *bhūtapratyavekṣā* as *vipaśyanā*, that *bhūta* (reality, i.e., what withstands critical assessment) “is the selflessness of persons and phenomena (*pudgala dharma nairātmya*), and [2] his equation of *bhūtapratyavekṣā* with *dharmaprapicaya*, the “discrimination of phenomena (*dharmas/dharma*).

<sup>1172</sup> *Bhāvanākrāma* I, in Tucci 1958, 212–5...10–16: ...*tathā cokaṃ sūtre katamaṃ paramārthadarśanam | sarvadharmāṇām adarśanam iti | atredṣam evādarśanam abhipretam | na tu nimilitākṣajātyandhānām iva pratyayaivaikalyād amanasikārato vā yad adarśanam | ... yat punar uktam nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇyām amanasikārato rūpādinimittam varjayatīti | tatrāpi prajñayā nirūpayato yo 'nupalambhaḥ sa tatrāmanasikāro 'bhipreto na manasikārābhāvamātram | na hy asaṃjñīsamāpattiyādir iva anādikāliko rūpādyabhiniveśo manasikārapari-varjanamātrāt prahīyate |*

<sup>1173</sup> See Tucci 1958, 261<sub>21</sub>–262<sub>2</sub>: *rnam par mi rtog pa la 'jug pa'i gzungs las yid la mi byed pas gzugs la sogs pa'i mtshan ma spong ngo zhes gsungs pa gang yin pa de yang shes rab kyis brtags na mi dmigs pa gang yin pa de der la yid la mi byed par dgongs kyis | yid la byed pa med pa tsaṃ ni ma yin te | 'du shes med pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa la sogs pa ltar | thog ma med pa'i dus nas gzugs la sogs pa la mngon par zhen pa'i yid la byed pa spangs pa tsaṃ gyis spong ba ni ma yin no ||*



perceptions of forms etc. cease, while at the same time rejecting an early Buddhist strain of *amanasikāra* that consists in a complete absence of mental activity. In other words, he can advocate mental nonengagement while repudiating the total absence of mental engagement. It may be recalled that this type of critical revision of certain early Buddhist *amanasikāra* paradigms had already been advanced a few centuries earlier by Vasubandhu and Asvabhāva, and such critiques undoubtedly provided Kamalaśīla with a ready-made template for generating arguments against the anti-intellectualist, or even ideoclastic, approach ascribed to Heshang in the context of the Bsam yas debate.

[3] SIDDHA AND VAJRAYĀNA: This brings us to a third major strand of Indian Buddhist *amanasikāra* exegesis that developed in tantric circles, and especially among the Buddhist siddhas and their interpreters. We can observe that among Madhyamaka treatments of *amanasikāra*, there is evidence that it was at times interpreted in the sense of mind's luminous, nondual nature and regarded as a kind of special teaching concerning mind's unborn nature that was reserved for advanced candidates that should be kept concealed from those of inferior intelligence. This conception seems to have circulated in certain siddha-influenced Madhyamaka circles wherein the Middle Way philosophy of Nāgārjuna and his successors was combined with *upadeśas* on the nature of mind found in the mystical *dohās* of the siddhas and treatises based on these. Thus we encounter a remarkable statement in the *Madhyamakaratantrapradīpa* (MRP), a summary of the Madhyamaka tradition attributed to a scholar named Bhavya who may have been a grandpupil of Saraha.<sup>1174</sup> By qualifying *amanasikāra* as not being fixed in any way and specifying it a special *upadeśa* on directly accessing nondual luminous mind reserved for those of superior acumen, this Bhavya's account accords fully with Maitrīpa's Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka-based *mahāmudrā* of mental nonengagement:

Moreover, [mind is] primordially luminous by nature and devoid of material form. It has not originated as an essence of anything and is not established as subject and object, nor as cognition and objects of cognition. It is not anything. It is not fixed in any extreme (*mtha' la'ang mi gnas pa*). It is without any context for all discursive expressions and elaborations. Since it is inconceivable, without thought, and

<sup>1174</sup> Seyfort Ruegg 2010 (149–51) notes that when Bhavya to whom the *Madhyamakaratantrapradīpa* is ascribed quotes a famous passage found in Saraha's *Dohakośa* stanza 74 (corresponding to stanza 43ab in Shahidullah 1928 which reads: *citteka saala bīam bhavanivvāṇa vi jaṃsi vipphuranti* |) he attributes it to "teacher's teacher" (*bla ma'i bla ma : guru-guru*). This and the philosophical content of the work make it likely that this work belongs to the exegetical tradition of Saraha's successors who combined Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā views. Seyfort Ruegg also notes (150–51) that the author of the *Madhyamakaratantrapradīpa* appears to identify himself as the Bhavya/Bhā(va)viveka (6<sup>th</sup> c.) who composed the *Prajñāpradīpa* and the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikās* when he refers to a passage from this last-mentioned work (III.259) as his own and also states that he composed the *Tarkajvāla*. This identification is problematic based on the textual evidence given that the earliest proposed dating of Saraha is the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

beyond thought, it is not fixed anywhere. It is [therefore] said that “one should cultivate mental nonengagement by abandoning mindfulness (*smṛti*) and mental engagement (*manasikāra*).” [But] if this [teaching] is not kept secret from those less fortunate persons who are of inferior intelligence, it could lead to [one of the] root transgressions of a novice bodhisattva. It must therefore not be divulged carelessly.<sup>1175</sup>

Interestingly, the Rnying ma polymath Klong chen rab ’byams pa echoes this same sentiment, but in regard to the Bsam yas debate, when he suggests, in his *Gnas lugs mdzod* commentary, that many of Heshang’s contemporaries lacked the requisite intelligence to understand the import of his teachings on *amanasikāra*, especially the relativity of all value judgements from an ultimate standpoint. He adds that such teachings were therefore kept hidden from those on the lower vehicles so as to avert ruinous karmic consequences.<sup>1176</sup>

It is in siddha contexts that *amanasikāra* for the first time features as a descriptor of buddhahood and is equated with *mahāmudrā*, the *condition sine qua non* of Buddhist tantrism. As we noted previously in this work and in greater detail elsewhere<sup>1177</sup>, the siddhas deployed and extolled *amanasikāra* as an apophatic descriptor of goal realization. It is in the commentarial literature associated with the Indian Buddhist Siddha movement that this *amanasikāra*-based Mahāmudrā system is codified as a comprehensive path to awakening. In his *Cakra-saṃvara* commentary, Indrabhūti says that “to be mindful of the inconceivability of the nature of things (*dharmatā*), one should abide in mental nonengagement, i.e., *mahāmudrā*, the [state] wherein everything transcends the domain of the intellect.”<sup>1178</sup>

<sup>1175</sup> *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* D 3854, 561<sub>7</sub>–562<sub>3</sub> (Dpe bsdur ma, 57–1542<sub>11–20</sub>): *de yang gdod ma nas rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal ba | gzugs spangs pa | ci’i ngo bor yang ma skyes pa yul dang | yul can dang | shes pa dang | shes byar ma grub pa | ci yang ma yin pa | mtha’ gang na’ang mi gnas pa | brjod pa dang spros pa thams cad kyi skabs med pa | bsam gyis mi khyab pa | bsam du med pa | bsam pa las ’das pa yin pas | ci la’ang mi gnas pa | yid la mi byed pa dran pa dang yid la byed pa spangs par bsgom par bya’o zhes gsungs pa yin te | skal pa chung ba blo gros dman pa dag la sba bar ma byas na | byang chub sems dpa’ las dang po pa’i rtsa ba’i ltung pa ’byung bar ’gyur bas na bag med pa brjod par mi bya’o ||*

<sup>1176</sup> *Gnas lugs mdzod ’grel* (Gangtok ed.), 33b<sub>6</sub>: “Although at the time the Great Ācārya Heshang taught [that good and bad deeds can both be obscurations, just as black and white clouds equally block the sun], narrow-minded people could not comprehend it, it in fact holds true. It is kept secret from those on the lower spiritual vehicles because were they to disparage it because their minds could not comprehend it, they would then plunge, on account of this karma, into the lower destinies.” *slob dpon chen po ha shang gis gsungs pas de dus blo dman pa’i blor ma shong yang don la de bzhin du gnas so | theg pa ’og ma gsang ba blor mi shong bas skur pa btab dus kho las des ngan song du ltung ba’i phyir ro ||*

<sup>1177</sup> Higgins 2006.

<sup>1178</sup> *Śrīcakrasaṃvaratantrarājasambarasamuccayanāmavṛtti* D 1413, 236<sub>3</sub>: *chos nyid bsam mi khyab dran bya ni thams cad la blo’i yul las ’das pa phyag rgya chen po yid la mi byed pa la gnas par bya ba’o ||*

An important source for determining how this Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka-based Mahāmudrā teaching of *amanasikāra* was classified and related to other strands of Siddha Mahāmudrā teachings is the *Dohākoṣahrdayārthagūṭīkā* ascribed to one Avadhūtīpa. The author presents this tradition as the highest of three yogas for realizing the ultimate nonduality of all phenomena and distinguishes three strands of Apratiṣṭhāna—unity (*zung ’jug : yuganaddha*), emptiness (*stong nyid : śūnyatā*), and cessation (*rgyun chad : uccheda*<sup>1179</sup>)—that reflect progressive degrees of nonmentation (*amanasikāra*):

Considered in terms of lower, middle and higher yogas, [1] the lower one comprises: [A] view (*lta ba*) regarding the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness, [B] meditation (*sgom pa*) on the indivisibility of bliss and emptiness and [C] fruition (*’bras bu*), the indivisibility of the three *kāyas*.

[2] In the case of the middle yoga, the thoughts in the lower yoga are the ascription of names to what are mere conceptual constructs. [A] Since these thought constructs are, moreover, merely mindfulness (*dran pa*), they are the mirror-like wisdom. [B] Through the Guru’s instruction, they are experienced without mindfulness (*dran med myong ba*), and are the wisdom of equality. [C] By revealing their status as unoriginated, they are the discriminating wisdom. [D] By realizing that they are free from activities, there is the task-accomplishing wisdom. [E] By the complete purity of the absence of representational thinking, one experiences, by means of these instructions, the thoroughly purified expanse—the *dharma-dhātu*. Hence, it is called the middle yoga.

[3] In the context of the higher yoga, what were labeled as “wisdoms” by the middle yoga are like an illusion. [A] They are merely the “Apratiṣṭhāna of unity” (*zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa*), that is, the inseparability of mindfulness and mental nonengagement, [B] But the absence of any mindfulness and mental activity is the “Apratiṣṭhāna of emptiness” (*stong nyid rab tu mi gnas pa*). [C] And the since it is free from thought, not being known by anyone’s intellect, it is the “Apratiṣṭhāna of cessation” (*rgyun chad rab tu mi gnas pa*). Moreover, since these Apratiṣṭhāna [strands] are inseparably united with *amanasikāra*, through the capacity of unifying any dualities whatsoever, the three aspects of *saṃsāra* and three *nirvāṇas* are only the magical emanation of mind and wisdom.<sup>1180</sup>

<sup>1179</sup> This is the most likely Sanskrit equivalent. Others are noted in Negi s.v. *rgyun chad*.

<sup>1180</sup> *Dohākoṣahrdayārthagūṭīkā* (DKHT) D 2268, 69b<sub>2-7</sub> (p. 138<sub>2-7</sub>): *de la rnal ’byor tha ma dang ’bring dang rab kyi dbang du byas na | tha ma snang stong dbyer med lta ba | bde stong dbyer med bsgom pa | sku gsum dbyer med ’bras bu’o || rnal ’byor ’bring po na re | rnal ’byor tha ma ni rnam par rtog pa ni rnam par rtog pa ’ba’ zhig la ming du btags pa’o || rnam rtog de yang dran pa tsam yin pas me long lta bu’i ye shes dang | man ngag gis dran med myong ba mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes dang | skye med sa bstan pas so sor rtog pa’i ye shes dang | bya*

Of particular significance here is the view that the lower yoga is mind-based, the middle yoga wisdom-based, whereas the highest, Apratiṣṭhāna yoga of Amanasikāra, realizes a unity in which both mind and wisdom freely manifest.

In particular, it was Maitrīpa (aka Maitreyanātha) and his colleagues who were credited with synthesizing and systematizing the Amanasikāra teachings of the siddhas and showing their continuity with Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka.<sup>1181</sup> Orna Almogi has drawn attention to Vajrapāṇi's (11<sup>th</sup> c.) identification of *amanasikāra* with Apratiṣṭhānavāda meditation, and this tradition's rejection of the type of blank-minded meditation that was associated with early Buddhists and, later, with Heshang. In his *\*Guruparamparākramopadeśa*, this student of Advayavajra states that “*amanasikāra* that is devoid of false imputation, false deprecation, and attachment is the meditation [of Apratiṣṭhānavāda]. [To be sure, reaching a state of] total blankness [lit. ‘becoming [like] inanimate matter’] as a result of holding a nihilist view in regard to all [external] objects and [thus no longer] experiencing [phenomena] is [considered by it] a stain in meditation [that should be avoided].”<sup>1182</sup>

In his *Caturmudrānvaya*, Maitrīpa explicitly connects the siddha-based Mahāmudrā teachings with the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka and *amanasikāra* meditations, citing as support a verse from the *Jñānalokālaṃkāra* (JAĀ) linking *amanasikāra* (mental nonengagement) and *apratīṣṭhāna* (nonfoundationalism).<sup>1183</sup> In his *Sekanirdeśa*, Maitrīpa explains how the *mahāmudrā* that is defined in terms of “not abiding (not being fixed, not having a foundation) in everything” (*sarvasminn apratiṣṭhānam*) is in harmony with the Madhyamaka goal of realizing suchness devoid of any superimpositions, especially of knowledge and objects of knowledge.<sup>1184</sup> Indeed, *Sekanirdeśa* 36 provides a thumbnail sketch of the last three of the four abandonments of mental signs as presented in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (and

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*ba dang bral ba rtogs pas bya ba nan tan gyi ye shes dang | bsam du med pa shin tu rnam par dag pas chos kyi dbyings shin tu rnam par dag pa'i dbyings de dag man ngag gis nyams su myong bas rnal 'byor 'bring po zhes bya'o || rnal 'byor rab na re | rnal 'byor 'bring pos ye shes su ming du btags pa ni sgyu ma lta bu dran pa dang yid la ma byas pa dbyer mi phyed pa zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas pa tsam yin gyi | gang dran pa med cing yid la bya ba med pa de stong nyid rab tu mi gnas pa dang | skye ba med cing dgag tu med pa de btang snyoms rab tu mi gnas pa | gang gis blos mi rig pa bsam du med pas rgyun chad rab tu mi gnas pa'o || de yang rab tu mi gnas pa de dag yid la mi byed pa dang dbyer mi phyed pas | gang yang gnyis po'i sbyar ba'i nus pa des | 'khor ba rnam pa gsum dang mya ngan las 'das pa gsum ni sems dang ye shes kyi sprul pa'o ||*

<sup>1181</sup> As this is discussed in detail in Mathes 2013, it is only given cursory treatment here.

<sup>1182</sup> Almogi 2010, 16. Translation altered slightly for sake of consistency.

<sup>1183</sup> See Mathes 2013, 278–80. On the relevant quotation, which Padma dkar po also quotes, see Volume II, 177 n. 540.

<sup>1184</sup> See Mathes 2013, 280.

*Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*) but reframes these as stages in the realization of *mahāmudrā*.<sup>1185</sup> Rāmapāla’s commentary on this sequence follows the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* but concludes by showing its culmination to be the Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*):

‘Who has no eagerness for fruition’ [means] ‘he who does not have ‘eagerness’ [i.e.] desire, which has the nature of an attachment to concepts that grasp the attaining of [fruits] beginning with the first spiritual level (*bhūmi*) and ending with omniscience of all forms, ‘for fruition’. ‘He will find’ [i.e.] attain ‘the Great Seal’. By this [Maitreyaṇātha] teaches the Great Seal to be devoid of all attachments because of the disappearance of attachment to [concepts of] opposing factors, antidotes, reality, [or] fruition, in as much as [all of them] have the nature of the world, whose nature is non-abiding and non-superimposition.<sup>1186</sup>

Finally, Sahajavajra, a student of Maitrīpa, argues in his commentary to his master’s *Tattva-daśaka* that, contrary to Kamalaśīla’s interpretation of *amanasikāra* as the outcome (*phala*) of analytic investigation, meditation—deep insight (*vipaśyanā*) meditation notwithstanding—is performed with a nonanalytical mind right from the beginning.<sup>1187</sup>

This overview of three important strands of Indian *amanasikāra* exegesis fills in some of the doctrinal background needed to understand Padma dkar po’s own erudite interpretations of *amanasikāra* and the ways he is able to situate these within the broader hermeneutic of reconciling, and resolving conflicts over, the relative roles of conceptual and nonconceptual modes of knowledge in Buddhist soteriology. It is to these interpretations that we now turn our attention.

#### PADMA DKAR PO’S THREE GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF *AMANASIKĀRA*

Padma dkar po takes up the topic of *amanasikāra* in a wide variety of exegetical, pedagogical, and polemical contexts, but nowhere more rigorously than in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod*. Among the many treatments of the topic advanced in that work, one deserves special notice. It occurs in a section on the import of Maitrīpa’s *Amanasikāra Cycle* (*Yid la mi byed pa’i chos skor*) of Mahāmudrā teachings where the Fourth ’Brug chen delineates three permissible grammatical interpretations of the term *amanasikāra* that each illuminate

<sup>1185</sup> See Mathes 2013, 281: “He who does not abide in the domain of the remedy,/ Is not attached to true reality,/ And does even not desire the fruit,/ Finds *mahāmudrā*.”

<sup>1186</sup> I follow the translation and critical edition of Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 321 which is altered very slightly for sake of consistency. See also Mathes 2013, 285.

<sup>1187</sup> Mathes 2006, 17; 2013, 288.

important senses of the term as it is employed in Maitrīpa’s corpus. The relevant passage is translated here, with the critical text provided in volume two.<sup>1188</sup>

The meaning of the term *yid la mi byed pa* has been explained in three ways:

[1] First, the letter *i* of the *si* in *amanasikāra* signifies the seventh case [i.e., locative] particle, viz., the [Tibetan] *la* in the locution *yid la* [meaning “in the mind”]. This seventh [locative case] is designated with an inflection denoting a locus (*gnas gzhi’i rkyen*). As a grammatical sūtra [*Kalāpasūtra*<sup>1189</sup>] states:

That which is apprehended is called a “locus”.<sup>1190</sup>

Therefore, that sense of “having a locus [or foundation]” is negated by the first letter *a*, and so the term *amanasikāra* must be known [here] to imply “the absence of any locus or founding basis for perceiving anything” (*gang du dmigs pa’i gnas sam rten gzhi med pa*). According to the *Samvarodaya* 33.4:

<sup>1188</sup> See Volume II, critical edition: 175–79.

<sup>1189</sup> *Kalāpasūtra* (Tib. *Ka lā pa sū tra*) D 4282. For an overview of this basic text of the Kalāpa (alias Kātantra or Kaumāra) system of Sanskrit grammar that was developed by Buddhist grammarians, see Verhagen 1994, 63–64. “Kalāpa” is named after a text called *Kātantra* (“small manual”), itself an abridged version of the longer *Kaumāralāta* which is said to have been revealed by a deity Kārttikeya to Śarvavarman, about whom no reliable historical information is available. See Op. cit., 51. Padma dkar po elsewhere alludes more generally to the *Bshad pa bzhi* as the source of his third interpretation of *amanasikāra*. This is short for the *Brda sprod pa’i gzhung byung tshul bshad pa bzhi* or *Four Explanations on the History of Grammatical Texts* (*vyākaraṇagrantha : brda sprod pa’i gzhung*). For a useful synopsis of these four grammatical systems, see *Chos rnam kun btus* vol. 1 693–95. They are summarized in Op. cit., 50 f. et passim. They comprise [1] the grammatical system of Pāṇini (fl. 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE), [2] the *Kalāpa* grammatical system (ca. 4<sup>th</sup> c.) associated with Śarvavarman, [3] the slightly later Cāndra system named after Candragomin (ca. 450) and his *Cāndravyākhyā*, and [4] the Sārasvata (alias Sarasvatī) system named after the text *Sārasvatavyākaraṇa* that is said to have been revealed by the goddess Śrī Sarasvatī to the Brahmin ācārya Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> c.) and gained popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in northern India (esp. Bihar and Bengal) and Tibet. The *Sārasvatavyākaraṇa* is extant (see Op. cit., 117), as are partial Tibetan translations. Of these four grammatical systems, the second and third were developed by Buddhist grammarians, the first and fourth by Brahmanical grammarians.

<sup>1190</sup> *Kalāpasūtra* (Tib. *Ka lā pa sū tra*) D 4282, 10s. As the commentary *Lung ston pa ka lā pa’i mdo’i ’grel pa slob ma la phan pa* (D 4284) ascribed to \*Ugrabhūti (ca. 10<sup>th</sup> c.) explains: “That apprehender [or act of apprehending] with respect to which [there is] a support is “apprehension”... That which is apprehended is termed the ‘locus’ [or ‘subject’] (*gnas gzhi : ādhāra*)”... | *gang la rnam par gnas pa ’dzin par byed pa de kun ’dzin pa’o* |... | *gang kun nas ’dzin pa de gnas gzhi’i ming can du ’gyur ro* | The commentary further explains that the *ādhāra* is also a term used to explain the relationship between any entities in terms of founding and founded (*gang yang rten dang brten pa’i dngos po ’brel pa ’chad pa*...). On this commentary and the various Tibetan forms of the author’s name, see Verhagen 1994, 69–70.

Relying on existents devoid of existence<sup>1191</sup>,  
 One deals with existents devoid of foundation.<sup>1192</sup>  
 Engaging the mind that is without mentation (*yid med yid*),  
 One does not think anything at all.<sup>1193</sup>

What is hereby negated is a mental fixation that is restrictive (*sems 'dzin dam por byed*) due to being tightly focused on an objective reference by means of a mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs*) belonging to the mental factor of mental engagement (*manasikāra*)<sup>1194</sup>, even though this may be necessary in the context of establishing an ordinary state of tranquility (*thun mong gi zhi gnas*).<sup>1195</sup> Moreover, Asaṅga stated [in the *Śrāvakabhūmi*] “here, fixation (*'jog pa*) and thorough fixation (*yang dag par 'jog pa*) are mental engagements involving forced application (*bsgrim ste 'jug pa'i yid la byed pa : balavāhana manaskāraḥ*)”.<sup>1196</sup>

[2] Second, when *amanasikāra* is rendered as a [genitive] *tatpuruṣa* compound such that the *i* of the seventh [locative case is omitted], then the term *yid byed pa* [*manaskāra*] renders the second explanation [i.e., genitive form of the *tatpuruṣa*]

<sup>1191</sup> This final chapter of the *Samvarodaya* (33) concerns the “*saṃvara* of attainment” (*saṃvarasiddhi*) which, as Ratnarakṣita explains, refers to reality (*tattva*). Tsuda 1974, 329. It is bodiless, mindless and without existence, yet it is the source of body, mind and existence and realized through them.

<sup>1192</sup> As quoted in Padma dkar po's treatise, this line reads “[They] should be cultivated as lacking any foundation.” (*brten pa med pa'i bsgom par bya*). We have followed canonical translations and Sanskrit (see following note).

<sup>1193</sup> For Sanskrit and Tibetan text, see Volume II, 176 and n. 531.

<sup>1194</sup> On *manasikāra* in relation to *amanasikāra*, see above, 401 f. and below 416 n. 1197.

<sup>1195</sup> See next note.

<sup>1196</sup> This statement occurs in a discussion of *śamatha* (“tranquility”) techniques near the beginning of the penultimate third section (*yogasthāna*) of the *Śrāvakabhūmi*. The “mental engagement of forced application” is there presented as the first of four mental engagements that engender *samādhi* on the Śrāvaka path of meditation by the power of thorough investigation involving nine steps of stabilizing the mind (*cittasthita : sems gnas pa*). The four mental engagements comprise: [1] forced application (*bsgrim ste 'jug pa : balavāhana*), [2] interrupted application (*sacchidravāhana : skabs su 'chad cing 'jug pa*), [3] uninterrupted application (*niśchidravāhana : skabs su 'chad pa med par 'jug pa*), and [4] effortless application (*anābhogavāhana : rtsol ba med par 'jug pa*). In his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* (280s–281i), Padma dkar po explains four types of fixation in the context of calm abiding meditation: “Here, the term ‘fixation’ (*'jog : prasthāna*) means to fixate the mind on an objective reference. The term ‘sustained fixation’ (*rgyun du 'jog : samsthāpana*) means to fixate continually on that objective reference. In sum, the term ‘fixation’ means that when one recognizes distractions, one [can thereby] relinquish them. The term ‘proximate fixation’ (*nye bar 'jog pa : upasthāpana*) means to fixate the mind on that objective reference intently in order to subsequently abandon distractions.” *de la 'jog ces bya ba ni | dmigs pa la sems 'jogs pa || rgyun du 'jog ces bya ba ni dmigs pa de nyid la rgyun du 'jog pa'o || bslan te 'jog bya ba ni rnam par g.yeng ba shes na de spong ba'o || nye bar 'jog ces pa ni rnam par g.yeng ba spang phyis phyir brtul te dmigs pa de nyid la 'jog pa'o ||*

such that the particle *i* [*la*] is not presented [i.e., is deleted].<sup>1197</sup> In that case, its meaning is glossed as “mental inaction” (*yid mi byed pa : amanaskāra*) where it is “activity of ego-mind” (*yid kyi las*)<sup>1198</sup> that is here claimed to be the object of negation. As the *Abhi[dharmakośa]* 4.1c states:

[What is the “mental activity”?] Intentionality<sup>1199</sup> is mental activity.<sup>1200</sup>

[Here], what is negated is the purposive application (*nan tan du byed pa*) pertaining to the mode of apprehension that is a grasping belonging to the mental factor of intentionality (*sems pa : cetanā*).<sup>1201</sup> As for the mental factor of intentionality, it

<sup>1197</sup> Padma dkar po’s second grammatical interpretation takes *manaskāra* as a genitive *tatpuruṣa* compound (“activity of mind”) following the AK 4.1c compound *manaskāra* which was taken by Tibetan translators as a genitive *tatpuruṣa* and rendered accordingly as *yid kyi las*. Padma dkar po thus offers a hermeneutical interpretation (widespread in Indian scholasticism) that exploits the semantic possibilities of *tatpuruṣa* compounds wherein different possible nominal inflections of the first term in the compound which are dropped in the compound formation can be read back into it. Grammatically, the compound *manasikāra* is an instance of a non-deletion (*aluk*) compound. According to Prof. Aklujkar, “Constructions such as *manasi + kṛ* are common in Sanskrit. Because a close association developed between *manasi* and *kṛ*, a syntactic compound came into being between the locative *manasi* and the verbal noun *kāra* derived from *kṛ*. When, against the general rule, the case suffix of the first member is not dropped, the compound is called *aluk* (‘non-deletion’).” We are grateful to Prof. Aklujkar for sharing this grammatical observation (in personal correspondence) and refer the reader to his *Sanskrit: An Easy Introduction to an Enchanting Language* (Richmond: Svadhyaya Publications 2003), sections 29.11 fn. 7, 33.16, 34.22.

<sup>1198</sup> Padma dkar po here follows the Abhidharma understanding of ‘mental engagement’ (*manaskāra*). See *Abhidharmasamuccaya*: Skt. Gokhale, 15<sub>38</sub>; *manaskāraḥ katamaḥ | cetasa ābhogaḥ | ālambanane citta<sup>a</sup> dhāraṇa-karmakaḥ ||* <sup>a</sup>Pradhan 6<sub>1</sub>: *ālambanacitta* (Tibetan *la* supports locative in Gokhale edition); Tib. *yid la byed pa gang zhe na | sems kyi ’jug pa ste | dmigs pa la sems ’dzin pa’i las can no* | “What is mental engagement? It is mental tenacity. Its function is to keep the mind on an objective reference.” From French translation of Rāhula 1971, 7. The term *ābhoga* has the sense of ‘bending’ or ‘inclining’ toward an object; a directedness or inclination of mind. Seyfort Ruegg 1989 translates *cetasa ābhogaḥ* as “mental inflexion”; Rahula (op. cit., 7) translates it as “la ténacité de l’esprit”.

<sup>1199</sup> ‘Intentionality’ is a suitable rendering of *cetanā* with the proviso that both of the primary senses of ‘intentionality’ are implied: [1] directedness toward a content or object, and [2] pertaining to an intention or purpose. On the Abhidharma understanding, mind’s object-directedness is tied to specific intentions and purposes. Thus, action (*karma*) is by definition what is done intentionally; and because all action is motivated action, action is intentionality. Intentionality is further identified with mental activity which is considered the source of all other activity (bodily and verbal).

<sup>1200</sup> *Abhidharmakośa* 4.1c (La Vallée Poussin ed.): *cetanā mānasakaraṃ...*; Tib. *sems pa yid kyi las yin no*. In the Abhidharma analysis, of the three types of activities—bodily, verbal and mental—mental activity (*mānasakara*) is regarded as the original cause and is identified with intentionality (*cetanā*). Thus AK 4.1cd reads: “Intentionality is mental activity. It engenders two kinds of activity: bodily and verbal activity.”

<sup>1201</sup> In Abhidharma philosophy, *cetanā* is generally listed as the third of the five omnipresent (*sarvatraga* : *kun tu ’gro ba* : ‘going everywhere’) mental factors that are pervasively present, overtly or covertly, in all conscious processes. Mental engagement (*manasikāra/manaskāra*) is listed as the fifth omnipresent mental factor. In the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, *manaskāra* is the first of fifty-one mental factors belonging to the aggregate of mental



consists in “notional construction [or constitution] by the mind (*sems mngon par 'du byed pa : cittābhisamkāra*), i.e., mental activity”<sup>1202</sup>. According to that [account in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*]:

It has the function of directing the mind toward wholesome, unwholesome or neutral activities.<sup>1203</sup>

[Here,] it is notional construction (*abhisamkāra*) of the object that is negated. While it may [help] establish tranquility, like in the case of the eight notional constructs (*saṃskāra*) that eliminate the five faults (*doṣa*)<sup>1204</sup>, *mahāmudrā* is said to be free from such construction and thus karma does not accumulate. And [as Saraha states in *Dohākoṣagīti*]:

I don’t accept or reject the coming and going [of thoughts].<sup>1205</sup>

And the *Hevajra* [I.8.44a] states:

[The whole world should indeed be contemplated]  
Such that it is not contemplated by mentation.<sup>1206</sup>

Thus, it is said [in the *Dohākoṣagīti*]

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formations (*saṃskāra*) that in turn consist in six types of intentionality (*cetanā*) or object-directedness associated with the six sense faculties: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental.

<sup>1202</sup> *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS) Skt. Pradhan, 6<sub>1</sub>; Gokhale, 15<sub>37</sub>. See also following note.

<sup>1203</sup> *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS) Skt.: Pradhan, 5<sub>23</sub>–6<sub>1</sub>; Gokhale, 15<sub>37</sub>: *cetanā katamā | cittābhisamkāro manaskarma | kuśalākuśalāvyākṛteṣu cittapreraṇakarmikā* || “What is intentionality? It consists in notional construction by the mind, mental activity. It has the function of directing the mind toward wholesome, unwholesome or neutral activities.” For French translation, see Rahula 1971, 7 (English tr. by Boin-Webb 2001, 9). The important term “notional construction” (*abhisamkāra*) is clarified in the *vyākhyā* (D 124b–125a): “The statement ‘it has the function of directing the mind toward wholesome, unwholesome or neutral activities’ is taught because in, this case, [intentionality] makes the mind attend to phenomena such as wholesomeness and the rest, however these are notionally construed (*mngon par 'dus byas pa*).” The connection between *abhisamkāra* (notional construction) and *prapañca* (discursive elaboration) is noted in *Tarkajvālā* 3.26.

<sup>1204</sup> This refers to the identification of *amanasikāra* as one of five faults that obstruct nonconceptual wisdom (*nirvikalpañāna*), as noted in Yogacāra sources such as *Mahāyānasamgraha* 8.2, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* 485–88, and *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*. See above, 405–6. Padma dkar po here distinguishes *amanasikāra* qua *mahāmudrā* from the early Buddhist *amanasikāra* that Mahāyānists viewed as an obstacle to *nirvikalpañāna*.

<sup>1205</sup> *Do ha mdzod kyi glu* D 2224. This text not to be confused with the *Dohākoṣa* of Saraha that is known in Tibet as the *People’s Dohā* (*dmangs gyi do ha*). The expression “coming and going” (*gamanāgamana : 'gro 'ong*) typically refers to erratic movements of thoughts (*vikalpa : rnam rtog*) in Siddha works.

<sup>1206</sup> Line in square brackets is added to provide context.

Due to mentation, that [single nature] has an objective reference.<sup>1207</sup>

Having here posited that everything that functions as mental activity has an objective reference, it is definitively shown that all [such] intentional objects are to be completely pacified. This has been eloquently explained by the Teacher in the following quotation [from the *Jñānālokāṃkāra* (JĀA)]:

Homage to you who is without imagined thoughts,  
Whose mind has no foundation whatsoever,  
Who is beyond mindfulness, and not mentally engaged,  
And who is without objective reference.<sup>1208</sup>

The [terms] “nonmindfulness” (*dran med : asmṛta*) and so forth are treated extensively below.<sup>1209</sup>

[3] Third, when the *a* in the term *amanasikāra* is a prefix, the vowel *a* [can be] taken in the sense of nonorigination (*anutpāda = skye ba med pa*)<sup>1210</sup> while *manasikāra* is [then] explained as mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*). In this case, the letter *a* signifies a “well-founded” (*yonīśaḥ*) mental engagement (*tshul bzhin du yid la byed pa : yonīśomanaskāra*)<sup>1211</sup> and may [thus] be glossed as *a yid la byed*

<sup>1207</sup> The next line in the *dohā* establishes the emptiness of the referential (*dmigs bcas*) and nonreferential (*dmigs med*) which are both products of mind (*yid*): *dmigs pa stong pa nyid yin la* | Advayavajra’s *Ṭīkā* on Saraha’s *Dohānidhikośaparipūrṇagīti* (D 2257) indicates that *de nyid* in the quoted passage refers to the undifferentiated single nature (*rang bzhin gcig*) that he equates with *dharmakāya*. The relevant passage is translated quite differently in the *Ṭīkā*. It may also be worth noting that the section of the *Dohākośagīti* (D 2224) in which the quoted line occurs is similar to Saraha’s *Dohākośa* (or “People’s dohā”; *dmangs do hā*) *pādas* 100–2 where however the *pāda* containing the quoted passage which would follow these is missing.

<sup>1208</sup> JĀA, 146<sub>1-2</sub>.

<sup>1209</sup> For a lengthy analysis of the multiple meanings of *dran pa* and *dran med* in different doctrinal and soteriological contexts, see *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod*, PKsb vol. 21, 271<sub>4</sub> ff.

<sup>1210</sup> On the scriptural basis for this definition, see the following note.

<sup>1211</sup> Used adjectivally, *yonīśaḥ* (*tshul bzhin*) has various meanings such as correct, thorough, fundamental, and founded (on this last rendering, see Adam 2003, 146 et passim). On the nominative form, see Monier-Williams s.v. *yonī* where it is defined as source, place of birth, vagina, womb, repository, receptacle etc. We have rendered *yonīśaḥ* as “well-founded” based on a passage from the *Buddhasaṃgīti* sūtra which is quoted by Padma dkar po (*Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod*, 280<sub>1-2</sub>) as it had been earlier by Kamalaśīla (see *Bhāvanakrama* I: Skt. critical text in Adam 2003, 166) which glosses *yonīśo* as ‘nonorigination’ (*skye ba med pa*): “What is well-founded inquiry? What is the source [or birth-place] (*yonīḥ*; lit. ‘vulva’)? It was said: ‘Nonorigination is the source (*anutpādo yonīḥ*). The inquiry with regard to it is well-founded inquiry.’” *katamā yonīśaḥ | prcchā | āha | anutpādo yonīḥ | tasya prcchā yonīśaḥ prcchā* | Tib. *tshul bzhin dri ba gang lags | tshul bzhin ni gang lags | bka’ stsal pa | skye ba med pa ni tshul bzhin no* | On this basis, Padma dkar po posits “mental engagement in that

*pa*, [‘bringing to mind [the foundation (*yonih*)] *a*’, i.e., nonorigination]. Moreover, in that case, the intermediary *mi* [‘non-’] is not presented, in the same way that the “king fond of greens” (*lo ma la dga’ ba’i rgyal po : śākapriyaḥ pārthivaḥ*) is [truncated to] “king greens (*lo ma’i rgyal po : śākapārthiva*).”<sup>1212</sup> Here, the *a* refers to the perfection of insight (*shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa : prajñāpāramitā*). [The syllable *a* thus has] the capacity to show all the quasi-synonyms of nonduality such as nonorigination, noncessation and so forth by way of such expressions as *anutpanna* and *anirodha*. According to the [*Mañjuśrī*] *nāmasaṃgīti* [5.1cd]

A is foremost among all the letters (*akāra*).

It is of great significance, it is the supreme vowel (*akṣara*),

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source” [i.e., nonorigination] as “well-founded mental engagement” (*tshul bzhin de yid la byed pas tshul bzhin yid byed du’ang bzhag pa yod do*). He explains elsewhere in the text (284<sub>4-5</sub>) that nonorigination is a synonym of emptiness (*skye ba med pa ni stong pa nyid kyi ming rnam grangs pa’o*). The antonym of well-founded mental engagement is unfounded mental engagement; it is unfounded (*ayoniśo*) because it bases itself on imagined superimpositions rather than the unborn nature of reality.

<sup>1212</sup> Padma dkar po here follows the grammatical analysis of *amanasikāra* given by Maitrīpa in his *Amanasikārādhāra*, on which see Mathes 2009 and 2015. According to Maitrīpa (in Mathes’ translation) “...the negative particle (i.e., the privative *a*) is only [used] in its usual [metaphorical] sense. This word (i.e., this negation) has two [meanings] that require explaining. [Everything] being either [like] an illusion or something not truly established [i.e., as mode of emptiness asserted either by the Māyopamādvayavādins or the Apratiṣṭhānavādins, respectively], [the privative *a*] negates neither something existent nor something non-existent. By this reasoning it is ruled out [that the privative *a*] has the meaning of negating the world. I will explain the formation of the word. [*Amanasikāra*] means the *manasikāra* for which the letter *a* [in front of it] is the main thing. It is a compound in which the middle word is dropped, as in the case of a *śākapārthiva*, a “king [for whom] vegetables [are the main thing].” Accordingly, whatever mental engagement (*manasi-kāra*) there is, all of it is “*a*” which means that it has the nature of nonorigination.”

In a note on this important passage, Mathes observes that Maitrīpa here followed the lead of Jayāditya and Vāmana in taking *amanasikāra* as a compound in which the component *pradhāna* (“the main thing”) has been omitted. This, Mathes continues, “is fully in line with the *Kāśikāvṛtti* on *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2,1,60, in which Maitrīpa’s example of “vegetable king” is analyzed as a “king for whom vegetables are the main thing.” (see KV, vol. 2, 84: *śākapradhānaḥ pārthivaḥ śākapārthivaḥ*). When it is understood thus—that one directs one’s attention (*manasikāra*) to the letter *a* as the main thing—“*a*” can no longer be the simple privative, but must stand for a more profound negation, such as the one implied by emptiness or nonorigination (*anutpāda*).” It may be added that with this interpretation the *a* no longer serves as a negation (affirming or nonaffirming) of mental engagement but as its very object – emptiness or nonorigination. This enables both Maitrīpa and Padma dkar po to counter the long-standing allegations that *amanasikāra* involves (voluntary) cognitive cessation. Mathes 2015 further notes that Maitrīpa and Padma dkar po base their example of the *śākapārthiva* on different Indian grammatical precedents : “Padma dkar po’s analysis of the compound “vegetable king” is in accord with Jayakṛṣṇa’s *Subodhinī* commentary on the *Siddhāntakaumudī* (no. 739), where we find: *śākapriyaḥ pārthivaḥ śākapārthivaḥ* (SB, p. 178). Maitrīpa’s own analysis of the compound as “*manasikāra* for which the letter *a* is the main thing” shows, however, that he was following the *Kāśikāvṛtti*.”

Of great creative power<sup>1213</sup>, yet unoriginated.<sup>1214</sup>

And so it continues. As it says in the great commentary on the [*Mañjuśrī*] *nāma-saṃgīti* 4.1:

According to the Way of Mantras, there are two [factors]: discerning insight and skillful means. Their unity is ‘nonduality’ because the intrinsic essence of supreme bliss in which there is no duality between insight and means is claimed to be nondual. So it is [said].

According to the Way of Pāramitās, as long there are vacillations of mind [between] subject and object, I and mine, knower and known, there will be dualism in all these [cases]. The selflessness of all phenomena, free from all vacillations and devoid of discursive elaborations, is the essence of nonduality; it arises as spiritual embodiments (*sku*) having as their very being the nature of phenomena. It thereby arises as nonduality. Because its arising as a nonduality is distinguished in particular by the aspect of nonorigination, it is described as “having the quality of nonorigination.”

The *Amanasikāra Doctrinal Cycle* (*vid la mi byed pa'i chos skor*) is so-named because it teaches “mental nonengagement” (*amanasikāra*) according to meanings like those [elaborated above]. All these [twenty-five works contained in the cycle] were composed by the Lord Maitrīpa, a great master among siddhas, who was also called Advayaavajra, a master of definitive learning.

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To underscore some salient points in the foregoing passage, it may be helpful to consider the grammatical possibilities of *amanasikāra* that Padma dkar po exploits. He proposes

<sup>1213</sup> The Tibetan has *khong nas 'byung ba* but we follow the extant Sanskrit edition of *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* which has *mahāprāṇo* (“great power/vitality”), corresponding to the *srog chen po* given in some of the Tibetan canonical editions.

<sup>1214</sup> This line is from a passage in *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* 5.1bcd–2abc which is often quoted by Padma dkar po: “A is foremost among all the letters; It is of great significance, it is the supreme letter; It is of great creative power yet unoriginated; It is beyond verbal exemplification; It is the foremost cause of all expression. It thoroughly elucidates all words.” Skt. *akāraḥ sarvavarṇāgrya mahārthaḥ paramākṣaraḥ || mahāprāṇo hy anutpādo vāgudāhāravarjitaḥ | sarvābhilāpa hetvagryaḥ sarvavākṣuprabhāsvaraḥ ||* Tib. *a ni yig 'bru kun gyi mchog | don chen yi ge dam pa ste | srog chen po ste [khong nas 'byung ba] skye ba med | tshig tu brjod pa spangs pa yin | brjod pa kun gyi rgyu yi mchog | tshig kun rab tu gsal bar byed ||*

that *amanasikāra* can be validly interpreted in any of three ways, depending on how its grammar is construed: [1] taken as a locative *tatpuruṣa*, *amanasikāra* has the sense of “no mental engagement *in* any intentional locus or foundation”; [2] taken as a genitive *tatpuruṣa* compound, it has the sense of “no engagement *of* mind”; and finally, [3] taken as a *karmadhāraya*<sup>1215</sup> compound (of the form ‘a B that is A’) wherein the *a-* is taken not as a privative prefix but as a marker for an abstract noun signifying “nonorigination” (*anutpāda*), it has the sense of “mental engagements that are unoriginated” or “selfless” (*anātma*) or “essenceless” (*niḥsvabhāva*) and is thus identified as “well-founded mental engagement” (*yoniso manasikāra*) that Padma dkar po equates with *prajñāpāramitā*. The equation of *mahāmudrā* with *prajñāpāramitā* is already found in Jñānakīrti’s *Tattvāvatāra* and subsequently reiterated by commentators such as Rāmapāla in order to connect the perfection of insight (*prajñāpāramitā*)—which is said to underlie and encompass the other perfections by virtue of its being without foundation and free from discursive elaborations—with the *mahāmudrā* of mental nonengagement.

Philosophically, the three grammatical interpretations repudiate the existence of an apprehended object (locus), of an apprehending subject or mind, and of the world conceived as an array of existent selves and entities. To be more specific, *amanasikāra* in the sense of absence of a locus refutes the grounds for establishing any intentional object, *amanasikāra* in the sense of absence of mental activity refutes the grounds for establishing any intending subject or cognition, and *amanasikāra* of all mental engagements being unoriginated, selfless and empty, transcends every trace of conceptual dualism between subject and object, knower and known. We may note that in Padma dkar po’s second grammatical interpretation, the *Jñānālokālaṃkāra* (JĀA) quotation is cited, as it was by Maitrīpa and his circle, to link practices of mental nonengagement with the Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka view that phenomena lack any epistemic or ontological foundation. Padma dkar po is insistent that whatever provisional role intentional mental engagements may play in achieving a state of tranquility, they are nothing in and of themselves and subside in the prereflective *mahāmudrā* experience that is prior to and a precondition of all reflective and thematic mental activities.

Of particular interest in Padma dkar po’s third grammatical interpretation is his equation of *amanasikāra* with the well-founded mental engagement (*tshul bzhin yid la byed pa* = *yoniso manasikāra*), an equation he returns to repeatedly in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod* and other works. Following the gloss of *yonis* (‘vulva’, ‘source’, ‘birthplace’) as non-origination (*anutpāda*) given in the *Buddhasaṃgīti* and later quoted by Kamalaśīla to support his understanding of *amanasikāra* as a “mental engagement on (or, that goes to) the source,” i.e., nonorigination—and which is in this sense a “well-founded mental engagement”—Padma

<sup>1215</sup> Padma dkar po does not specify that it is a *karmadhāraya* compound but the context and Maitrīpa’s *Amanasikāradhāra* statement “It is both *a* and *manasikāra*, so it is *amanasikāra*” make it clear that it is.

dkar po is able to link Kamalaśīla's interpretation with Maitrīpa's interpretation of *amanasikāra* as “mental engagement in (or that is) *a*” (*a-manasikāra*) where *a* signifies nonorigination (*anutpāda*) and selflessness (*anātman*).

Now, the term *yonisomanasikāra* and its counterpart *ayonisomanasikāra* have a long history in Buddhist thought, their earliest deployment being found in the Pāli canon.<sup>1216</sup> In his own assimilation of these terms, Padma dkar po follows Kamalaśīla in equating the well-founded mental engagement with *bhūtapratyavekṣā* (*yang dag par so sor rtog pa*), which both scholars interpret as the “discernment of reality” where the reality (*bhūta*) in question is selflessness. He at the same time follows Maitrīpa's identification of *amanasikāra* with “genuine awareness” (*saṃvedana* : *yang dag par rig pa*), namely that “awareness which continues as something that is not separate from emptiness and compassion, [i.e.,] the inseparable union as a pair, nonduality.”<sup>1217</sup> What these terms commonly signify is a nondual cognition that discerns things as they are once obscuring reifications are dispelled. The key difference, then, is whether this cognition is “arrived at” as the fruition (*phala*) of a long drawn-out process of moral refinement and elimination of hypostases through analytical investigation (Kamalaśīla) or “disclosed” in its originary condition through a more radical clearing of dualistic accretions (Maitrīpa, Rāmapāla, Sahajavajra, Padma dkar po).

#### RESPONDING TO CRITICISMS OF AMANASIKĀRA

Despite Padma dkar po's intention to clarify and reconcile polarized lines of *amanasikāra* exegesis, his interpretations did not escape criticism. The Dge lugs scholar Shar chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532–1592), in his lengthy critique of the *Phyag chen mdzod*, raises questions about the methodological soundness of Padma dkar po's (and by implication Maitrīpa's) employment of a certain hermeneutical etymology of the Sanskrit term *amanasikāra* which takes the *a-* not as a privative marker but as signifying true reality (*tattva*) so that *yid la mi byed pa* is rendered as “mentally engaging in the nature of reality” (*tattva* : *de kho*

<sup>1216</sup> On *yonisomanasikāra* (Pāli *yonisomanasikāra*), see *Dīghanikāya* III, 227, *Vibhaṅga*, 373. On *ayonisomanasikāra* (Pāli *ayonisomanasikāra*), see *Dīghanikāya* III, 273, *Vibhaṅgāttakatha*, 148. The two terms are also found in certain works attributed to Asaṅga/Maitreya: *yonisomanasikāra*: *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* I.16; *ayonisomanasikāra*: *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* XI.4; *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.55–6, 58–9. It was previously noted that the term *amanasikāra* is often given a negative evaluation in Asaṅga/Maitreya's works. Thus, in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* XI.3, *amanasikāra* and *ayonisomanasikāra* are both included in a list of sixteen obstacles to the accumulation of virtue and knowledge. See, however, *Madhyāntavibhāga* V.12 and *Vṛtti* where *manasikāra*, understood as the belief in an “I” or “mine” (*ahaṃkāra* = *ngar 'dzin*), is presented as one of six types of distractedness (*vikṣepa*) and is said to be characteristic of the narrow-mindedness (*chung ngu'i sems*) resulting from the mental engagement (*manasikāra* in the Hīnayāna. In a similar vein, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* V.28–9 (together with Haribhadra's *Sphuṭārthā*) specifies not setting one's mind (*amanasikāra*) on the ‘seat/highest place of awakening’ (*bodhimāṇḍa*) as characteristic of the *manasikāra* of the *śrāvaka* family (*gotra*) amongst the Hīnayāna followers.

<sup>1217</sup> *Amanasikārādhāra*, Ed. Mathes 2015: *śūnyatākaruṇābhinnayuganaddhādvayavā hi saṃvedanam...*

na nyid).<sup>1218</sup> His argument is predicated on the assumption that hermeneutic etymologies based on grammar manuals can only be used to interpret aspects of provisional meaning but not those of definitive meaning. In a short text written in response to Shar chen's objections entitled *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan*, Padma dkar po rejects this hermeneutical restriction, arguing that the passage from the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* quoted in support of such a prohibition in fact "refutes the clinging to the Sanskrit language," i.e., to focusing on the words and not their meanings.<sup>1219</sup> Unfortunately, his reply is rather cryptic on this important issue but we may not be wrong to surmise that when the passage in question concludes that "one does not know that the meaning of the letter [a] is the nature of reality itself just as it is because [this] is the domain of the buddhas," Padma dkar po would read this not as a proscription on attempts to indicate definitive meanings through lexical hermeneutics, but rather as a recommendation *not* to confuse linguistic sense and reference, that is, not to confuse the understanding of words and grammar with an understanding of the reality to which they refer. Consider his following remark:

<sup>1218</sup> Sgom sde shar chan Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532–1592): *Byang chub sems 'grel gyi rnam par bshad pa'i zhar byung 'brug Mi pham Padma dkar pos Phyang chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces par rje tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa'i gsung lan*, 610<sub>6</sub> f.: "Relying on methods of establishing the meaning of the expression *yid la mi byed pa* [with reference to] the term *amanasikāra*, you claim to derive the definitive meaning of Unsurpassed tantras such as the [*Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*] which states: "A is foremost among all the letters." [5.1c] As the *Summary of Conduct* [*Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, D 1803, 141<sub>7</sub>–142<sub>1</sub>] states:

'Here, regarding explanations in canonical texts, when one follows *only* the sense of terms based on the previous renderings of words and meanings according to grammatical analysis, one does not thereby know how and why what is expressed by the letter [a] actually applies. One does not know that the meaning of the letter is the nature of reality itself just as it is because [this] is the domain of the buddhas. Listen, that [reality] is to be fathomed through the stages of the teachings.'

So, [you] in this way contradict [this] explanation that is not possible to derive aspects of definitive meaning of Unsurpassed tantras merely from grammatical treatises. Accordingly, there is no contradiction in deriving only aspects of definitive meaning shown in etymologies pertaining to path by relying on grammatical treatises. Also, having appended *manasikāra* to the prefix *a-*, you render it as mental engagement in reality (*de kho na nyid : tattva*), i.e., the meaning indicated by the letter *a*, in [the context of] the meditative equipoise. Taking it as an object of the mode of apprehending emptiness in the meditative equipoise, you correlate it with claims about meditation. But, in that case, surely you can't consult what is said by 'meditation masters' nowadays!" *yid la mi byed pa'i skad don a ma na si kā ra'i sgra'i bsgrub tshul la brten nas | a ni yi 'bru kun gyi mchog || ces sogs bla na med kyi rgyud rnams kyi nges pa'i don thon par bshad pa ni | spyod bsdu las | "di na gsung rab 'chad pa dag ni |<sup>a</sup> byā ka ra ṇa'i [vyākaraṇa] tshig don<sup>b</sup> sngon du byas nas sgra'i don 'ba' zhig gi rjes su 'brang gi | yang yi ge'i brjod pa gang du gang gi phyir ji ltar rab tu 'jug pa shes pa ni ma yin no || yi ge'i don<sup>c</sup> de kho na nyid ni<sup>d</sup> ji lta ba nyid<sup>d</sup> mi shes te | sangs rgyas rnams kyi spyod yul yin pa'i phyir ro || bstan pa'i rim gyis de<sup>e</sup> khong du chud par bya'i nyon cig" ces bla med kyi rgyud kyi nges don gyi cha sgra pa'i gzhung tsam las thon par mi nus par bshad pa dang ji ltar 'gal | des na lam gyi sgra bshad sogs kyi mtshon pa'i drang don gyi cha tsam sgra pa'i gzhung la brten nas thon pa la ni 'gal ba med do || yang a yar bcad ma na si kā ra zhes mar bcad nas mnyam bzhas tu a yig gi mtshon don de kho na nyid yid la byed pa la mdzad pa ni | kho bo cag mnyam gzhag tu stong pa nyid 'dzin stangs kyi yul du byas nas sgom par 'dod pa'i rjes su phebs pa yin mchi | de'i tshe na deng dus kyi sgom chen pa rnams kyi ji skad zhu mi shes lags |<sup>a</sup>D addit. |<sup>b</sup>D om. |<sup>c</sup>D addit. |<sup>d</sup>D addit. |<sup>e</sup>D addit.*

<sup>1219</sup> See Volume II, translation: 194, critical edition: 197.

Concerning [our] explanation of the term *amanasikāra*, [you have alleged] that it contradicts authoritative scripture like the statement in the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*: “Here, regarding explanations [given in] canonical texts, when one follows *only* the sense of terms based on the previous renderings of words and meanings according to grammatical analysis, [one does not thereby know how and why what is expressed by the syllable [a] actually applies.]”<sup>1220</sup> etc. [As for the allegation that] “Taking it as an object of the mode of apprehending emptiness in the meditative equipoise, you correlate it with claims about meditation”. This commits neither of two faults of reasoning because [1] that [above] quotation refutes the clinging to the Sanskrit language [and thus losing sight of the deeper meaning], and [2] the meaning of the syllable [given] in the *Four Explanations [on the History of Grammatical Writings]*<sup>1221</sup> would otherwise not make sense. In the latter case, it does not constitute [a fallacy of reasoning] because the meaning of that term [*amanasikāra*] as “not mentally engaging in the unfounded” means precisely “to mentally engage in the well-founded”. And, in that regard, not seeing any strands of hairs in the sky is precisely the correct seeing, whereas [seeing] the strands of hair and so forth is said to be due to the influence of vitreous floaters (*myodesopsia*). Unfounded mental engagement is ignorance; well-founded mental engagement is personally realized self-awareness. In this context, ignorance means conceptualizing.<sup>1222</sup>

Here, in explaining his rationale behind his interpretation of *amanasikāra* in the sense of attending undistortively to the nature of things, Padma dkar po explains that *amanasikāra* means “not mentally engaging in the unfounded” (*tshul min yid la mi byed pa*), which is tantamount to “mentally engaging in the well-founded” (*tshul bzhin yid la byed pa*) or, to put it differently, discerning things just as they are.

<sup>1220</sup> The *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* (Tib. *Spyod bsodus sgron me*), an an esoteric text on *Guhyasamāja* practice is attributed to the tantric Āryadeva. Interestingly, the passage quoted by mentioned by “the letter *a* serves as the cause for the application of all words without exception” (*yi ge a tshig ma lus pa la rab tu ’jug pa’i rgyur ’gyur*), it goes on to say: “Here, regarding explanations [given in] canonical texts, when one adheres only to the sense of the term rendered according to the word-prefix in line with grammatical analysis, one does not know how whatever is expressed by the syllable [a] actually applies. One does not know that the meaning of the syllable is reality itself which is just the way things are, because [this] is the domain of the buddhas. Listen, that [reality] is to be fathomed through the stages of the teachings.” *di na gsung rab ’chad pa dag ni byā ka ra ṇa’i tshig sngon du byas nas sgra’i don ’ba’ zhiḡ gi rjes su ’brang gi | yang yi ges brjod pa gang du gang gi phyir ji ltar rab tu ’jug par shes pa ni ma yin no || yi ge’i don de kho na nyid ji lta ba nyid mi shes te | sangs rgyas rnam kyī spyod yul yin pa’i phyir ro || bstan pa’i rim gyis de khong du chud par bya yis nyon cig |*

<sup>1221</sup> See above, 414 n. 1189.

<sup>1222</sup> *Shar rtse zhal snga’i brgal lan*. See Volume II, translation: 195, critical edition: 197.



In clarifying these identifications, Padma dkar po makes explicit the disclosive soteriological model underlying his account of salvific knowledge that was also fundamental to his interpretation of two modes of *mahāmudrā*. Unfounded mental engagement is adventitious ignorance (*ma rig pa*), like the perception of falling hairs in one afflicted by the presence of proteins (“floaters”) in the vitreous fluid. Well-founded mental engagement is personally realized self-awareness (*so so rang rig*), like the correct vision of one who is not afflicted by opthemia. Here, Padma dkar po’s understanding of unfounded mentation as an adventitious distortion of well-founded mental engagement or the personally realized self-awareness corresponds closely with *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.56 where unfounded mental engagement, identified as the basis of adventitious *karma* and *kleśas*, is said to be itself based ultimately on the purity of mind.

Padma dkar po in other contexts equates this well-founded mental engagement with “natural awareness” (*tha mal gyi shes pa*)<sup>1223</sup>, another quasi-synonym of *mahāmudrā*, and with awareness (*rig pa*) or even great awareness (*rig pa chen po*)<sup>1224</sup> that reveals itself through the purifying (*dag*) away of unfounded mental engagements. On this view, it is due to the reciprocity between latent tendencies of ignorance (*ma rig pa*) or distraction (*yengs pa*) and the unfounded mental engagements that perpetuate these tendencies, that there occurs a deviation away from (*gzhan du phyogs pa*) the well-founded mental engagement or, in other words, from attending to the source. “Thus,” he concludes, “since when unfounded mental engagements are purified away, only well-founded mental engagement remains, the gurus have clearly resolved that the roots of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* lie in recognition (*rig*) and nonrecognition (*ma rig*). They have for this reason declared that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are like the front and back of one’s hand.”<sup>1225</sup>

<sup>1223</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod*, PKsb vol. 21, 101<sub>6</sub>–103<sub>4</sub>.

<sup>1224</sup> *Ibid.*, 265<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>1225</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba’i gan mdzod*, PKsb vol. 21, 102<sub>2-3</sub>: “Even distraction occurs due to the power of beginningless latent tendencies. And even these very tendencies are implanted by unfounded mental engagement. This mental engagement is distraction that is ignorance itself; it is an inclination away and apart from founded mental engagement. It is like the statement that “Mental wandering due to mindfulness (*dran pa*) is called distraction” which makes it easily understood. Therefore, since when unfounded mental engagements are purified away, only well-founded mental engagement comes about, the gurus have clearly resolved that the roots of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* lie in recognition (awareness) and nonrecognition (ignorance). They have for this reason declared that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are like the front and back of one’s hand. Even the “well-founded mental engagement” consists precisely in the three foregoing grammatical explanations of *amanasikāra*. Because of these, the Bla mas taught the meditation that consists in mental nonengagement.” *yengs pa’ang thog ma med pa’i bag chags kyi mthu las byung la | bag chags de ka’ang tshul bzhin ma yin pa’i yid byed kyi bzhag go | yid byed de la ma rig pa de ka yengs pa yin te | tshul bzhin yid la byed pa las gzhan du phyogs pas so | dran pa las g.yos pa la yengs pa zer ba bzhin go bde bar mdzad do | de bas na tshul bzhin ma yin pa’i yid la byed pa dag na | tshul bzhin yid la byed pa kho na ’ong bas bla ma rnams ’khor ’das kyi rtsa ba rig ma rig gnyis su kha tshon gcod | des ’khor ’das lag pa’i lto rgyab lta bur gsung | di’i tshul bzhin yid la byed pa’ang | sngar a ma na si kā ra’i sgra bshad gsum pa de ka’o | de’i phyir bla ma rnams sgom pa yid la mi byed pa zhes gsungs ||*

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout his writings on ground and path *mahāmudrā*, Padma dkar po attempts to strike a viable balance between the nontantric and tantric paths of Mahāyāna, taking the former as a system of dispelling reifications and the latter as a system of rediscovering primordial modes of being, thinking and acting. He distinguishes these as “the sūtric system (*mdo'i lugs*) of instructions (*gdams ngag*) on severing imputations *externally* by relying on scripture and reasoning and the mantric system (*sngags kyi lugs*) of severing imputations *internally* by relying on the bla ma's personal guidance (*man ngag*).”<sup>1226</sup> Following the Second 'Brug chen Rgyal dbang rje, Padma dkar po reasons that the sūtra-based Lakṣaṇayāna “emphasizes a negative orientation” (*dgag phyogs*) whereas the tantra-based Vajrayāna “emphasizes a positive orientation” (*sgrub phyogs*). Viewed in terms of the modes of discourse relevant to these orientations, the former emphasizes negative determinations (*rnam bcad : vyavaccheda*), while the latter emphasizes positive determinations (*yongs gcod : pariccheda*). Padma dkar po proceeds to quote Rgyal dbang rje who characterized these contrasting orientations and discursive styles as the hallmarks of sūtra and tantra, as methods of distinguishing through the aspect of ‘negating by negative determination’ (*rnam bcad dgag pa*) and the aspects of ‘affirming by positive determination’ (*yongs gcod sgrub pa*) respectively.<sup>1227</sup> The difference, explains Rgyal dbang rje, is that the former “annihilates (*tshar gcad pa*) via counteracting objects to be abandoned,” whereas the latter “assimilates (*rjes su 'dzin pa*) via the nonduality of objects to be abandoned and their counteragents.”

<sup>1226</sup> *Ngo sprod ke'u tshad ma'i 'grel pa*, PKsb vol. 12, 457<sub>3-4</sub>: ...*lung rigs la brten nas sgro 'dogs phyi nas gcod pa'i gdams ngag mdo'i lugs | bla ma'i man ngag la brten nas sgro 'dogs nang nas gcod pa sngags kyi lugs so ||* Padma dkar po here takes his lead from Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor. See the latter's *Zab don dgongs pa'i gter mdzod grub pa'i shing rta*, *Kun dga' dpal 'byor gsung 'bum* vol. 2, 76–82: “Moreover, at first, in the case of ascertaining the view, when it comes to severing imputations regard the way things are, there is a difference between outward-oriented and inward-oriented [imputations]. Among these, [1] when study (*thos pa*) is the focus, the difference is between severing imputations outwardly by relying on reasoning and scripture and severing imputations inwardly by relying on personal instructions. [2] When thinking (*bsam pa*) is the focus, the difference is between discriminating insight (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) and personally realized wisdom (*so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*). [3] When meditation (*sgom pa*) is the focus, the difference is between the analytical meditation (*dpyod sgom*) of the paṇḍit and the settled meditation (*'jog sgom*) of the *kusulupa*.” *de yang dang po lta ba gtan la 'bebs na yang | yin lugs sgro 'dogs gcog pa'i tshe kha phyir bltas dang nang bltas kyi khyad par yod la | de dag la thos pa gtso bor byed pa'i tshe lung rigs la brten nas sgro 'dogs phyi nas gcog pa dang | man ngag la brten nas sgro 'dogs nang nas gcod pa'i khyad par | bsam pa gtso bor gyur pa'i tshe so sor rtog pa'i shes rab dang | so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes kyi khyad par | sgom pa gtso bor gyur pa'i tshe pa ndi ta'i dpyad sgom dang | ku su lu pa'i 'jog sgom gyi khyad par ro |*

<sup>1227</sup> *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* PGsb v. 21, 70<sub>2</sub>: *ji ltar sgro 'dogs khyer yang | mtshan nyid kyi theg pa thams cad du dgag phyogs gtso bor bton pa dang || rdo rje theg par sgrub phyogs gtso bor bton pas | rgyal dbang rjes | mdo sngags kyi khyad par la rnam bcad dgag pa'i rnam pa dang | yongs gcod sgrub pa'i rnam pas khyad par byas tshul gsungs |* This quote is from Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor's *Zab don dgongs pa'i gter mdzod grub pa'i shing rta*, in *Kun dga' dpal 'byor gsung 'bum* vol. 2, 71–3.

In Padma dkar po's estimation, negative determinations are integral to the Aprati-ṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka which dispenses with all epistemic and ontological foundations, whereas positive determinations are integral to the Vajrayāna evocations of immutable bliss supreme (*mahāsukha*). Both strands of interpretation are interwoven in the term “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” (*sarvākāravopetāsūnyatā*) and this unity is the gist of the author's own Mahāmudrā tradition.<sup>1228</sup> Padma dkar po also views this mediation between negative and positive determinations as the key to reconciling Madhyamaka and Siddha discourses in his Mahāmudrā tradition:

In reply to the question “in what way do the [1] the view explained in the Madhyamaka corpus on reasoning (*dbu ma rigs pa'i tshogs*) and [2] the view explained in the Dohā Trilogy (*do ha skor gsum*) differ in terms of fundamental discrepancies?”, they are vastly different in their approaches to ascertainment when it comes to their modes of expression. [1] The corpus on reasoning teaches by means of a logical reasoning that negates all wrong views, and thus explains matters according to the so-called “negating aspect involving a negative determination”. Such is the case, for example, [when they] explain the basis of Middle Way in terms of the nonduality of the truth in order to overturn the grasping for [and belief in] the two truths. [2] The *dohās* teach from the vantage point of first-hand experience (*nyams su myong ba*), thus [employing] “affirming aspect involving a positive determination”, as [in their] expressions “unity (*yuganaddha*) of the two truths” or “coemergent wisdom”.<sup>1229</sup>

The author adds that the purpose of this balancing of negative and positive determinations is not to impose value judgements based on subjective predilections such as “this is good” (*'di ni legs pa'o*) but to articulate a “nonfoundationalism of mere discourse” (*smra tsam rab tu mi gnas pa*) in order to realize the “nonfoundationalism of unity” (*zung 'jug rab tu mi*

<sup>1228</sup> We here summarize the sense of the following stanza in Padma dkar po's *Zhal gdams tshigs su bcad pa'i rim pa bdud rtsi'i gter*, PKsb vol. 21, 24 (compilation): “[It is] Apratiṣṭhāna [via] negative determination; immutable bliss supreme [via] positive determination; and is termed ‘emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects’ (*sarvākāravopetāsūnyatā*). Although classified by conceptual delimitations, [they have] the same meaning. Such is the *mahāmudrā* of our own tradition.” *rnam gcod rab tu mi gnas te || yongs gcod 'gyur med bde ba dang || rnam kun mchog ldan stong nyid ming || ldog pas 'byed la don gcig pa || nged rang lugs kyi phyag chen yin ||*

<sup>1229</sup> *Klan ka gzhom pa'i gnam*, in PKsb vol. 21, 571<sub>5</sub>–572<sub>3</sub>: *dbu ma rigs pa'i tshogs nas bshad pa'i lta ba dang | do ha skor gsum nas bshad pa'i lta ba la || ngo bo mi 'dra ba'i khyad par ji ltar zhes dris pa'i lan | de gnyis brjod byed gi sgo nas gtan la 'bebs tshul la khyad par che ste | rigs pa'i tshogs nas lta ba ngan pa thams cad dgag pa'i rigs pa'i sgo nas bstan pas rnam bcad dgag pa'i rnam pa zhes bshad de | dper na | bden pa gnyis su 'dzin pa bzlog pa'i phyir gzhi dbu ma bden pa gnyis su med par bshad pa lta bu | do ha la sogs pa nyams su myong ba'i ngo nas bstan pas yongs gcod sgrub pa'i rnam pa ste | bden pa gnyis zung 'jug gam lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes zhes pa lta bu ||*

*gnas pa*) that the author identifies as the “great Middle Way” or even “greatest of great Middle Way” (*dbu ma chen po'i chen po*).<sup>1230</sup> At stake here is a Middle Way between and beyond positive and negative appraisals of the ultimate, seeing both the *via negativa* and *via positiva* as complementary, rather than contradictory, aspects of the Buddhist path of discern-ing what is enduring from what is superfluous.

From this vantage point, the goal of all Buddhist thought and practice is to realize the abiding unity of appearance and emptiness without recourse to foundationalist aims and assumptions. Denying any dichotomy between appearance and reality, Padma dkar po draws attention to the intimate connection between the way things appear (conventional) and the way they are (ultimate). Following his line of thought, we may conclude that appearance is not something separate from reality but rather belongs to it as a form of its being. As Padma dkar po repeatedly reminds us, conventional phenomena belong to this groundless reality; they are the manifest expressions of its being and are therefore the only avenue for restoring our vision of things as they are.

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<sup>1230</sup> Ibid., 572<sub>3-4</sub>: *don skyes bu la skyon med pa zhes dang | 'di ni legs pa'o zhes pa lta bu | zhe 'dod kyis lta ba bzang ngan du mi srma || smra tsam rab tu mi gnas pa dang | zung 'jug rab tu mi gnas pa dang | dbu ma chen po dang | dbu ma chen po'i chen por 'jug pa'i khyad tsam yod ces lan du bgyis so |*

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

There is a set of tensions to which the four post-classical Bka' brgyud exegetes examined in this book continually returned. These turned on age-old controversies over the relative value and efficacy of different kinds of soteriological knowledge, praxis and discourse that had animated Buddhist thought since its inception. At the heart of such controversies was a dilemma over monastic-scholastic and peripatetic-yogic regimes of spiritual practice and the types of contemplation and knowledge associated with each. Of course, one must be wary here of oversimplification since the issues involved go beyond the incidentals of religious vocation, and touch on a deeper issue of how to relate philosophical and soteriological thinking to meditative realization, an issue that was of concern to the monk and yogin alike. In the eyes of our post-classical authors, these tensions were nowhere more clearly exemplified than in the life-events and teachings of the originator of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud traditions, Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen. Just as his early quest for knowledge and realization were seen as embodying the dilemma between the monastic and yogic ideals<sup>1231</sup>, his goal-realization and ensuing teaching career were thought to epitomize their harmonization within the overlapping spheres of personal assimilation and doctrinal synthesis. In these different ways, his life story revealed more vividly than any treatise how one could be both a learned (*mkhas*) monk and realized (*grub*) yogin.<sup>1232</sup> The key to reconciling these vocations lay in accommodating the modes of knowledge particular to each: the inferential-representational knowledge of the scholar and the experiential-presentational knowledge of the yogin. In this regard, Sgam po pa's life and teachings were viewed as paragons of a path of unity beyond extremes. It is time now to close this book with some concluding reflections on this vision of reconciliation by noting some of its Indian antecedents, and showing how it figured in Sgam po pa's life and teachings, and subsequently shaped the Mahāmudrā exegesis of our four post-classical Bka' brgyud thinkers.

Viewed historically, the dilemma between monastic and yogic styles of praxis and knowledge resurfaces time and again as a tension calling for reconciliation rather than as a matter of choice calling for an either/or solution. It was the genius of Sgam po pa and his successors to present and defend a vision of reconciliation that sought to combine essential elements of the scholastic and yogic vocations as they had evolved in India and Tibet. Looking back on the development of these ideals, the tension is already discernable in the early Buddhist distinction between monastic town-dwelling (*gāmaśālin*) monks and ascetic forest-dwelling (*āraṇyaka/āraṇyika*) monks, vocations that were, as Rupert Gethin has noted, by no

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<sup>1231</sup> The role of this tension in Sgam po pa's life and teachings is examined by Gyatrul Rinpoche 2004.

<sup>1232</sup> The Tibetan term title *mkhas grub* "learned-realized" conveys this dual ideal.

means mutually exclusive.<sup>1233</sup> Surveying the broader canvas of Indian religious history, the tension can be traced to the emergence in the sixth century BCE of a pan-Indian subculture of renunciates (*śramaṇa*), mainly from the warrior-administrator (*kṣatriya*) caste, who challenged the hegemony of the priestly (*brāhmaṇa*) caste. Many of these renunciates retreated to forest hermitages in order to discover the deeper meaning of the Vedas by internalizing its central rituals and sacrifices through yogic praxis. This resulted in a new body of religious literature known as “forest texts” (*āraṇyaka*) which were precursors of the Upaniṣads.<sup>1234</sup> This widespread “forest” movement led within Brahmanism to the advent of a religio-philosophical vocation of itinerant ascetics who forged new paths to liberation based more on direct personal knowledge (*jñāna*) than Vedic ritualism (*karma*). At the same time, it led to the propagation of many heterodox religio-philosophical traditions that developed largely outside of the Brahmanical system, among which Buddhism and Jainism were to prove the most resilient.

In the subsequent expansion of Buddhism in India, the tension between the vocations of the scholar-monk and itinerant-yogin was intensified by two major historical developments. The first was the emergence at the beginning of the first millennium of the common era of the so-called Great Vehicle (*Mahāyāna*) of Buddhism which claimed to offer a less self-centred, more universalistic approach to awakening than its predecessor, which was pejoratively designated as a Lesser Vehicle (*Hinayāna*). Granting altruism and social engagement priority over asceticism and renunciation, *Mahāyānists* displaced the early Buddhist monastic ideal of the Arhant who was alleged to be concerned primarily with his own spiritual liberation with that of the socially-embedded bodhisattva who strives, in defiance of what came to be perceived as a deeply-engrained self-interest, to make the aims and interests of others more important than his own. The growing societal acceptance and state patronage of *Mahāyāna* led to its institutionalization and the attendant establishment of large monastic universities as venues for its dissemination. The second historical development that intensified the scholar-yogin tension was the emergence, beginning in the seventh century CE, of a Buddhist tantric subculture that became known as the Adamantine Vehicle (*Vajrayāna*) since its aim was to recover the indestructible (*vajra*- or diamond-like) nature of mind. Claiming to offer more efficacious and expedient means to awakening than their predecessors, Buddhist tantrikas developed a highly complex repertoire of teachings and contemplative practices aimed at facilitating awakening in a single lifetime.

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<sup>1233</sup> See Gethin 1998, 98, 104–5, et passim. The author observes that the “distinction between the vocations of practice and scholarship corresponds in part with that between forest-dwelling and town-dwelling. But these two vocations should not be seen as mutually exclusive in that an individual monk might in the course of his monastic career at one time spend a period meditating in the forest and at another devote himself to scholarship in a large monastery.” (ibid. 104–5)

<sup>1234</sup> See for example Flood 1996, 84.

Although Vajrayāna developed out of late Mahāyāna, building on the shared cornerstones of compassion and emptiness, tantric scholar-adepts were quick to criticize the Mahāyānist tendency to give intellectual and moral refinement priority over spiritual illumination. Its adherents criticized the inclination to suppress those very elements of life—erotic desires and other intense bodily, emotional, and aesthetic experiences—that could prove the most potent means of self-transcendence. Going beyond the ethos of renunciation of the so-called lesser vehicle Hīnayāna but grounding themselves firmly in the Mahāyāna ethos of altruism, Vajrayāna adepts advocated an ethos of spiritual transformation through yogic praxis and introduced the new ideal of the Siddha (Accomplished One) who typically lives independently of Buddhist monasteries and strives to take whatever manifests—the whole panorama of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—as the path to liberation. Eventually, these Vajrayāna sects also became institutionalized as they gained popularity and secured state sponsorship. To summarize, the history of Buddhist thought has been punctuated at each stage of its development by intermittent periods of religious experimentation and domestication, innovation and institutionalization, thus repeatedly renewing the challenge of reconciling monastic and yogic aims and ideals.

In part, this challenge was endemic to the broader problem of “inclusivism,” a term which has been used to characterize the Indian penchant for assimilating historically antecedent doctrines as lower stages leading toward the more fundamental and encompassing view represented by a later doctrine.<sup>1235</sup> According to this model, doctrines and ideals are superseded by those which have emerged later in reaction to them, but are retrospectively reassimilated as preliminary stages on the path of a single aspirant. Indian religious thought has reflected a singular brilliance for recapitulating stages of doctrinal-historical development as stages of individual soteriological development. In Hinduism, we see this at work in the reframing of historical-doctrinal stages of Vedic ritualism, Upanishadic mystical philosophy, and Bhakti devotionism into the three paths of ritual activity (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotion (*bhakti*) that align with the differing interests and dispositions of individuals. In the case of Buddhism, the historical development of early Buddhism, Mahāyāna and tantrism leads to the schematization of three idealized vehicles<sup>1236</sup>—Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and

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<sup>1235</sup> On inclusivism, see Schmithausen 1981, 223 f. The term, coined by Paul Hacker, is defined by Schmithausen as the method by which “competing doctrines, or essential elements of it, are admitted but relegated to a subordinate position, or given a suitable reinterpretation, and which aims not so much at reconciliation but at prevailing over the other doctrine or its propounders” (ibid., 223).

<sup>1236</sup> As Seyfort Ruegg (2004) has noted, the attempt to reconstruct a history of these vehicles and to specify their dates, leading proponents, representative texts and doctrines is far from unproblematic. What is important for our purposes is the role these idealized soteriological narratives – based on largely abstract doxographies and characterologies – played in the construction of hierarchically-arranged delineations of theory and praxis by leading adherents of different traditions.

Vajrayāna—reflecting the above-mentioned doctrinal developments characterized by divergent ethical norms and ideals, world-views, exemplary lifestyles, and conceptions of the path. These are later reformulated as three stages in the life of a single individual as he or she progresses through stages of intellectual-spiritual maturation leading sequentially from an ethos of renunciation (Hīnayāna), to that of altruism (Mahāyāna), and, finally, spiritual transformation (Vajrayāna). This reformulation is most clearly and comprehensively reflected in the Tibetan *Stages of the Path* (*lam rim*) genre. The creative transposition from doctrinal history to individual soteriology reflects the important intuition that the way intellectual history builds upon itself as new ideas and ideals emerge in response to older ones can be retrospectively delineated in terms of successive stages of an intellectual-spiritual path.

Against this background, it becomes understandable why the tension between the monastic and yogic vocations played as central a role as it did in the assimilation of Buddhism in Tibet and why it attracted as much attention as it did from those at the vanguard of cultural appropriation. From the eighth century Bsam yas Debate to the incendiary polemics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the issue came to the fore again and again, asserting itself each time as a dilemma between competing soteriological models, each with its own claims to legitimacy. In Tibet, the problem of balancing the vocations of the scholar-monk and realized-yogin developed in tandem with the problem of how to reconcile both in theory and practice the complex variety of soteriological approaches that Buddhism had become by the time of its reception in Tibet. As indicated above, Buddhism had by this stage become less a single creed that is the same for all than a graded series of idealized vehicles formulated to meet the varying needs and interests of its aspirants at different stages of their intellectual, ethical and spiritual itinerary. Central to the Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism was the problem of how to bridge non-tantric Mahāyāna traditions with esoteric Vajrayāna traditions that had become increasingly influential and popular in Indian Buddhism from the time of their rise to prominence circa 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Tibetan Buddhist traditions of exegesis (*bshad lugs*) and practice (*sgrub lugs*) are often indelibly marked by seminal events and transformations in the lives of their founders. In this regard, Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā traditions are certainly no exception. In fact, Sgam po pa's life epitomized some of the principal issues and tensions of his time as is evident in the various ways he sought to resolve these through his own intellectual-spiritual pursuits and teachings. Hagiographical accounts of Sgam po pa<sup>1237</sup> report that he trained as a physician and had settled into life as a village physician when, at age twenty-four, his young wife, eight year old son and two year old daughter all died suddenly of smallpox (*'brum nag*). The biographies agree that the anguish he endured in seeing his loved ones die, despite all medical interventions, set

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<sup>1237</sup> For an interesting and well-documented overview of Sgam po pa's life and teachings in relation to the monastic and yogic ideals, see the unpublished Phd dissertation of Trungram Gyatrul Rinpoche Sherpa, 2004. See also the unpublished MA dissertation of Kragh 1998.



him on a spiritual quest that would eventually culminate in his spiritual awakening. To respect his wife's dying wishes that he not remarry and with the urging of his uncle Dpal bsod, Sgam po pa renounced his career and the life of a layperson to take up the vocation of a scholar-monk. Trungram Gyatrul Rinpoche reports that the renunciate "found no consolation in the first Kadampa teacher he met, Po to ba, who Gampopa felt lacked the requisite quality of compassion."<sup>1238</sup> At age twenty-five, Sgam po pa received ordination from Mar yul ba "the abbot" (*mkhan po*) and, according to some accounts, also from Sha pa gling pa the "master" (*slob dpon*), also known as Geshe Rgya Yon bdag, who would become one of his main teachers. Sgam po pa progressed rapidly in his studies under many Bka' gdams masters, following the Bka' gdams curriculum of logic, epistemology, ethics, and the structured doctrinal and path summaries known, respectively, as Stages of Doctrine (*bstan rim*) and Stages of the Path (*lam rim*). The biographical sources relate that Sgam po pa's mastery of the Bka' gdams curriculum of study and meditation led him to the heights of erudition but not to the spiritual fulfilment he had been looking for.

At age thirty, with an illustrious scholarly career already behind him, Sgam po pa's life was profoundly transformed for a second time upon meeting the famous Tibetan yogi Mi la ras pa. This time the transformation was triggered not by the anguish of enduring the loss of his loved ones "but rather by the faith and inspiration he experienced merely from overhearing the name 'Milarepa' from one of a group of three wandering beggars."<sup>1239</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Mi la ras pa was not at this time universally revered as one of Tibet's greatest saints, as he would be posthumously, and many of the yogin's contemporaries were wary of free-wandering Tibetan tantrikas like Mi la who were suspected of eschewing monastic norms and practices. It was therefore against the wishes of many of Sgam po pa's Bka' gdams pa teachers that the thirty-year old monk set out on an arduous forty-day journey to meet Mi la ras pa.<sup>1240</sup>

Interestingly, biographical sources report that those of the monk's teachers who did acquiesce to his desire to meet Mi la did so only under the conditions that he return within one year and not abandon Bka' gdams pa methods of reasoning (*rtags* : *liṅga*).<sup>1241</sup> When Mi la ras pa finally consented to meet with Sgam po pa, after withholding audience with him for a fortnight—a traditional means of humbling a prospective disciple's scholarly pride and testing his or her resolve—Mi la proceeded to ridicule him for engaging in pointless theoretical

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<sup>1238</sup> Gyatrul Rinpoche 2004, 45.

<sup>1239</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>1240</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>1241</sup> See Gyatrul Rinpoche 2004 (58) where the author takes the *rtags* to here refer to "Kadams pa symbols". The context would seem to favour the general sense of *rtags* (*liṅga*) as "reasoning", which also refers, more specifically, to the third step in a Buddhist syllogism, on which see Volume II, 64 n. 159. Syllogistic reasoning was given a central place in Bka' gdams pa scholasticism.

studies and in a brand of analytical meditation that was said to be as fruitless as trying to wring oil from dry sand. The yogi also rejected Sgam po pa's gifts of tea and gold, saying "My mind has no attachment to gold; use it for your own livelihood".<sup>1242</sup> Having tested Sgam po pa in this fashion, Mi la ras pa went on to advise him that by applying the path of skillful means (*thabs lam*), he would soon recognize the nature of mind. Mi la ras pa proceeded to give Sgam po pa the Mahāmudrā pith-instructions that would, after a few years of dedicated application, lead to the new disciple's spiritual awakening.

Despite this life-changing encounter with Mi la ras pa, Sgam po pa continued to advocate the Bka' gdams curriculum of study and practice. Indeed, for the remainder of his life, Sgam po pa would combine in his teachings the paths of sūtras, tantras as well as Mahāmudrā which he taught as a third, superior, path that he styled as the "essential path" (*snying po'i lam*)<sup>1243</sup> because it introduces the suitable recipient directly to the nature of mind. It is noteworthy that shortly after his decisive first encounter with Mi la ras pa, Sgam po pa composed his own structured path summary entitled *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Thar par rin po che'i rgyan*) in which he sought "to unite the two streams of Bka' gdams and Mahāmudrā" (*bka' phyag chub bo gnyis 'dres*). This text has been used down to the present day in Bka' brgyud monasteries as an introduction to the essentials of Buddhist thought and practice, and as intellectual and ethical preparation for receiving Mahāmudrā instruction.

The transition from scholastic to yogic idioms of learning and pedagogy is a crucial but still poorly understood element in the life-narratives of some of Tibet's most renowned scholar-yogins. Trungram Gyatrul Rinpoche has lucidly documented and described how the tension between these competing vocations made its presence felt in the Bka' gdams monastic community during Sgam po pa's lifetime and shaped the master's own spiritual quest.

Owing to his efforts to comply with two radically different styles of teaching, the tension that resulted in his following the instructions of the Kadampa monks and the Kagyupa yogis was not surprising. His biographies, among other sources, suggest this, and tension seems to resonate repeatedly in his life. It only stops at the time of his realization, the moment he sought leave from his Kadampa masters to visit Yogi Milarepa, when he is said to have gained total confidence in himself. This realization also seems to be his early source for his later synchronized teachings of the two schools. The tension is evident when biographers narrate his questions to Milarepa, his recounting of dialogues he had with Kadampa masters, and his way of teaching found elsewhere in the *Collected Works*.<sup>1244</sup>

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<sup>1242</sup> On Sgam po pa's three paths (*lam gsum*), see Gyatrul Rinpoche 2004, 52–53.

<sup>1243</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>1244</sup> Ibid., 79–80.

We would certainly be remiss to regard Sgam po pa's formative encounter with Mi la ras pa and the personal transformation it triggered as nothing more than a narrative trope of Buddhist hagiographic literature. One problem this transformation poses for modern interpretation is its involuntary and transcendent nature. Unlike renunciation which is an act of will, spiritual transformation is typically portrayed as occurring involuntarily and unexpectedly, sometimes even against the aspirant's wishes when everything in him or her militates against it. It is also an event that is as much affective as it is cognitive, involving the whole mental-emotional life of the individual, and one over which the reasoning mind has no control, or in the course of which it may even appear to lose control. Yet those who have given testimony to it generally describe it as an event of the highest significance, as a momentous loss of familiar reference points leading to the disclosure of deep features of reality—a new form of intelligibility—after which nothing in their lives remains the same.

The foregoing reflections are a prelude to considering in these closing pages how the four post-classical Bka' brgyud scholar-yogins each shed new light on the old problem of reconciling monastic and yogic vocations as epitomized in the life and discourses of Sgam po pa. Building upon half a millennium of Bka' brgyud Buddhist scholarship and debate, they opened up fresh perspectives on how best to understand and reconcile [1] scholastic and yogic ideals of salvific knowledge, [2] negative (apophatic) and positive (cataphatic) styles of Buddhist discourses on the nature of the ultimate, and [3] the conventional and ultimate truths and their associated modes of cognition and emptiness.

With regard to the monastic and yogic ideals, Shākya mchog ldan could have been speaking for all four scholars when he accords the yogin's (*rnal 'byor pa*) tradition of first-hand experience (*nyams su myong ba'i lugs*) priority over the dialectician's (*mtshan nyid pa*) traditions of severing superimpositions (*sgro 'dogs bcad pa'i lugs*) which he subdivides into Rang stong and Gzhan stong. His rationale is that although the dialectician's strategies of denial and affirmation advocated by Self-emptiness and Other-emptiness approaches respectively provide potent preliminary methods of dispelling illegitimate imputations (*sgro 'dogs*) and unwarranted deprecations (*skur 'debs*), they are nonetheless seen as intellectually contrived views from the standpoint of Mahāmudrā. From this standpoint, the aspirant breaks out of the dialectical circle of reciprocal negation and affirmation not by more refined procedures of reasoning but by leaving behind the entire framework within which such negative and positive determinations make sense. For Shākya mchog ldan, *mahāmudrā* transcends the domain of what is expressible in language and thought (*sgra bsam du brjod pa'i yul*) and can therefore never be an abstraction or object-universal (*don spyi*) deducible by reasoning that investigates the ultimate. If the dialectician's way remains confined to the sphere of abstractions deduced by studying (*thos pa*) and thinking (*bsam pa*), the yogin's way touches on deep features of reality accessible only to meditative experience (*sgom pa*).

In a similar vein, Karma phrin las distinguishes himself from those “masters of discursive convention [who] claim the four qualities of view, meditation, conduct, and fruition are separate,” and declares that “for me, the *kusulu*, they are undifferentiated”. This undifferentiated unity is “the mode of abiding wherein ground and fruition are the same”.<sup>1245</sup> We gather from Karma phrin las pa’s caricatural reflections on his own spiritual journey that this transition from an erudite scholar to a realized yogin is not always an easy one. To evolve from “a lunatic lost in endless abstractions” based on superficial assumptions to a siddha having the conviction of nondual wisdom grounded in direct experience involves the often arduous process of shedding deeply-held convictions that undergird one’s sense of self and of one’s place in the world. As a case in point, he differentiates the method of ascertainment through Madhyamaka reasoning, which deals only with abstractions or object-universals (*don spyi*) and thus remains confined to a conceptually-determined or represented ultimate (*rnam grangs pa’i don dam*), from the method of yogic direct perception of the nonrepresented ultimate which is otherwise called “personally realized wisdom”. That said, Shākya mchog ldan acknowledged that intellectual abstraction may play a vital role in soteriological thought, enabling the practitioner to form a general idea of one’s goal and itinerary, like a map used to chart a journey.<sup>1246</sup> The point is not to take the abstraction for the goal, not to confuse the map with the territory, but to clearly differentiate between the conceptual and nonconceptual kinds of knowledge that are suited to these provisional and ultimate aims. For Karma phrin las, the experiential corroboration of philosophical insight is critical: “the moment that subtle hair-splitting divisions of philosophical tenets are deeply understood, they are included within Mahāmudrā; when not understood, they are [but] the confused prattle of lunatics.”<sup>1247</sup>

The Eighth Karma pa for his part seeks to expose the fallacies that lead scholars to confuse mundane knowledge with yogic direct perception. In doing so, he points to the epistemological reasons for giving yogic direct perception phenomenological priority over inferential knowledge. As a case in point, he alleges that Shākya mchog ldan and some of his disciples were prone to confusing the “clear and knowing cognition” which is simply a hallmark of mundane consciousness—that which distinguishes the sentient from the insentient—with nondual wisdom.<sup>1248</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje contends that it is a grievous error to mistake this clear and knowing cognition—which Shākya mchog ldan had himself equated with the subjective, inward-looking part of consciousness—with nondual wisdom, ultimate truth and nirvāṇa. He contends that it is precisely the subjectivizing and objectifying acts of consciousness, its inward-looking apprehending and outward-looking apprehended aspects,

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<sup>1245</sup> See above, 150, n. 400.

<sup>1246</sup> See above, 60–61.

<sup>1247</sup> See above, 149 n. 394.

<sup>1248</sup> See above, 290 f. and Volume II, 113.

which make it *dualistic* and which in fact identify it as the principal cause of *saṃsāra*. Hence, both these “streams of this clear and knowing aspect stem from the element of karmic predispositions” and both are “adventitious stains that are to be relinquished.”<sup>1249</sup> Stated simply, to elevate the subject-oriented consciousness to nondual wisdom is tantamount to mistaking the source of delusion for a source of liberation and confusing what is to be relinquished with what is to be realized.

The Eighth Karma pa similarly rejects the identification of self-aware direct perception (*rang rig mngon sum : svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa*) with yogic direct perception (*rnal 'byor mngon sum : yogipratyakṣa*) along with the proclivity to elevate the former to the status of the ultimate or *nirvāṇa*: “This self-aware direct perception is *not nirvāṇa* because, in the context of classifying types of mentation, it is said to exist in all ordinary individuals and is therefore sharply separated from yogic direct perception.”<sup>1250</sup> We have seen that Mi bskyod rdo rje’s arguments against Shākya mchog ldan’s Alīkākāra Cittamātra-oriented epistemology base themselves on the Apratiṣṭhānavāda Madhyamaka tradition’s comprehensive rejection of Cittamātra views and aims, in particular its idealistic presupposition that mind or wisdom is a real entity which qualifies as ultimate truth. By reinstating the need to unequivocally distinguish between dualistic consciousness (*rnam shes*) and nondual wisdom (*ye shes*) in order to avoid confusing sources of defilement and purification, the Karma pa sought to clarify and hence revalidate a distinction which was, in fact, central to the views of Shākya mchog ldan and many other Tibetan masters as well.

Padma dkar po takes a similar tack when he adopts the Second 'Brug chen Kun dga' dpal 'byor's distinction between the analytical meditation (*dpyod sgom*) of the *paṇḍita* which is based on discriminating insight (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) and the resting meditation (*'jog sgom*) of the *kusulupa* which is based on personally realized wisdom (*so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*).<sup>1251</sup> The Fourth 'Brug chen on this basis distinguishes “the type of analysis which is called the analytical meditation (*dpyad sgom*) of a *kusāli* because it is an analysis through inward-oriented self-awareness (*rang rig*)” from “the analytical meditation of a *paṇḍita* [so named] because [it is] an analysis through outward-oriented knowledge (*shes pa*)”.<sup>1252</sup> For Padma dkar po, the reconciliation of conceptual-analytical and prediscursive styles of liberating knowledge is made possible by a type of mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*) involving the cessation not of *all* thought activity across the board but only of those objectifying and subjectivizing activities which engender deluded, dualistic perception. In this way, he is able to bring Kamalaśīla's interpretation of *amanasikāra* as a “well-founded mental

<sup>1249</sup> See above, 290.

<sup>1250</sup> See above, 290 and n. 834.

<sup>1251</sup> See above, 426 and n. 1226.

<sup>1252</sup> See Volume II, 67 n. 168.

engagement” (*yoniso manasikāra*)—which the latter had characterized (in *Bhāvanākrāma* I) as “appropriate” or “well-founded” (*yoniso : tshul bzhin du*) in the specific sense that it attends to the foundation or source/birth-place (*yon*i) that is nonorigination or selflessness—into line with Maitrīpa’s interpretation of *amanasikāra* as “mental attention (*manas[i]kāra*) on (or which *is*) nonorigination (*a-*)”. This rapprochement enables Padma dkar po to draw attention to the commensurability of the mainstream Mahāyāna and nongradual Mahāmudrā paradigms of liberating knowledge while at the same time evaluating the latter as a less conceptually-mediated path to awakening.

All four authors maintained that philosophical analysis has a vital preparatory role to play in Buddhist soteriology, clearing away reifications to make way for a realization of how things are, undistorted by conceptual superimpositions. At the same time they were wary of the dangers of overestimating the role of philosophical reasoning in the process of ascertaining the ultimate and taking it as an end in itself. Shākya mchog ldan gave particular attention to the deleterious effects of (mis)taking the nonaffirming (*med dgag*) emptiness arrived at through Madhyamaka methods of reasoning as the goal of the Buddhist path. In his view, taking this conceptually-determined negation as one’s soteriological aim is akin to mistaking a mother for a barren woman: it disregards the inherent fecundity and dynamism of human reality which the Madhyamaka *via negativa* is, afterall, meant to disclose. For all four scholars, an intellectual understanding of the ultimate unleavened by direct experience leads to a negativistic view of buddhahood (*sangs rgyas*) which unduly restricts its focus to the dispelling (*sangs*) of objects of refutation while overlooking the blossoming (*rgyas*) of the unpremeditated altruistic modes of being, awareness and activity known as buddha qualities which are disclosed by virtue of the absence of what obscures them.

Each of the authors in his own way emphasized how the *via negationis* of Madhyamaka dialectics and *via eminentiae* of Tathāgatagarbha, tantric, and Siddha discourses should be regarded not as mutually exclusive alternatives but as complementary modes of thought and praxis which each have an important role to play at different junctures of the Buddhist path. This insight helps to explain why all four were inclined to regard the distinction between Rang stong and Gzhan stong approaches as dialectically related positions rather than as diametrically opposed alternatives. It also helps to explain why each scholar attempted in his own way to forge a Middle Way which could accommodate these affirmative (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) strains of Buddhist thought and discourse within a dialectical path-structure. Karma phrin las followed his teacher the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho in emphasizing the noncontradiction between Rang tong and Gzhan stong on the grounds that “ultimate truth is nothing but the nature of mind which is free from the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender” and that this “natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the

inseparability of the expanse and awareness, natural awareness itself, is the profound view of Gzhan stong”.<sup>1253</sup>

Shākya mchog ldan for his part emphasized that the Gzhan stong view makes room for a positive appraisal of the ultimate, the way things are, from the vantage point of first-hand experience and in this way comes closer to the perspective of unity (*zung ’jug : yuganaddha*), the cornerstone of the Mahāmudrā teachings, than Rang stong which is focused on negating all that is *not* ultimate. Yet, as we have repeatedly emphasized, his Mahāmudrā works present both the Rang stong and Gzhan stong “traditions of severing superimpositions” as “poisoned” (*dug can*) or “intellectually contrived” (*blos byas*) views from the standpoint of the Mahāmudrā “tradition of direct experience”.<sup>1254</sup> We have also shown the extent to which Mi bskyod rdo rje and Padma dkar po were concerned with balancing the negative orientation (*dgag phyogs*) of the reasoning corpus (*rigs tshogs*) of Nāgārjuna’s tradition with the positive orientation (*sgrub phyogs*) articulated in the mystical songs (*dohā*) of Mahāmudrā experience attributed to the Indian siddhas.

The post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes may be regarded as philosophers of unity in light of their shared concerns with doctrinal inclusivism and soteriological holism. Taking their lead from Sgam po pa’s attempt to unite the two streams of Bka’ gdams pa and Bka’ brgyud pa, each of the scholars attempted to synthesize the rich scholastic and yogic heritages of their Indo-Tibetan predecessors, and they repeatedly drew attention to the underlying *unity of intent* amidst the complex diversity of Buddhist discourses that had been developing for over two millennia within India and beyond. Karma phrin las advocated the idea that the complex variety of the Buddha’s teachings were informed by a single intent and therefore without contradiction. He proposed that this vision of doctrinal unity was a hallmark of the Bka’ brgyud tradition for which it was justly famous. “The so-called ‘greatness of realizing that the diversity of teachings do not contradict each other’ is renowned in this tradition.”<sup>1255</sup> For Shākya mchog ldan, the key to realizing this unity amidst diversity of Buddhist discourses is to bring philosophical analysis into line with contemplative experience by combining through study (*thos*), thought (*bsam*) and meditation (*sgom*), the key elements of the tantric and non-tantric vehicles of Buddhism.

A cornerstone of post-classical Mahāmudrā exegesis was the so-called “view of unity” (*zung ’jug gyi lta ba*) variously characterized as the “inseparability of appearance and emptiness” (*snang stong dbyer med*), “unity of the two truths” (*bden gnyis zung ’jug*), “nonduality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*” (*’khor ’das gnyis med*), and “coemergence of mind and phenomena”

<sup>1253</sup> See above, 152 n. 409.

<sup>1254</sup> See above, 47–49 et passim.

<sup>1255</sup> See above, 152 n. 406.

(*chos sems lhan cig skyes pa*). From this holistic standpoint, adventitious phenomena and thoughts derive from a more primordial, undifferentiated mode of being and awareness. According to Karma phrin las, “since the two, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, are an inseparable unity, the key point of the view of this Bka’ [brgyud] is known in the saying ‘thoughts are *dharmakāya*’”. He adds that “the key point of the view of the glorious Sa skya pas which states that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable is identical to the [Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā] key point which states that ‘thoughts are *dharmakāya*’. Interestingly, Shākya mchog ldan noted that the very conception of “unity” is not attested within the orthodox Rang stong tradition, but rather had its origin in Gzhan stong traditions. Unlike the Gzhan stong system, he adds, the Rang stong system allows no scope for the *Pañcakrama* teaching on luminosity of mind, nor its claim that adamant nature of mind is of definitive meaning.<sup>1256</sup>

All four scholar-yogins regarded the nonduality of the two truths and their associated modes of cognition and emptiness as the ground and goal of Mahāmudrā view and meditation. Viewing this unity as a fundamental mode of human reality which prefigures any judgement about it, they stood united in considering its realization to depend first and foremost upon direct perception rather than the inferential forms of reasoning which derive and deviate from it. Although each of the scholars underscored the importance of making clear soteriological distinctions between conventional and ultimate truths or realities and their associated modes of knowledge while on the Buddhist path, they commonly portrayed the goal as a unity beyond conceptual extremes. In line with their soteriological contextualism, distinctions between adventitious (*glo bur*) and innate (*gnyug ma*) modes of being and awareness were regarded as heuristic conventions which facilitate, and increasingly give way to, the discovery or recovery of the innate itself to the extent that the adventitious has been recognized for what it is and relinquished. This is the view of asymmetrical unity which had traditionally been identified as the ground and goal of Mahāmudrā teachings. In doxographical terms, it is the “Great Nonfoundational Middle Way of Unity” (*zung ’jug rab tu mi gnas pa’i dbu ma chen po*) which navigates between the opposing currents of eternalism and nihilism and beyond the limits of existence and nonexistence.

To post-classical Bka’ brgyud thinkers, the vision of nonfoundational unity was a way to underscore the compatibility of Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings with the *via positiva* of Nāgārjuna’s hymnic corpus, buddha nature discourses, and the tantras, while emphasizing their complementarity with the *via negativa* of Nāgārjuna’s reasoning corpus. In the context of Mahāmudrā practice, it offered a way for the intellect to clearly recognize and dispel its own self-imposed limitations and thereby make room for a prediscursive mode of being and awareness beyond the reach of any kind of reason. By articulating and defending the primacy of this innate and noninferential access to reality in its most originary forms of

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<sup>1256</sup> See above, 73 and n. 167.



## FINAL REFLECTIONS

disclosure, without resorting to a facile denial of the role that dialectical reasoning may play in this process, these scholar-yogins raised ancient Buddhist debates over the relative efficacy of scholastic and yogic modes of knowledge and praxis to unprecedented heights of clarity and sophistication.





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## Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Shākya mchog ldan</b>   | 10  |
| Introduction: the Mahāmudrā Trilogy  | 11  |
| 1a. English Translation of <i>Gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed</i>                      | 14  |
| 1b. Critical Edition of <i>Gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyam byed</i>                          | 26  |
| 2a. English Translation of <i>Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges</i>                 | 34  |
| 2b. Critical Edition of <i>Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges</i>                    | 43  |
| 3a. English Translation of <i>Zung 'jug gi gru chen</i>                                | 48  |
| 3b. Critical Edition of <i>Zung 'jug gi gru chen</i>                                   | 71  |
| <br><b>Karma phrin las pa</b>  | 86  |
| Perspectives on Rang stong and Gzhan stong   | 87  |
| 1a. English Translation of <i>Dri lan yid kyi mun sel</i>                              | 88  |
| 1b. Critical Edition of <i>Dri lan yid kyi mun sel</i>                                 | 91  |
| <i>A Mystical Song of the View Proclaiming the Mode of Being</i>                       | 94  |
| 2a. English Translation of the <i>Yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur</i>                  | 95  |
| 2b. Critical Edition of the <i>Yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur</i>                     | 98  |
| <i>A Vajra Song</i>  | 100 |
| 3a. English Translation of the <i>Rdo rje mgur</i>                                     | 100 |
| 3b. Critical Edition of the <i>Rdo rje mgur</i>  | 102 |
| <br><b>Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje</b>  | 104 |
| Critique of 'Gos Lo tsā ba's Separation of Buddhahood and Buddha Nature                | 105 |
| 1a. English Translation of <i>Rgan po'i rlung sman</i> (excerpt)                       | 105 |
| 1b. Critical Edition of <i>Rgan po'i rlung sman</i> (excerpt)                          | 109 |
| Some Criticisms of Shākya mchog ldan's Buddha Nature Epistemology                      | 111 |
| 2a. English Translation of <i>Rgan po'i rlung sman</i> (excerpt)                       | 112 |
| 2b. Critical Edition of <i>Rgan po'i rlung sman</i> (excerpt)                          | 115 |
| <i>Two Minds in One Person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma kham pa</i>               | 117 |
| 3a. English Translation of <i>Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis</i>         | 118 |
| 3b. Critical Edition of <i>Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis</i>            | 120 |
| <i>A Trove Containing Myriad Treasures of Profound Mahāmudrā</i>                       | 122 |
| 4a. English Translation of <i>Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'igter</i> | 123 |
| 4b. Critical Edition of <i>Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter</i>   | 134 |
| Mental Nonengagement as Unconditioned Mental Engagement                                | 143 |
| 5a. English Translation of <i>Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad</i> (excerpt)              | 144 |
| 5b. Critical Edition of <i>Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad</i> (excerpt)                 | 147 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Amanasikāra</i> , Emptiness, and the Tradition of Heshang Moheyan                | 150 |
| 6a. English Translation of <i>Dgongs gcig 'grel pa</i> VI (excerpt)                 | 151 |
| 6b. Critical Edition of <i>Dgongs gcig 'grel pa</i> VI (excerpt)                    | 153 |
| <b>Padma dkar po</b>  | 156 |
| Distinguishing <i>Gnas lugs phyag chen</i> and <i>'Khrul lugs phyag chen</i>        | 157 |
| 1a. English Translation of <i>Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod</i> (excerpt)         | 157 |
| 1b. Critical Edition of <i>Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod</i> (excerpt)            | 168 |
| Three Grammatical Interpretations of <i>Amanasikāra</i>                             | 175 |
| 2b. Critical Edition of <i>Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod</i> (excerpt)            | 176 |
| Refuting Sa paṇ's Equation of Mahāmudrā with Heshang's Chan Meditation              | 179 |
| 3a. English Translation of <i>Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam</i> (excerpt)                 | 180 |
| 3b. Critical Edition of <i>Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam</i> (excerpt)                    | 188 |
| Response to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's critique of Padma dkar po's <i>Amanasikāra</i> | 194 |
| 4a. English Translation of <i>Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan</i> (excerpt)         | 195 |
| 4b. Critical Edition of <i>Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan</i> (excerpt)            | 197 |
| <i>Amanasikāra</i> in the Context of Nonreferential Meditation                      | 199 |
| 5a. English Translation of <i>Snying po don gyi man ngag</i> (excerpt)              | 199 |
| 5b. Critical Edition of <i>Snying po don gyi man ngag</i> (excerpt)                 | 201 |
| <b>Bibliography</b>   | 202 |
| Abbreviations of Canonical Collections, Journals, and Online Sources                | 202 |
| Primary Sources: Indian Works   | 202 |
| Primary Sources: Tibetan Works  | 207 |
| Secondary Sources   | 218 |
| <b>Index</b>  | 232 |

SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN

# SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN

MAHĀMUDRĀ TRILOGY

English Translation and  
Critical Edition

## INTRODUCTION: THE MAHĀMUDRĀ TRILOGY

The Mahāmudrā Trilogy by Shākya mchog ldan consists of three individual texts presented in sequence in the seventeenth volume of the three extant editions of the author's *Collected Works*. These three editions of the trilogy that we consulted in preparing our translations and critical editions are the following:

- SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> New Delhi: Ngawang Topgyel, 1995 (reproduced from the unique manuscript prepared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the order of Rje sakya rin chen, the 9<sup>th</sup> rje mkhan po of Bhutan, preserved at the monastery of Pha jo sdings 'og min gnyis pa).
- SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006 (computer generated).
- SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> Rdzong sar khams bye: Slob gling thub stan dar gyas gling, 2006–2007 (computer generated based on a *dbu med* manuscript).

Note that page references in subscript square parentheses <sub>[ ]</sub> within the body of the translation and edited transliteration refer to paginations in SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>.

Bibliographic details and abstracts of the three texts:

The first text in the trilogy is the *Phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed* or, in English, *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others by the Wheel of Brahma: A Treatise Clarifying Mahāmudrā*. The author's colophon informs us that the text was composed at Shākya mchog ldan's monastic seat Gser mdog can at the request of Chos kyi rgyal mtshan bzang po, son of Zla dgon chos kyi bzang po. No date of composition is provided. SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 331–346<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 359–376<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 437–457<sub>2</sub>.

This text is largely devoted to establishing the validity and soteriological efficacy of Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā teachings by showing the many ways in which its central aims and presuppositions are consistent with those of authoritative Pāramitāyāna and Mantrayāna scriptures. In the author's eyes, the philosophical viewpoint of this tradition is in accord with the buddha nature theory of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to the extent that *mahāmudrā* is to be equated with *tathāgatagarbha*. The emphasis in both traditions is on mind's luminous nature that remains invariant throughout the successive stages of purifying away the adventitious stains that have temporarily obscured it. The author equates this *mahāmudrā* both with the wisdom devoid of subject and object featured in third turning Pāramitāyāna scriptures and with emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvākāravaropetaśūnyatā*) described in the tantras. Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā discourses thus represent the definitive meaning of the third *dharmacakra* because of their positive appraisal of the ultimate, and their affirmation of nondual wisdom in particular.

According to the author, the conditions for *mahāmudrā* realization are karmic connections from previous [lives], devotion to the *bla ma*, and prior reception of knowledge

and awareness, although preliminaries may include Madhyamaka reasonings and Mantrayāna empowerments. He adds, however, that since the Mahāmudrā method enables one to see buddha nature immediately upon recognizing that all phenomena are empty of their own (*rang stong*) essences, it may not be necessary to learn many methods of reasoning in post-meditation. As for the meaning of *mahāmudrā*, Shākya mchog ldan explains that all sentient beings are ‘marked’ by this Great Seal in the sense that they are universally endowed with nondual wisdom and therefore have within them the “possibility to one day be separated from saṃsāric states”. He describes *mahāmudrā* as that which is beyond the domain of what can be expressed in thought and language. It is the wisdom one arrives at when the searching mind has not found anything with which to identify.

In terms of literary style, the work is metric, with the opening invocation and first half of the statement of intent composed in nine-syllable (enneameter) lines, and the remainder of the text in seven-syllable (heptameter) lines. Despite its metric form, the content of the work is anything but poetic and more in line with the genre of scholastic treatises generally favoured by the author. Consequently, with the exception of the opening stanzas, no attempt has been made to produce a poetic translation of the text. For ease of recognition, the long title of the text is abbreviated to *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others*.

The second text is the *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed ces bya ba'i bstan bcos grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges* or, in English, *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas: A Treatise Called Distinguishing Mahāmudrā*. The colophon informs us that the text was composed in the author's seventy-sixth year at the behest of Sa skyong mchog and that the scribe was Bsod nams ye shes lhun grub. SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 346<sub>4</sub>–355<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 376<sub>1</sub>–385<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 457<sub>2</sub>–468<sub>3</sub>.

In this text the author defends Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā against five misrepresentations based on mistakenly identifying it with [1] Niḥsvabhāvavāda meditation on emptiness as a nonaffirming negation, [2] tantric bliss and emptiness which consists in filling the cakras by means of the ‘blessing from within’ (*svādiṣṭhāna*), [3] the naked mind free from thoughts sought by certain practitioners of the three Great Ones (Madhyamaka, Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen), [4] the Zhi byed meditation whereby the seeing mind is not found by searching for it, and [5] the Rdzogs chen view of the all-ground as the Creator of All (*kun byed rgyal po*). After refuting each of these five mistaken identifications, the author goes on to explain, among other things, the nature and significance of the four yogas of Dwags po Mahāmudrā. He shows that the emphasis of these and other Mahāmudrā teachings on lucidly not pursuing thought within a state of clarity and emptiness and the natural flow of altruistic activity that flows from this state has nothing in common with the type of thought-suppression and mental and ethical quietism that had, rightly or wrongly, become associated with the meditative system of the eighth century Sino-Tibetan Chan master Heshang Moheyan.



The work is metric, composed in seven-syllable (heptameter) lines, but is otherwise predominantly scholastic in style and content and has therefore been translated accordingly. For ease of recognition, the title of the text is abbreviated as *Ascertaining the Intent*.

The third text is *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed* or *Lung rigs gnyis kyi phyag rgya chen po'i bzhed tshul la 'khrul pa sel ba'i bstan bcos zung 'jug gi gru chen*, translated in English as *Distinguishing Mahāmudrā* or *The Great Ship of Unity: A Treatise Dispelling Errors in the Interpretation of Mahāmudrā of Scripture and Reasoning*. The colophon of the text tells us that the text was composed in the author's monastic seat Thub bstan gser mdog chen in response to some questions about Sa paṇ's *Sdom pa gsum kyi rab tu dbye pa* posed by Karma Dbang phyug dpal. The scribe was Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 355<sub>1</sub>–379<sub>5</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 385<sub>4</sub>–412<sub>2</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 468<sub>3</sub>–499.

In this text, the longest of the three, the author responds in detail to a number of Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticisms against Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā teachings and even defends its controversial characterization as a panacea, a “Self-sufficient White Remedy” (*dkar po gcig thub*).<sup>1</sup> He traces the authentic source of this Mahāmudrā transmission to the *Dohā Trilogy* (*do hā skor gsum*) of Saraha. He explains that there are both outer and inner preparatory means to approach Mahāmudra: the outer, analytical methods are primarily the Rang stong and Gzhan stong philosophies, whereas the inner, nonanalytical methods are the teacher's blessing, the disciple's devotions, tantric empowerments and so forth. The author goes on to say, however, that the actual accomplishment of Mahāmudrā does not consist in any of these. Instead, it works with the direct realization of nonconceptual self-luminous self-aware wisdom. Noteworthy in this work is the author's revisionist attempt to redeem the early Sa skya and Bka' brgyud systems of exegesis and praxis from their latter-day interpreters.

As for its literary style, only the opening invocation and the statement of intent are metric, composed in nine-syllable (enneameter) lines. The main body of the text is in prose. For ease of recognition, the title of the text is abbreviated as *Great Ship of Unity*.

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<sup>1</sup> This controversy is the subject of David Jackson's *Enlightenment by a Single Means* (Jackson 1994).

**1a. English Translation of *Gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed*<sup>2</sup> [360]**

Swasti. May that which brings about virtue and excellence be realized.

*Undermining the Haughtiness of Others by the Wheel of Brahma: A Treatise Clarifying Mahāmudrā.*

I pay homage to the unwavering *mahāmudrā*,  
The naturally pure perfect buddha-mind—  
Unadulterated by the host of adventitious stains—  
That has been ever-present in all for all time.

Its nature being difficult to clearly understand,  
It is beyond the range of words and thoughts.  
Yet, there arises the urge to partially describe it,  
Much as when one points to the sky with one's finger.

Though [*mahāmudrā*] commonly abides in buddhas, sentient beings,  
In worldly existence and *nirvāṇa*,  
In the Mantra and Pāramitā [systems] and  
In all philosophical tenets,  
It is exceedingly difficult to understand it.

Hence, [I] shall concisely elucidate precisely this  
Luminous nature of mind which,  
Having been given the name *mahāmudrā*, [361]  
Is widely renowned in [this] Land of Snow.

Now, having initially paid homage and set forth the statement of intent, the Mahāmudrā revealed through the natural expression of Zla 'od gzhon nu [Sgam po pa] shall be explained according to the categories of: [1] A detailed explanation of the doctrinal system, [2] a synoptic description to identify it, [3] a clear way of settling in equipoise, and [4] a response to objections.

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<sup>2</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 331–346<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 359–376<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 437–457<sub>2</sub>. The full title is *Phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed* (= PCdn).

## [1.] A detailed explanation of the doctrinal system

In the first place, when the topic of discussion is not explained in precise detail, then one sees [how] the unbearable prattle of criticisms of others is taken as melodious utterance.

In general, that which is explained among the Yogatantra texts and which many teachings among the Unsurpassed [Yoga] Tantras explain, and which is the definitive meaning of the Pāramitā[yāna]—i.e., the natural luminosity of mind which is all-pervading—is in this instance described as *mahāmudrā*. It is therefore without one-sidedness. When this key point is understood, then regardless which of the distinct paths of means for realization of the definitive meaning as taught in the Pāramitā[yāna] and the Mantra[yāna] are entered, it will be the very best. And even if one has not pursued each of the traditions of exegesis, the very Path of Seeing the personally realized wisdom will be obtained by this alone. Having presented the gathering of merits as an extraneous method, this view alone unites the supplementary aspects of realization and does not require any other preliminaries.<sup>3</sup> Should one ask why, it is because this view is beyond verbal description. It is not comprehended by a mind given to study, thinking and worldly meditations.

[*Query:*] Then by what means is it to be realized? <sup>[362]</sup> [*Reply:*] [By] unmediated direct [perception] that stems from [1] karmic connection from previous [lives] which is the dominant condition, [2] devotion to the *bla ma* which is the objective condition, and [3] prior reception of knowledge and awareness. It is for this reason that in this [tradition] we do not make the distinction between “studying and thinking on the path of accumulation and seeing a mere conceptual abstraction<sup>4</sup> on the path of application”. As for the noble path of direct seeing, having in mind that there are no subdivisions, it was stated that there are no divisions into levels and paths. However, this does not deprecate the methods.

When Zla 'od gzhon nu elucidated the view of what he had realized to the assembly<sup>5</sup>, it is not cited that he first taught the way of severing discursive elaboration according to the texts of Nāgārjuna, nor that [he deemed it] necessary to teach the method of ending dualistic

<sup>3</sup> Another possible reading is: “...the realization of this view alone does not require supplementary preparations and extraneous preliminaries.” Zla 'od gzhon nu is an epithet of Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen.

<sup>4</sup> Literally an object-universal (*don spyi* : *arthasāmānya*), one of two types of universals distinguished by Dignāga, the other being the word-universal (*sgra spyi* : *śabdhasāmānya*). The term *don spyi* is frequently used in Tibetan works in the more general sense of conceptual representation or abstraction, the general idea we have of something as opposed to the particular, the thing itself.

<sup>5</sup> Alluding to the so-called *tshogs chos* collection of Sgam po pa in his Collected Works: *Tshogs chos legs mdzes ma*, *Tshogs chos mu tig gi phreng ba*, *Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*, *Tshogs chos bkra shis phun tshogs*, and *Tshogs chos chen mo*. They contain oral teachings by Sgam po pa written down by various of his students, the *Tshogs chos chen mo* is the latest of these compilations, put together about one hundred years after Sgam po pa's death. They start with “again, the Dharma-master Sgam po pa said: ...” (Tib. *yang chos rje sgam po pa'i zhal nas ...*). The respective author is named in the colophon of each. Every teaching collections covers a complete set of teachings combining general sūtric topics with tantric ones and *mahāmudrā* teachings. They do not contain specific meditation instructions but general advice given in public. See also Roerich, 1949, 460.

thoughts according to the texts of Asaṅga. [Moreover, he said that] if one does not arrive at a genuine experience of self-luminous self-awareness, which is of definitive meaning, and realizes *mahāmudrā* based on the Mantra[yāna], there is the danger of falling into deviations<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, when *mahāmudrā*, which is the pervasive factor that runs through everything, is realized as [explained] previously, one should examine whether the realization of it is stable or unstable. When it is unstable, it is not incongruous to familiarize oneself with the methods of ending dualistic [thoughts and] discursive elaborations as taught by the two charioteers [Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga]. However, those with diligence who have the inclination to leave behind these very [methods] which [they already] understood previously may correctly familiarize themselves [with mind's true nature in meditation] and familiarize themselves with the state of not grasping by means of concepts the appearances of manifold dependent arising in post-meditation. That is said to be the main point of this teaching.

When the aforementioned understanding is stable, the *mahāmudrā* of the Secret Mantra path which is a means of realization <sup>[363]</sup> is to be undertaken. But when engaged [in it] without stability, a host of flaws multiply. Therefore vigilance is advised.

As for the ways of identifying Zla 'od gzhon nu's Mahāmudrā, which was said to be similar to the white self-sufficient remedy, some have said that it may be distinguished into [1] a mode of abiding and [2] its actualization through the path of skillful means. This is to take the unbearable criticisms alleged by others as melodious utterance.<sup>7</sup> Why? Because it is said that the *mahāmudrā* of this tradition is not touched by the “three Great Ones”<sup>8</sup> of Buddhists and is therefore superior to them. In that regard, some say that what is thought to be untouched by the “three Great Ones” would make it *ipso facto* inferior. This qualm requires [careful] consideration. [1] [Great Madhyamaka:] Taking a space-like nonaffirming emptiness analytically deduced as an object by means of reasoning does not qualify [as *mahāmudrā*] because it is not beyond words and concepts. [2] [Great Seal:] Because the realization of *mahāmudrā* elucidated in this [Dwags po tradition] does not *necessarily* depend upon the path of Mantra[yāna], it is not explained here as the wisdom of the Mantra[yāna]. [3] [Great Perfection:] The wisdom of the Great Perfection is also not taught here because its actualization is accomplished by means of many preparations and ritual arrangements.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> These deviations include the clinging to experiences of bliss, clarity and emptiness.

<sup>7</sup> The strongest criticisms against Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā were advanced by Sa skya Paṇḍita in his *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.

<sup>8</sup> See Volume I, 115 n. 299.

<sup>9</sup> Here Shākya mchog ldan gives a similar explanation in the passage quoted in Volume I, n. 299, except the sequence is different. Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā is beyond [1] Madhyamaka, [2] Rdzogs chen, i.e., the Atiyoga of the tantras, and [3] the *mahāmudrā* wisdom associated with the signless Completion Stage (*rdzogs rim*) according to the New Schools (*gsar ma*).

The wisdom of *mahāmudrā* which, untouched by distraction due to all sorts of intellectually contrived elaborations, is realized only through the three [aforementioned] conditions<sup>10</sup> is as follows. It is nothing but what is explained as [1] the very wisdom free from subject and object that is the definitive meaning of the third *dharmacakra* in the Pāramitā[yāna], [2] the *E* and *Vaṃ*, and the ‘emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects’<sup>[364]</sup> of the Unsurpassed [Yoga] tantras and what is identified as the essence in the Hevajra and other [tantras]. But when actualized through the respective means, it has been given a variety of different names.

In that regard Sgam po pa says “the hallmark of my Mahāmudrā is self-awareness and its scriptural source is the *Uttaratantra* [RGV] treatise”.<sup>11</sup> If we analyze the intent of this statement, what identifies the tradition that hails back to the master, the Buddha-son Maitrīpa, is clearly evident in the text of the *Uttaratantra*. And it is said that the stages of the path that unfold due to familiarizing oneself with it are to be understood from the scripture *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*. Considering this, should one ask what is explained in the *Uttaratantra*, the answer is that it explains the element of *\*sugatagarbha*, the nature of mind, luminosity, which is unchanging like space, showing [by means of] analogies [its] obscuration by nine types of stains. This, at the time of the ground is in an impure [state], while on the path it is in a partially pure [state], and at the time of fruition it is in an entirely pure [state]. Thus there does not exist any phenomenon that would not be encompassed by these three. Even though the nature of the three [states] is undifferentiated, the subdivision into three phases is made from the perspective of how things appear to the impure worldly mind co-existing [with ignorance and] its latent tendencies for mistaken perception.

The element of *\*sugatagarbha* is that which has been given the name *mahāmudrā*. In this which is the ground for the clearing (*sbyang gzhi*) of stains, the *\*sugatagarbha* that is the cleanser (*sbyong byed*) of the nine kinds of stains<sup>12</sup> that are the objects to be cleared (*sbyang*

<sup>10</sup> The three are karmic connection from former [acquaintance], devotion to the *bla ma*, and previous reception of knowledge and awareness.

<sup>11</sup> We were unable to locate this quotation in the various editions of Sgam po pa’s *Collected Works* available to us (see Bibliography under Sgam po pa). See ‘Gos Lo tsā ba’s *Deb ther sngon po* (632–633) where he quotes Sgam po pa as saying: ‘o skol gyi phyag rgya chen po ‘di’i gzhung ni bcom ldan ‘das byams pas mdzad pa’i theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos ‘di yin zhes gsung shing | See Roerich 1979 (tr.), 734.

<sup>12</sup> See RGV I.130, 132: “Desire, aversion and ignorance, their intensive manifestations and the habitual tendencies [resulting from these], [that what] is to be abandoned on the path of vision and of cultivation, [that what persists] on the impure and the pure spiritual levels, [these] nine stains starting with desire etc. are summarized in the respective order and shown by means of the nine examples such as the covering of the lotus etc. ...” *rāgadviḍmohatattīraparyavasthānavāsanāḥ* || *ḍṛkmārgabhāvanāśuddhaśuddhabhūmigatā malāḥ* || ... *nava rāgādayaḥ kleśaḥ saṃkṣepeṇa yathākramam* || *navabhiḥ padmakōśādidṛṣṭāntaiḥ saṃprakāśitāḥ* || Tib. *chags dang sdang dang rmongs dang de’i* || *kun ldang drag dang bag chags dang* || *mithong sgom lam spang ma dag dang* || *dag pa’i sa la brten pa yi* || *dri ma rnam dgu pad ma yi* || *sbubs sogs dpe ni rab bstan te* || *nye ba’i nyon mongs sbubs kyi ni* || *dbye ba bye ba mtha’ las ‘das* ||

bya) clears them by means of the wisdom of awareness, whereby the fruition of the clearing process emerges, i.e., the transcendent qualities of purity, selfhood, bliss, etc.<sup>13</sup> [365]

The phase that is concordant with these qualities is present [as] the Path of Seeing because when one sees the selfhood wherein the elaborations of self and no self are pacified<sup>14</sup>, one sees *tathāgatagarbha*, [and] it is said that one thereby sees *mahāmudrā*. As explained in the tantras, the realization is twofold: [one where] regression is possible and one with no more regression. There is no contradiction with the explanation of two aspects that are likewise [made] with regard to the Path of Seeing.

In the post-meditation phase of such realization, the stages of the path which are classified according to the pure stages of familiarizing oneself with the manifold methods of accessing the pure nature of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*) have been explained in the *Dharmadharma-tāvibhāga*. After directly seeing the nature of phenomena, the stages of terminating the grasping for [and believing in] characteristics [consist in] familiarization with many factors. If one thinks [the Mahāmudrā post-meditation procedures] contradict explanations from the Pāramitāyāna, the reply is that there are a great many explanations like that in the Guhyamantra[yāna]. Thus, when it comes to the wisdom that arises from empowerments, in order to undermine the conceptualization of a self, [there were] statements such as “the ancient man, and the lord (*īśvara*)”.<sup>15</sup> The noble Avalokiteśvara stated the reason: the wisdom that immediately follows the [practice of] perfections in the ocean[-like] Yogācāra texts does not ultimately exist. Upon knowing that all phenomena have the mode of each being empty of their own essences, the [aspirants] see buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), so it is not necessary to learn the many methods of reasoning in post-meditation. The method of engaging in a copious number of positions regarding practice [366] is the style of the disputatious Vehicle of Characteristics (*lakṣaṇayāna*).

[2.] A synoptic explanation in order to clearly identify it<sup>16</sup>

The adage that “the identifications by Sgam po pa are the same as citations from authoritative scripture” should be understood by way of the [following] explanation. When the meaning of the statement in [*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*]*prajñāpāramitā* [5b.1–2] “that mind is no

<sup>13</sup> The fourth in this series can only be permanence.

<sup>14</sup> See also RGV I.37cd: Skt. *paramātmāmanairātmyaprapañcā<sup>a</sup>vyupa<sup>a</sup>śāntitaḥ* || <sup>a</sup>Johnston: *–kṣaya-*: Tib. *bdag dang bdag med spros pa dag* || *nye bar zhi bas dam pa'i bdag* ||

<sup>15</sup> These are two terms from a list that continues with “*ātman, jīva, sattva, kāla, and pudgala*” given for example in the *Hevajratāntra*. See HT, H 378a: vol. 79, folio/line 350b.5–350b.6. See also Snellgrove 1959 vol. 2, 36: *puruṣaḥ purāṇa īśvaro*, tr. in Snellgrove 1959 (vol. 1, 81) as “primeval man, *īśvara*”.

<sup>16</sup> Here, *bshad pa* is used instead of the *bstan* given in the introductory outline. Note that the term *ngos 'dzin* has the sense of “grasping/apprehending/understanding (*'dzin pa*) something by (or in terms of) its essence (*ngo bo*) characteristics”. It combines the senses of identification and recognition.

mind; mind's nature is luminous.”<sup>17</sup> and the statement in the *Abhidharmasūtra* “the beginning-less element is the basis of all phenomena”<sup>18</sup> etc. are commented upon, it is said [in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*] that unfounded mental engagements (*ayoniśo-manasikāra*)<sup>19</sup> due to the *skandhas*, *āyatanas*, *dhātus*, and *indriyas* etc., “depend upon the purity of mind”<sup>20</sup>. Hence, because all saṃsāric phenomena have arisen from *tathāgatagarbha*, there is no difference between the element of sentient beings and the element of a buddha.

In this context, the scriptural source for explaining [the element] as *mahāmudrā* was uttered by Saraha [*Dohākoṣa*, DK 41ab] “Mind alone is the seed of everything”.<sup>21</sup> This was proven by [saying] that it gives rise to all the good things of worldly existence and *nirvāṇa* and that it is therefore “like the wish fulfilling jewel”<sup>22</sup>. The rationale behind this [passage] is explained in this way: The wisdom of *mahāmudrā* is [both] the consciousness that is seized by delusion and the wisdom of realization that is without delusion. Delusion moreover consists in the building up of karma through attachments and aversions and the building up of bright karma through virtues devoid of these. From these [karmas] there arise the suffering of bad destinies and the joys of higher realms. Although *mahāmudrā* amidst the accumulation of happiness and suffering has been drawn into saṃsāric states, it is impossible for it to mix inseparably with saṃsāric phenomena. Therefore, because it is present as the very possibility to one day [367] be separated [from these states], *mahāmudrā* is the element of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*) too. As for the delusion-free wisdom pertaining to this element, since it is mixed inseparably with mind as such which is cultivated through familiarization with it, the element of buddhas (*buddhadhātu*) is *mahāmudrā* as well.

In this way it is understood both through scriptural authority and reasoning that all sentient beings are sealed by *mahāmudrā*. However, by these alone it is not realized. As is stated [in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*]: “The absolute truth of the self-arisen [i.e., the Buddhas,] is

<sup>17</sup> ASP, 3a<sub>3</sub>: *sems nyid sems ma yin* || *sems kyi rang bzhin nyid 'od gsal ba yin* || The line in the original Sanskrit, Schmithausen 1977, 41, E.b.1–2, reads *tathā hi tac cittaṃ acittaṃ | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvārā* | which is rendered in the D as *sems de ni sems ma mchis pa ste* || *sems kyi rang bzhin ni 'od gsal ba lags so* || Note that the Tibetan passage quoted by Shākya mchog ldan has the erroneous locative particle *sems la* instead of the demonstrative *sems de* which corresponds to the *tac cittaṃ* in the extant Sanskrit ms. We have followed the Sanskrit reading. See Volume I, 76 n. 177.

<sup>18</sup> On this oft-quoted passage, see Volume I, 76, 111, and 192.

<sup>19</sup> See Volume I, 418–23 et passim for an explanation of this important term.

<sup>20</sup> See also RGV I.57ab: *ayoniśomanaskāraś citta śuddhi pratiṣṭhitaḥ* ||

<sup>21</sup> D2224, 41cd: *sems nyid gcig pu kun gyi sa bon te* || *gang la srid dang mya ngan 'das 'phro ba* || *Dohākoṣa*, DK 41ab: *cittaṃ ekaṃ sakalabījaṃ bhavanirvāṇe-api yasya visphurataḥ* | Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> D2224, 42ab: *'dod pa'i 'bras bu ster bar byed pa yi* || *yid bzhin nor 'dra'i sems la phyag 'tshal lo* || *Dohākoṣa*, DK 41cd: *tac cintāmaṇirūpaṃ praṇamata [tat] icchāphalaṃ dadāti* || Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

to be realized through faith”.<sup>23</sup> The expression “That mind” (*tac cittam*) in the [*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*] *prajñāpāramitā* refers precisely to wisdom in the ground phase, while the “is no mind” (*acittam*) refers to the eightfold ensemble of consciousness, the entire range of mental factors and the illusory habitual tendencies of dualistic appearances, whereby [luminous mind] is not attained. Even an understanding that clings to the side of the purifications (*vyavadāna*)<sup>24</sup> is something that obscures luminosity as well. When the respective essences of these obscuring factors have given way to self-luminous self-awareness, then there is no more dichotomy between the obscured and the obscurer. As long as there are notions that cling to the dualism between obscured and obscurer, because the essence of the obscuration is not recognized and one clings to a partial luminosity, there is no realization of *mahāmudrā*.

All that is described in the tantras as the teacher and listener, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, existence and nonexistence, buddhas and sentient beings, is what is experienced by self-luminous self-awareness—*dharmadhātu* wisdom as the three continua of ground, path, and fruition—and by personally realized wisdom that constitutes the element of the whole of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and of buddhas and sentient beings. [368] There is nothing anywhere that is not sealed with the seal of this [wisdom]. Consequently, in designating this with the name “Great Seal”, the proper name (*dn̄gos ming*) has both an explanation and application. There is no contradiction in it being [both] a metonymic term [based on its association with a seal] and a proper name [based on the actual nature of reality denoted].<sup>25</sup>

This meaning [as emphasized] in the texts of the master Maitreya is that there exists no other phenomenon (*dharma*) apart from the expanse of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*). And since this *dharmadhātu* is experienced by the personally realized wisdom of the noble ones, it is the nature of mind. And this nature, to whatever extent it is analyzed on the basis of the reasoning corpus<sup>26</sup>, is simply the ultimate and hence irrefutable. Hence is it said that deliverance from all attachments and the like is [also] attachments and the like. Therefore, because the scriptural sources of this *mahāmudrā* are the works of Maitreya along with associated [texts], the nonaffirming negation based on analysis according to the texts of the reasoning corpus are not taught in that context.

However, when one experiences that definitive meaning which constitutes the remainder left behind in the wake of such analysis according to that [reasoning corpus], then that is

<sup>23</sup> See also RGV I.153ab: Skt. *śraddhayā eva anugantavyaṃ paramārthe svayaṃbhuvām* || Tib. *rang byung rnam kyī don dam de* || ‘*dad pa nyid kyis rtogs bya yin*’ ||

<sup>24</sup> In other words, a mind that clings to purifications on one side and rejects afflictions on the other remains caught in the dualism of acceptance and rejection.

<sup>25</sup> A proper name (*dn̄gos ming*) is one that is applied to an object based on actual characteristics. A metonymic name (*rjes grub*) is one that is given by reason of associations such as perceived similarities.

<sup>26</sup> This refers to one of two collections into which Nāgārjuna’s corpus is divided, the other being the hymnic corpus (*bstod tshogs*).



also designated as such [i.e., as the definitive meaning]. To illustrate with an example, [the Buddha]—after explaining in the middle *dharmacakra* that all phenomena are simply empty of own-nature—taught in the third *dharmacakra* that the unchanging perfect nature which is empty of that [self-emptiness] is the definitive meaning. Likewise, one doesn't find any core of a banana plant when one searches for it, yet in the middle of the unfolded leaves [bananas] nonetheless ripen as sweet fruits.<sup>27</sup>

### [3.] A clear way of resting in equipoise

As for the way of familiarizing oneself with practice, there are the ways of calm abiding when settling in meditative equipoise <sup>[369]</sup> and of irreversibly sustaining deep insight in both equipoise and post-meditation. First, what is to be seen is luminosity. So long as this remains an object of thought, *mahāmudrā* is not seen. Seeing a mere abstraction is not advocated here. Consequently, in seeing it directly, one remains settled in it in one-pointed equipoise [and maintains] its continuity without distraction. Then there is the unity of calm abiding and deep insight because, when the eight preparations for abandoning [obstacles]<sup>28</sup> come to the fore, the flaws of calm abiding and deep insight are eliminated. However, this is not the essence of meditation, because for the most part it does not go beyond the very conceptualizing that clings to [and believes in] language and objects. It is possible that it too will become a deviation.

As for the way to cultivate deep insight, there is meditative equipoise and post-meditation. In meditative equipoise, when any concepts of existence and quiescence that spring up are looked at by another conceptual analysis (*rtog dpyod*), the former dissolve in the expanse. When that conceptual analysis, the looker, is seen by the third insight, then seer and seen both mingle into the very essence of deep insight. On that occasion, one speaks of “the realization of deep insight that is clear and nonconceptual”. At that time, all unreal conceptualizations cease, not to mention the concepts on the side of the antidotes, which must also cease because they are precisely the grasping for [and believing in] characteristic signs.

[*Query:*] What is unreal conceptualizing? [*Reply:*] It is what has been explained as everything and anything that appears as having aspects which constitute the three realms within the eight groupings of consciousness together with their associated [activities] which one has been habituated to since beginningless time.

<sup>27</sup> Example from the *Dharmadhātustava*, D1118, verse 14, 64a.

<sup>28</sup> See *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*, 526: In calm abiding meditation: faith, determination, perseverance, confidence (all of which counter laziness), mindfulness (which counters lack of mindfulness), introspection (which counters sinking and distraction), investigation (which counters further association with sinking and scattering), and equanimity (which counters unnecessary prolongation of countermeasures). See also *Gangs can rig brga'i chos kyi rnam grangs mthong tshad kun las btus pa ngo mtshar 'phrul gyi lde mid chen po, bar cha*, 1846–1847 which gives the same eight terms in a different series, one according to the *Bhāvanākṛāma*, and one according to the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.

[*Query:*] Isn't it impossible to end such appearances without employing analysis by means of reasoning? [*Reply:*] <sup>[370]</sup> That is possible without employing that [reasoning]. For example, when deep insight is realized in the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), there is no opportunity for the eightfold [consciousness to operate]. [Yet] when one reemerges from that in post-meditation, so long as one has not realized buddhahood, unreal conceptualizing arises automatically and cannot be stopped. Consequently, leave all appearances that arise as they are without manipulating them. Don't let conceptualizing that grasps words and objects mingle with any [judgments of] good or bad but just naturally let it be in the fresh and uncon-trived state throughout the [phases of] meditation and post-meditation. When there is a relapse into conceptual thought that deliberates about the past and future, without manipulating the moment of awareness in the present by base thoughts or correct thoughts, just leave whatever arises as it is. This is called "being natural". To identify what it is "to be natural," nothing else is required. On the other hand, by all sorts of efforts to stop thoughts, thoughts [only] multiply. Thus by letting thoughts be without making an effort to stop them, realization arises naturally. This is the meaning of [Saraha's statement] "when the mind bound by entanglements loosens, there is freedom" and so forth.<sup>29</sup> This also pertains to the phase of cognition [in] post-meditation in the wake of the preceding meditative equipoise.

#### [4.] A response to objections

The Niḥsvabhāvavādins say that without ascertaining [emptiness] through logical reasoning such as freedom from one and many, it is impossible to realize emptiness, and [also] that the [mere] presumption of realization does not transcend doubts. They say that if the object that is to be realized by the view is not subjected to analysis through logical reasoning that investigates the ultimate, the clinging to that object as having characteristics [can]not be reversed.

[Yet] the victor [Chos grags rgya mtsho]<sup>30</sup> has said that expertise in the means for realizing the ultimate <sup>[371]</sup> without prior recourse to methods of logical reasoning that analyzes the ultimate are attested in the Guhyamantra[yāna] and the direct instructions (*upadeśas*). For example, the view is realized through binding bodily functions<sup>31</sup>, yantra methods of

<sup>29</sup> D2224, *Dohākoṣagīti* (Tib. *Do hā mdzod kyi glu*), 40cd.

<sup>30</sup> It seems unlikely that the author would attribute a Mahāmudrā *upadeśa* to the Buddha. More plausible is that *rgyal ba* here refers to the Seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho, whom he highly venerated and who was usually referred to as *rgyal ba*, the victor, by Karma phrin las pa. *Rgyal ba* is a title that is still used to refer to Karma pas.

<sup>31</sup> According to Mkhan po Phun tshogs rnam rgyal of Rdzogs sar monastery in Khams (as recorded by Komarovski 2011, 368 n. 54), the term *lus kyi byed bcings* refers to certain somatic techniques for realization outlined in the *Hevajratāntra* such as pressing points on the neck and yantra yoga.

embracing, reversing, and pervading,<sup>32</sup> and the invitation of the wisdom beings (*jñānasattva*) and so forth. Accordingly, when these experiences through personal realization are subjected to analysis through logical reasoning, all the ultimate [aspects] of the Mantra tradition such as bliss and luminosity and the like will be forsaken. If analysis through reasoning does not stop, then at that time analysis will be pointless [because] when the entire spectrum of reifying thinking has ceased, the analysis of objects is fruitless.

In that regard Abhidharma adherents say that it is not acceptable to practice calm abiding after accomplishing deep insight. Such a statement should be examined. Even among such Abhidharma adherents, a great many explain, to give an example, that the actual concentration is to be practiced after one has rid oneself of the attachment to the desire [realm]. [Similarly,] in the six limbs of *yoga*,<sup>33</sup> concentration (*dhyāna*) is taught after having accomplished withdrawal (*pratyāhara*), [i.e., a method of understanding that appearances are empty].

Some followers of this [Mahāmudrā] system speak of “Mahāmudrā of the mode of abiding” and of “Mahāmudrā of bliss and emptiness”, [relating] the former to Madhyamaka *upadeśas* [and] the latter to the ultimate [level] of the Mantra[yāna].<sup>34</sup> According to the Madhyamaka system, if Atiśa quoting many scriptures proclaimed that the ultimate of this [Madhyamaka] system is not realized through inference, then what need is there to speak of the *mahāmudrā* of the mode of abiding being realized through inference? [Moreover,] the statement that “the emptiness of the Madhyamaka system is said to be realized through the direct perception of self-awareness”<sup>[372]</sup> does not exist in the classical texts of Bhāviveka or Candrakīrti.

To say that Sgam po pa’s *mahāmudrā* realization is a prelude to the [tantric] bliss-emptiness *mahāmudrā* realization is declared to *not* be the Bka’ brgyud system [by its own adherents]. Why would one build up stores of wisdom (*ye shes tshogs*) prior to cultivating the Generation Stages (*bskyed rim*)? Is the *mahāmudrā*, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness, realized without the Generation Stages? If you are asking about [my view]: in the first place, by considering the point of Mantra[yāna], the meaning of emptiness that is realized is explained as the “adamantine wisdom of emptiness” (*stong nyid ye shes rdo rje*). If you want to distinguish that and the various distinctive features of Bka’ brgyud *mahāmudrā*, then think properly and speak according to scripture! [Only] then will you attain confidence in the teachings.

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<sup>32</sup> An allusion to the Vajrayāna practices that involves sexual union.

<sup>33</sup> The author refers to the Generation and Completion phases of the Kālacakra tantra.

<sup>34</sup> These designations are sometimes used more specifically to refer, respectively, to the awareness-emptiness (*rig stong*) Mahāmudrā tradition of Saraha and Maitrīpa et al. and the bliss-emptiness (*bde stong*) Mahāmudrā tradition of Tilopa and Nāropa Wien.

If you are asking about [my view]: The existence of a *mahāmudrā* greater than famili-  
arizing oneself with ultimate bodhicitta is not advocated in this lineage. The venerable Nāgār-  
juna explained that to take the recognition of ultimate bodhicitta as the adamant mind (*sems*  
*rdo rje : cittavajra*) is the system of the Guhyasamāja.

Again, other traditions argue [as follows]: The liberation of beginners with mere  
devotion who are not taught the esoteric precepts (*upadeśa*) by a *bla ma* is called “a system  
for fools”. This is because any expression expressible by speech is nothing more than a  
[conceptual] abstraction (*arthasāmānya*, ‘object-universal’) or delimitation (*anyāpoha*, ‘other-  
exclusion’) and is therefore not the ultimate. Therefore, [the ultimate] is ineffable by speech.

“Devotion” means having confidence in the qualities of realization. When this has  
arisen, self-luminous self-awareness one has had since beginningless time becomes manifest.  
The great bliss of self-luminous self-awareness has pervaded all [beings] from the very begin-  
ning. The different ways of awakening [373] in line with individual capacities are not unequi-  
vocally determined.<sup>35</sup> When there are present the conditions conducive to ascertaining that  
state in which what was primordially undeluded and nonconceptual has emerged in its very  
immediacy, yogic direct perception [is at hand].

Also in this regard, concerning the explanation that at the time of the main practice  
(*dnegos gzhi*), mental engagement (*manasikāra*) is abandoned, it has been objected that sleep,  
and stupor and the like would also involve this [absence of mental engagement].<sup>36</sup> And it was  
said that [this] is no different from the Great Perfection of Heshang in former times. “Mental  
engagement” is explained in the Abhidharma as conceptualizing that grasps words and objects.  
If its absence results in a mistake<sup>37</sup> in that case, then the same also holds true for all the  
meditation states of the noble paths.

Were one to retort that the scholar Kamalaśīla explained that [i.e., *amanasikāra*] as a  
mistake in such [meditation], the reply is that one is in that case disputing against the exegetical  
tradition of Nāgārjuna. If self-luminous self-awareness is not realized without prior engage-  
ment in studies and thinking, why then do beginners first cultivate the collection of stores of  
wisdom?

Although [Sa skya Paṇḍita] said that the “descent from above” (*yas babs*) view resem-  
bles the meditation of Heshang, in most Mantra traditions it is explained that one begins with  
the view and then engages in the path.

The expression “Self-sufficient White Remedy” (*dkar po gcig thub*) refers exclusively  
to the ‘view’ but is not a term that denigrates the accumulation of merits. Rather, its precise

<sup>35</sup> In other words, given the varied dispositions and interests of students, there is no “one size fits all” teaching.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of traditional Indian and Tibetan sources of this view, see Volume I, 405–7.

<sup>37</sup> Literally, absurd consequence (*thal [ba] : prasaṅga*).

meaning is that one does not need to strive for different antidotes to each of the emotional afflictions and discursive thoughts as *mahāmudrā* alone is sufficient [as a remedy].

[As for the] statement “The Great Seal meditation of the ignorant, it is taught, usually becomes a cause of lower realms”<sup>38</sup> etc.:<sub>[374]</sub> Any actions accumulated due to the disorientation of not clearly understanding the selflessness of persons and phenomena are nothing more than paths of *samsāra*. Moreover, the distinctions between good and bad according to different kinds of motivations at the time of the cause are impossible in the absence of conceptual grasping. Even in the case of inferior *mahāmudrā*, such concepts are impossible. Besides, statements noting that references such as [Mahāmudrā’s] resemblance to Prajñāpāramitā, the meditation of the Alīkākāra Cittamātra, and the third introduction in Mahāmudrā etc. are [all] mistaken<sup>39</sup>. On the consideration that they are not the *mahāmudrā* of the Guhyamantra[yāna]. However, when it is considered that there are no phenomena at all that are not sealed by the luminously empty mind as such devoid of grasping, there are a great many specific characterizations of that which is designated by the name *mahāmudrā*. Considered only in terms of the individual, the self-luminosity without subject-object duality is [its] “resemblance to *prajñāpāramitā*”. Taken in terms of all aspects of phenomena, wisdom free from subject-object duality is the ultimate definitive meaning of the Maitreya works that was described as “Mind only” by Candra[kīrti]. Through direct introduction wherein whatever appears is mind, the concepts of the apprehended [object] cease. Through direct introduction wherein the appearance of mind is like space, the distraction of apprehending [subject] ceases. The freedom from both [appearances and the apprehending mind] is spontaneously present wisdom. All of these are called *mahāmudrā*.

<sup>38</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.161: *blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud ’gro’i rgyu ru gsungs || min na gzugs med kham su skye || yang na nyan thos ’gog par ltung ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.) 117 (Eng.).

<sup>39</sup> Shākya mchog ldan appears to refer to a criticism raised by Sa skya Paṇḍita in his *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal* against various types of Mahāmudrā teachings. See *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*, 92<sub>11</sub> and 99<sub>18–1014</sub>. As for the Alīkākāra Cittamātra approach, Sa skya Paṇḍita says that the so-called four *yogas*, i.e., one-pointedness, freedom from elaboration, one flavour, and no-meditation were presented by Śāntipa as stages of meditation and that they are not known within Madhyamaka doctrine. Thereby, Sa skya Paṇḍita indirectly criticized Sgam po pa who made use of these four in his Mahāmudrā system. Moreover he emphasizes that these four *yogas* were made up (by ordinary persons) and were not taught within the Indian tantric sequences of levels and stages. As for the resemblance to Prajñāpāramitā, he criticizes those who take the statement in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (D12) 3a<sub>3</sub>: *sems nyid sems ma yin || sems kyī rang bzhin nyid ’od gsal ba yin ||* “That mind is no mind; mind’s nature is luminous” to convey the purport of Mahāmudrā. He also criticizes those Tibetans who employed a threefold introduction to guide their disciples to understand [1] that all phenomena are mind, [2] that mind resembles space, and [3] that space is emptiness. He singles out the third introduction and assesses it in the context of Prajñāpāramitā, more specifically with respect to a quote from the *Prajñāpāramitā in One Hundred Thousand Verses* (*Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*) which says that all phenomena are like space. For Sa skya Paṇḍita, even if practitioners know how to meditate correctly in this fashion, it remains on the level of Prajñāpāramitā and cannot be *mahāmudrā* as it is not tantric. Underlying this criticism is, again, his contention that *mahāmudrā* can only be realized as the culmination of tantric empowerments. To him it is untenable to present it along the lines of a sūtric approach. Sa skya Paṇḍita also criticizes those who teach *asmṛti* and *amanasikāra* as Mahāmudrā. Shākya mchog ldan repudiates these criticisms in the next few lines of the text.

Again, the statement that all followers of this tradition who identify the direct introduction to mind, when they do not find mind anywhere by searching for it, as what is called *mahāmudrā* needs to be investigated. As a result of this *mahāmudrā* which is precisely the wisdom experienced [in] Mantra[yāna] during the phase of post-meditation after reemerging from <sup>[375]</sup> meditative equipoise, the grasping of discursive signs [i.e., reification] is to be put to an end. Hence, when the searching mind does not find anything by searching, the cessation of this grasping of characteristics on account of habituation is excellent and it does not count as a flaw. [However] if you claim that *mahāmudrā* is a nonaffirming negation [deduced by] not finding anything by searching, this contradicts the *Uttaratantra* [RGV] scripture as well as the works of Saraha. When the searching consciousness has not found anything by means of reasoning, the wisdom that is left behind as the remainder is identified as *mahāmudrā*. Having understood this properly, it should be realized. Therefore, in being directly introduced to mind, this very “mind alone is the seed of everything”, the supreme wish fulfilling gem.

In this way, this identification of *mahāmudrā*, which commonly encompasses all [types of] *mahāmudrā* taught in all the sūtras and mantras, has been eloquently explained based on the condition of awakening of latent tendencies from the past, seeing many scriptures, hearing spiritual friends, and forging the connection with those who requested it. Through the virtue of this, may I and all who are equally fortunate attain perfect buddhahood and liberate all mothers from the ocean of worldly existence.

This *Undermining the Haughtiness of Others by the Wheel of Brahma: A Treatise Clarifying Mahāmudrā*, was composed in the monastic site called Thub bstan gser mdog can [located] in the heart at Gtsang gyas ru by the glorious Shākya mchog ldan Dri med legs pa'i blo, a scholar from Central Tibet upon the earnest request by Chos kyi rgyal mtshan bzang po, son of Zla dgon chos kyi bzang po, lord of siddhas. May it be completely realized.

### 1b. Critical Edition of *Gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed*<sup>40</sup>

<sup>[359]</sup> *Phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed ces bya ba bzhugs so |*

<sup>[360]</sup> swasti || dge legs su bgyi ba grub par gyur cig || *phyag rgya chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshang pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed* ces bya ba | rang bzhin rnam dag rdzogs sangs rgyas kyi blo || glo bur dri ma'i tshogs dang ma 'dres pa || dus rnams rtag tu kun la bzhugs gyur pa || g.yo med phyag rgya che la phyag 'tshal nas || de yi<sup>41</sup> rang bzhin gsal

<sup>40</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 331–346<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 359–376<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol. 17, 437–457<sub>2</sub>

<sup>41</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>; *yiś*

bar rtogs dka' ba || brjod dang rtog pa'i yul las 'das gyur kyang || mdzub mos nam mkha'  
mtshon pa ji bzhin du || phyogs tsam brjod la deng 'dir spro ba skyes ||

sangs rgyas dang ni sem can dang || srid dang mya ngan 'das pa dang || sngags dang pha rol  
phyin pa dang || grub mtha' kun la thun mong du || bzhugs kyang brda' 'phros ches dka' bas ||  
sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal la || phyag <sup>[361]</sup> rgya chen po'i mtshan gsol nas || gangs can ljongs  
su cher grags pa || de nyid mdo tsam gsal ba bya ||

de ltar mchod pa brjod pa dang || rtsom par dam bca' sngon btang nas || **zla 'od gzhon nu'**i  
rang rtsal gyis || bton pa'i phyag rgya chen po la || rnam gzhag rgyas par bshad pa dang || ngos  
'dzin bsdu te bstan pa dang || mnyam par 'jog lugs gsal po dang || brgal lan phye ste bshad  
pa'o ||

dang por bshad bya gang yin pa || rnam par phye ste ma bshad na || gzhan gyi klan ka ma bzod  
pa'i || cal col dbyangs su len pa mthong || spyir ni rnal 'byor rgyud gzhung las || der bshad de  
dang bla med las || gang bshad rnam grangs mang po dang || pha rol phyin pa'i nges don du ||  
bshad pa kun la khyab gyur pa'i || sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal la || dus 'dir phyag rgya che  
zhes gsung || de phyir phyogs su chad pa med || 'di don rtogs nas phar phyin dang || sngags nas  
gsungs pa'i nges don gyi || rtogs byed thabs lam so so ba || gang du zhugs kyang mchog nyid  
'gyur || bshad pa'i srol rnam so so ba || der ma zhugs kyang 'di kho na || gcig pus so so rang  
rig pa'i || ye shes mthong ba'i lam nyid 'thob || bsod nams tshogs tshul logs shig tu || rnam par  
gzhag nas lta ba 'di || kho na rtogs pa'i yan lag tu || sbyor dang sngon 'gro gzhan mi dgos || ci  
phyir zhe na lta ba 'di || tshig tu brjod pa spangs pa'i phyir || thos bsam dang ni 'jig rten pa'i ||  
sgom byung blo yis de ma 'jal || gal te gang gis rtogs she <sup>[362]</sup> na || snga ma'i las 'phro bdag po'i  
rkyen || bla mar mos pa'i dmigs rkyen dang || shes rig snga ma'i nyer len las || de ma thag pa'i  
mngon sum 'byung || de phyir 'di la tshogs lam du || thos bsam byed dang sbyor lam du || don  
spyi tsam zhig mthong zhes pa'i || dbye ba mdzad pa ma yin no || mngon sum mthong ba'i  
'phags lam la || dbye ba med pa nyid dgongs nas || sa lam dbye ba med gsungs mod || thabs la  
skur 'debs ma yin no ||

**zla 'od gzhon nus** gang mkhyen pa'i || lta ba tshogs su 'chad pa na || thog mar spros pa gcod  
pa'i tshul || **klu sgrub** gzhung bzhin 'chad mi bzhed || gzung 'dzin rtog pa 'gog pa'i tshul ||  
**thogs med** gzhung bzhin 'chad mi dgos || nges don rang rig rang gsal la || nyams myong tshad  
du ma 'khyol na || sngags las phyag rgya che rtogs pa || gol sa nyid du lhung bar dogs || de bas  
kun la khyab byed du || 'jug pa'i phyag rgya chen po ni || snga ma bzhin du rtogs byas nas ||  
de la rtogs pa brtan mi brtan || brtag par bya ste mi brtan na || shing rta'i srol gnyis las byung  
ba'i<sup>42</sup> || gzung 'dzin spros pa 'gog pa'i tshul || goms par byas kyang mi 'gal mod || brtson 'grus  
can gyis sngar rtogs pa || de nyid spong ba'i 'du byed kyis || tshul bzhin goms par byed pa dang

<sup>42</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; pa'i

|| rjes<sup>43</sup> thob rten 'brel sna tshogs pa || snang la rnam par rtog pa yis || 'dzin med nyid du goms byed pa || de nyid chos 'di'i gtso bor 'chad ||

sngar bshad rtogs pa brtan gyur nas || gsang sngags lam gyi phyag rgya che || rtogs pa'i thabs gang yin pa <sup>[363]</sup> la || 'jug par bya yi<sup>44</sup> mi brtan par || zhugs na nyes pa'i tshogs 'phel bas || bag yod nyid du gdams pa yin || **zla 'od gzhon nu**'i phyag rgya che || dkar po chig thub zhes bya ba'i || sman dang 'dra<sup>45</sup> bar bshad pa de || ngos 'dzin tshul la la la dag || gnas lugs dang ni thabs lam las || mngon 'gyur gnyis su 'byed ces zer || 'di ni gzhan dag gis rgol ba'i || klan ka ma bzod dbyangs su blangs || ci phyir zhe na lugs de yi || phyag rgya che la sangs rgyas pa'i || chen po gsum gyis ma reg pas || khyad par 'phags pa yin zhes gsungs || de la kha cig 'di snyam du || chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa || khyad par mi 'phags chos nyid du || 'gyur zhes dogs pa de bsam bya || rigs pas dpyad pa'i stong pa nyid || med dgag nam mkha' lta bu ni || yul du byed pa sgra rtog las || ma 'das phyir ne de mi rung || 'dir bshad phyag rgya chen po ni || mngon du byed pa sngags lam la || nges par ltos pa min phyir yang || sngags kyi ye shes 'dir mi 'chad || rdzogs pa chen po'i ye shes kyang || mngon du 'gyur ba sbyor ba dang || sta gon mang pos bsgrubs pa'i phyir || de yang 'dir 'chad ma yin no ||

blos byas spros pa mang po yis || rnam par g.yeng la ma reg par || rkyen gsum tsam las mngon 'gyur ba'i || phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes ni || phar phyin 'khor lo gsum pa yi || nges don gzung 'dzin las grol ba'i || ye shes nyid du gang bshad dang || bla med theg pa'i e vaṃ dang || rnam kun mchog ldan stong nyid dang || <sup>[364]</sup> *dgyes pa rdo rje* la sogs pa'i || ngo bo ngos 'dzin 'di las gzhan || yod pa min yang rang rang gi || thabs las mngon du gyur pa na || ming 'dogs gzhan dang gzhan byas so ||

de yang **sgam po pas** gsungs pa || nga yi phyag rgya chen po yi || ngos 'dzin rang gi rig pa ste | | gzhung ni rgyud bla'i bstan bcos zhes || gsungs pa'i dgongs pa dpyad pa na || **mnga' bdag rgyal sras mai tri**<sup>46</sup> las || brgyud pa de'i ngos 'dzin ni || *rgyud bla*'i gzhung du gsal ba dang || de goms byas pa las byung ba'i || lam gyi rim pa *chos dang ni* || *chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa* yi || lung las rtogs par bya zhes dgongs || *rgyud blar* bshad pa gang zhe na || dri ma rnam dgus bsgribs pa yi || dpe bstan bde gshegs snying po'i khams || sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba || mkha' bzhin 'gyur ba med la bshad || 'di ni gzhi dus ma dag dang || lam dus phyogs gcig dag pa dang || 'bras dus thams cad dag pa ste || gsum po 'di yis ma khyab pa'i || chos gang yod pa ma yin no || gsum po'i rang bzhin khyad med kyang || gnas skabs gsum du phye ba ni || 'khrul snang bag chags ma dag pa'i || 'jig rten lhan cig skyes blo yi || snang tshul dag la ltos nas phye ||

<sup>43</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *rje*

<sup>44</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *bya'i*

<sup>45</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *la*

<sup>46</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *tri*



bde gshegs snying po'i kham s gang la || phyag<sup>47</sup> rgya chen por mtshan gsol ba || gang 'di dri ma'i sbyang gzhi la || sbyang bya'i dri ma rnam dgu po || sbyong byed bde gshegs snying po de || rig pa'i ye shes kyis sbyangs pas || sbyang 'bras gtsang bdag bde sogs kyi || yon tan pha rol phyin pa 'byung || yon tan<sup>[365]</sup> 'di dag rjes mthun pa || gnas skabs mthong ba'i lam gnas te || bdag dang bdag med spros pa dag || nye bar zhi ba'i bdag mthong nas || de bzhin gshegs snying mthong ba'i phyir || phyag rgya chen po mthong bar bshad || rtogs te slar ldog srid pa dang || slar mi ldog pa'i dbye bas gnyis || rgyud sde dag las bshad pa ltar || mthong ba'i lam la'ang rnam gnyis su || 'chad la 'gal ba yod ma yin ||

de ltar rtogs pa'i rjes thob tu || chos nyid dag la 'jug pa'i tshul || rnam pa mang po goms byed pa'i || rim pa dag las phye gyur pa'i || lam gyi rim pa chos dang ni || chos nyid rnam 'byed dag tu bshad || chos nyid mngon sum mthong rjes su || mtshan 'dzin 'gog pa'i rim pa ni || rnam pa mang po goms byed pa || pha rol phyin pa'i theg pa las || bshad pa dag dang 'gal snyam na || de lta bu ni gsang sngags las || bshad pa shin tu mang ba ste || dbang las skyes pa'i ye shes la || bdag tu rtog pa bzlog phyir du || skye bu sngon rabs<sup>48</sup> dbang phyug dang || zhes sogs gsungs pa dag dang ni || 'phags pa spyang ras gzigs dbang gis || rnal 'byor spyod gzhung rgya mtsho yi || pha rol phyin pa'i rjes thogs su || ye shes de yang don dam du || yod pa min pa'i rigs<sup>49</sup> pa gsungs || chos kun rang rang ngo bo yis || stong pa'i tshul can shes 'og tu || de bzhin gshegs snying mthong ba la || rjes thob rigs pa'i tshul mang por || slob mi dgos pa spyod pa'i phyogs || rgya chen po la 'jug pa'i tshul || brtsod mdzad mtshan nyid theg<sup>[366]</sup> pa'i lugs ||

gnyis po ngos 'dzin bsdu bshad pa || lung las gsungs dang **sgam po pas** || ngos gzung pa de gcig go zhes || 'chad pa'i tshul gyis rtogs par bya || shes rab pha rol phyin pa las || sems la sems ni ma mchis te || sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal zhes || gsungs pa de dang mngon pa'i mdor || thog ma med pa'i dus kyi dbyings || chos rnam kun gyi gnas yin te || zhes sogs gsungs don 'grel pa na || phung po skye mched kham dbang rnam || sogs nas tshul min yid byed ni || sems kyi dag pa la rab gnas || zhes pas 'khor ba'i chos kun yang || de bzhin gshegs snying las byung phyir || sems can kham dang sangs rgyas kham || tha dad yod ma yin pa la ||

skabs 'dir phyag rgya cher 'chad pa'i || shes byed **sa ra has** gsungs pa || sems nyid gcig pu kun gyi ni || sa bon yin pa'i sgrub byed du || srid dang mya ngan 'das pa yi || dge legs ma lus 'byung ba'i phyir || yid bzhin nor bu 'dra bar gsungs || de yi<sup>50</sup> shes byed 'dir 'chad pa || phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes la || 'khrul pas gzung ba'i rnam shes dang || 'khrul med rtogs pa'i ye shes so || 'khrul pa la yang chags sdang gis || las bsags<sup>51</sup> pa dang de med pa'i || dge bas rnam dkar las bsags pa || de las ngan song sdug bsngal dang || mtho ris gnas kyi bde ba 'byung || bde sdug

<sup>47</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; *phyag*

<sup>48</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>; *rab*

<sup>49</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>; *rig*

<sup>50</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>; *de'i*

<sup>51</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>; *sog*, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, *sogs*

tshogs kyi phyag rgya che || 'khor ba'i gnas su drangs gyur kyang || 'khor ba'i chos dang dbyer med du || 'dres mi srid phyir nam zhig tshe ||<sup>[367]</sup> 'bral rung nyid du gnas pa'i phyir || sems can khams kyang phyag rgya che || khams der 'khrul med ye shes ni || goms pas bsgom pa'i sems nyid dang || dbyer med nyid du 'dres gyur pas || sangs rgyas khams kyang phyag rgya che ||

de ltar lung dang rigs pa yis || sems can kun la phyag rgya ches || rgyas btab par ni shes gyur mod || de tsam gyis de rtogs pa min || rang byung rnam kyi don dam de || dad pas rtogs byar gsungs de yin || sems la zhes gsungs gzhi dus kyi || ye shes nyid yin sems ma mchis || zhes pa rnam shes tshogs brgyad pa || sems las byung ba ji snyed dang || gnyis snang 'khrul pa'i bag chags kyis || bsgrubs pa min yang rnam byang gi || phyogs la zhen pa'i rtog pa yang || 'od gsal ba la sgrib byed do || sgrib byed de dag rang rang gi || ngo bo<sup>52</sup> rang rig rang gsal bar || gyur pa'i tshe na bsgrib<sup>53</sup> bya dang || sgrib byed gnyis su dbye ba med || ji srid sgrib bya sgrib byed kyi || gnyis 'dzin rtog pa yod de srid || sgrib byed ngo bo ma shes pas || 'od gsal phyogs rer zhen pa'i phyir || phyag rgya che de rtogs pa med ||

rgyud las 'chad po nyan po dang || 'khor dang mya ngang 'das pa dang || dngos dang dngos po med pa dang || sangs rgyas sems can kun du<sup>54</sup> zhes || gsungs pa rang rig rang gsal ba || gzhi lam 'bras bu'i rgyud gsum dang || chos dbyings ye shes 'khor ba dang || mya ngan 'das pa thams cad dang || sangs rgyas sems can thams cad kyi || khams gyur so so rang rig<sup>[368]</sup> pa'i || ye shes nyid kyis myong bya ba || de yis gang la rgyas gdab kyang || mi thebs gyur pa yod min pa || de phyir 'di la phyag rgya che'i || mtshan gsol ba ni bshad dang 'jug || gnyis ka yod pa'i dngos ming ste || rjes grub nyid du sbyar ba dang || dngos ming yin pa mi 'gal lo ||

'di don rje btsun byams pa yi || gzhung na chos dbyings ma gtogs pa'i || chos gzhan yod pa min pa dang || chos dbyings de yang 'phags rnam kyi || so so rang rig gis myong bas || sems kyi rang bzhin yin pa dang || rang bzhin de la rigs tshogs kyis || rigs pas ji tsam dpyad gyur kyang || don dam nyid phyir rgol mi nus || de phyir chags sogs thams cad las || nges 'byung chags sogs yin par gsungs || de phyir phyag rgya che 'di yi || lung khungs byams pa'i chos rnam ni || rjes 'brang bcas pa de yin phyir || rigs tshogs gzhung gis rnam brtags pa'i || med par dgag la der mi 'chad ||

'on kyang de yis der brtags pa'i || shul du lhag ma nyid gyur pa'i || nges pa'i don zhig myong gyur na || der yang der 'dogs dper mtshon na || 'khor lo bar pa chos rnam kun || rang stong nyid du bshad 'og tu || 'khor lo gsum par des stong pa'i || 'gyur ba med pa'i yongs grub nyid || nges pa'i don du bshad de bzhin || gzhan yang chu shing snying po ni || rtsal bas ma rnyed gyur mod kyang || lo 'dab rgyas pa'i dbus zhig tu || 'bras bu mngar por smin de bzhin ||

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<sup>52</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; ngo bor

<sup>53</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; sgrib

<sup>54</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; nga

gsum pa nyams len goms tshul la || mnyam par bzhag tshe zhi gnas dang || <sup>[369]</sup> mnyam rjes gnyis kar lhag mthong gi || slar ldog med par skyong<sup>55</sup> tshul lo || dang po mthong bya 'od gsal de || ji srid rtog pa'i yul gyur pa || de srid phyag rgya che ma mthong || don spyi tsam mthong 'dir mi bzhed || de'i phyir mngon sum gang mthong ba || de la rtse gcig mnyam bzhag gnas || de'i rgyun rnam par ma g.yengs pa || de tshe zhi lhag zung du 'jug || de tshe spong ba'i 'du byed brgyad || mngon du byed tshe zhi lhag gi || nyes pa sel ba'i phyir yin mod || sgom gyi ngo bo ma yin te || phal cher sgra don 'dzin pa yi || rtog pa nyid las ma 'das phyir || de yang gol bar 'gyur ba srid ||

lhag par mthong ba'i sgom tshul la || mnyam par bzhag dang rjes thob la || mnyam par bzhag tshe srid pa dang || zhi ba'i rnam rtog gang 'phros pa || de la rtog dpyod gzhan zhig gis || bltas pas snga ma dbyings su thim || lta byed rtog dpyod de la yang || shes rab gsum pas bltas pa na || blta bya lta byed gnyis ka yang || lhag mthong ngo bo nyid du 'dres || de tshe gsal dang rtog med kyi || lhag mthong mngon du gyur zhes bya || dus der yang dag min rtog ni || thams cad 'gog pa smos ci dgos || gnyen po'i phyogs kyi rtog pa yang || mtshan 'dzin nyid phyir dgag bya'o ||

yang dag min rtog gang zhe na || thog med dus nas gang goms pa'i || rnam shes tshogs brgyad 'khor bcas la || kham gsum pa yi<sup>56</sup> rnam pa can || gang snang thams cad der bshad bya || rigs pas dpyad pa ma byas par || der snang 'gog mi nus shes na || <sup>[370]</sup> de ma byas kyang de nus te || dper na 'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug ltar || lhag mthong mngon du gyur pa na || brgyad po'i go skabs med phyir ro || de las langs pa'i rjes thob ni || ji srid sangs ma rgyas ji srid || yang dag min rtog rang shugs kyis || 'char ba dgag mi nus pas na || gang shar snang ba thams cad ni || bzo bcos med par bzhag pa la || sgra don 'dzin pa'i rtog pa ni || bzang ngan gang yang bsre mi bya || mnyam rjes kun tu so ma dang || ma bcos lhug par bzhag byas te || 'das dang ma 'ongs la sems pa || rtog pa nyid du song bas nas || da lta shes pa skad cig ma || tha mal rtog dang yang dag pa'i || rtog pas bzo bcos ma byas par || gang shar nyid du bzhag byas pa || de la lhug pa zhes brjod kyi || lhug pa'i ngos 'dzin gzhan mi dgos || yang na rnam rtog 'gog pa yi || 'bad rtsol mang pos rtog pa spel || rtog pa 'gog pa'i rtsol med par || bzhag pas rtogs pa ngang gis 'char || ces pa 'jur bus beings pa'i sems || glod na grol ba sogs don te || 'di yang mnyam gzhas sngon song ba'i || rjes kyi shes pa'i skabs la dgongs ||

bzhi pa brgal lan bshad bya ba || ngo bo nyid<sup>57</sup> med smra rnam ni || gcig dang du bral la sogs pa'i || rigs pas gtan la ma phab par || stong nyid rtogs pa mi srid cing || rtogs rlom the tshom las ma 'das || lta ba gang gi rtogs bya'i yul || don dam dpyod byed rigs pa yis || dpyad ma byas na yul de la || mtshan mar 'dzin pa mi ldog zer ||

<sup>55</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *skyod*

<sup>56</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *pa'i*

<sup>57</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *gnyis*

don dam dpyod byed rigs pa'i <sup>[371]</sup> tshul || sngon song med par don dam pa || rtogs pa'i thabs mkhas gsang sngags dang || man ngag las byung rgyal bas gsungs || dper na lus kyi byed bcings dang || bzlog khyab thabs kyi 'khrul 'khor dang || ye shes sems dpa' spyen 'drongs pa || sogs las lta ba rtogs de bzhin || so so rang rig gis myong ba || de la rigs pas dpyad byas tshe || bde gsal la sogs sngags lugs kyi || don dam mtha' dag spangs par 'gyur || rigs pas dpyad kyang mi khegs na || dus der dpyad pa don med 'gyur || 'dzin rtog mtha' dag khegs nas ni || yul la dpyod pa don med do ||

'di na mngon pa ba rnams ni || lhag mthong grub pa'i 'og rol tu || zhi gnas bsgrub pa mi 'thad ces || zer ba de yang brtag bya ba || de 'dra mngon pa ba la yang || shin tu mang ste dper mtshon na || 'dod la chags bral byas 'og tu || dngos gzhi'i bsam gtan bsgrub par bshad || rnal 'byor yan lag drug pa ru || sor bsdud grub nas bsam gtan gsungs ||

lugs 'di'i rjes 'brang kha cig ni || gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po dang || bde stong phyag rgya che zhes pa || snga ma dbu ma'i man ngag dang || phyi ma sngags kyi mthar thug zer || dbu ma'i lugs kyi rjes dpag gis || lugs de nyid kyi don dam yang || rtogs pa min zhes **atiśas**<sup>58</sup> || lung mang drangs nas bshad gyur na || gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po ni || rjes dpag gis rtogs smos ci dgos || dbu ma'i lugs kyi stong pa nyid || rang rig mngon sum gyis <sup>[372]</sup> rtogs zhes || bya ba **legs ldan 'byed** dang ni || **zla ba grags pa**'i gzhung na med ||

bde stong phyag rgya chen po ni || rtogs pa'i sngon du sgam po pa'i || phyag chen rtogs pa sngon 'gro zhes || zer ba bka' brgyud<sup>59</sup> lugs min zer || skyed rim bsgom pa'i snga rol du || ye shes tshogs sog pa de ci || skyed rim med par bde stong gi || ye shes phyag rgya che rtogs sam || khyed la'ang ci zhes 'dri zhe na || dang por sngags don gsam byas pas || rtogs pa'i stong pa nyid don ni || stong nyid ye shes rdo rjer gsungs || de dang bka' brgyud<sup>60</sup> phyag chen gyi || khyad par mang po dbye 'dod na || legs par soms la gzhung bzhin smros || de nas chos la gdengs thob 'gyur ||

khyed la'ang ci zhes 'dri ba na || don dam byang chub sems goms las || lhag pa'i phyag rgya chen po ni || yod par rgyud pa 'dis mi bzhed || don dam byang chub sems de yi || ngos 'dzin sems kyi rdo rje la || mdzad pa gsang ba 'dus pa'i lugs || yin par **klu sgrub** zhabs gyis bshad || yang ni lugs gzhan gyis rgol ba || bla mas man ngag ma bstan par || mos gus tsam gyis las dang po || grol ba blun po'i lugs zhes zer || rjod byed ngag gis gang brjod pa || de ni don spyi'am gzhan sel las || ma 'das phyir na don dam min || de phyir ngag gis brjod du med ||

mos gus zhes pa rtogs pa yi || yon tan nyid la dad thob pa || skyes pas thog ma med thob pa'i || rang rig rang gsal mngon du 'gyur || rang rig rang gsal bde ba che || gdod ma nyid nas kun khyab pa || rang rang dbang <sup>[373]</sup> po'i bye brag gi || sad byed mtha' gcig tu ma nges || gdod nas

<sup>58</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *a tis shas*

<sup>59</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *dka' rgyud*

<sup>60</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *bka' rgyud*

rtog bral ma 'khrul ba'i || mngon sum nyid du gang skyes pa || gnas der nges pa 'dren pa'i rkyen || byung tshe rnal 'byor pa'i mngon sum ||

yang ni 'di la dngos gzhi'i dus || yid byed spangs par bshad pa la || gnyid dang brgyal ba la sogs kyang || der 'gyur zhes ni rgol ba dang || sngon byung **hwa shang** rdzogs chen dang || khyad par med ces zer ba yod || yid<sup>61</sup> byed ces pa mngon pa las || sgra don 'dzin pa'i rtog par bshad || de med pa yis der thal na || 'phags lam mnyam gzhang kun la'ang mtshungs ||

mkhas pa padma'i ngang tshul gyis || de la de<sup>62</sup> thal bshad ce na || de ni **klu sgrub** gzhung lugs dang || cig shos rtsod pa'i dbang du mdzad || thos bsam sngon du ma song bar || rang rig rang gsal mi rtogs na || las dang po yis<sup>63</sup> ye shes kyi || tshogs sogs<sup>64</sup> thog mar sgom de ci || lta ba yas babs **hwa shang** gi || bsgom dang mtshungs zhes gsungs mod kyang || sngags lugs phal cher lta ba nas || brtsams te lam la 'jug par<sup>65</sup> bshad ||

dkar po chig thub zhes bya ba || lta ba rkyang pa'i ldog cha nas || yin gyi bsod nams tshogs dag la || skur pa 'debs pa'i tshig ma yin || de yang nyon mongs rnam par rtog || so so'i gnyen po tha dad la || 'bad mi dgos par phyag rgya che || gcig pus chog pa'i don nyid do ||

blun pos phyag rgya che goms pa || ngan 'gro'i lam du 'gyur zhes sogs || gang zag dang ni chos rnams kyi || bdag med gsal bar mi shes<sup>[374]</sup> pa'i || rmongs pas las rnams gang bsags pa || 'khor ba'i lam las 'da' ba med || de yang rgyu dus kun slong gi || dbye bas bzang ngan so sor dbye || de yang rnam par rtog pa yi || 'dzin pa med la srid ma yin || phyag chen tha shal gyur na yang || rnam par rtog la de mi srid || gzhan yang sher phyin ltar snang dang || sems tsam rnam med bsgom dang ni || phyag chen ngo sprod gsum pa sogs || bya ba de dag 'khrul lo zhes || gsungs pa sngags kyi phyag rgya che || ma yin pa la dgongs mod kyang || sems nyid gsal stong 'dzin med kyis || rgyas mi thebs pa'i chos gang yang || yod ma yin pa la dgongs na || phyag rgya chen po mtshan gsol ba || 'di yi<sup>66</sup> bye brag shin tu mang || gang zag tsam gyis dbang byas pa'i || gzung 'dzin gnyis med rang gsal ba || shes rab pha rol<sup>67</sup> phyin ltar snang || chos rnam kun gyis dbang byas pa'i || gzung 'dzin gnyis bral ye shes ni || byams chos nges don mthar thug la || sems tsam zhes byar zla bas bshad || cir snang sems su ngo sprad pas || gzung ba'i rnam par rtog pa khegs || sems snang nam mkhar ngo sprad pas || 'dzin pa'i rnam par g.yeng ba khegs || gnyis bral ye shes lhun grub pa || de kun phyag rgya che zhes bya ||

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<sup>61</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: yod

<sup>62</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: der

<sup>63</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: yi

<sup>64</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: bsogs

<sup>65</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: pa

<sup>66</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: 'di'i

<sup>67</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: addit. tu.

yang ni lugs 'di'i rjes 'jug kun || sems btsal bas ni gang du yang || ma rnyed tshe na sems ngo  
 'phrod || de la phyag rgya che zhes par || ngos 'dzin pa de dpyad par bya || phyag rgya che 'di  
 mnyam bzhag las || langs pa'i rjes thob dus dag tu || sngags myong ye shes de nyid las ||<sup>[375]</sup>  
 mtshan mar 'dzin pa 'gog bya'i phyir || tshol byed blo yis gang du yang || btsal bas mi rnyed  
 de'i tshe || zhen ngor mtshan 'dzin de khegs pa || mchog yin de la skyon mi rtsi || btsal bas gang  
 du'ang ma rnyed pa'i || med par dgag pa phyag chen du || 'dod na rgyud bla'i gzhung dang ni  
 || mda' bsnun zhabs kyi gzhung dang 'gal || rnam shes tshol byed rigs pa yis || gang du yang ni  
 ma rnyed tshe || ye shes lhag mar bzhag pa de || phyag rgya chen po'i ngos 'dzin du || legs par  
 shes nas rtogs bya'i phyir || sems ngo sprod par byed na ni || sems nyid gcig pu kun gyi ni || sa  
 bon yid bzhin nor bu mchog ||

de ltar mdo sngags thams cad las || gsungs pa'i phyag rgya che kun la | khyab byed thun mong  
 du 'jug pa'i || phyag rgya chen po'i ngos 'dzin 'di || sngon gyi bag chags sad byed rkyen ||  
 gzhung mang dag las mthong ba dang || dge ba'i bshes las thos pa dang || bskul bar byed pos  
 mtshams sbyar nas || legs par bshad pa 'di'i dge bas || bdag dang skal bar mnyam thams cad ||  
 rdzogs sangs rgyas te ma rnams kun || srid pa'i rgya mtsho las sgrol shog || ces phyag rgya  
chen po gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos tshangs pa'i 'khor los gzhan blo'i dregs pa 'joms byed  
 ces bya ba 'di ni **grub pa'i dbang po** || **zla dgon chos kyi bzang po**'i sras ||

**chos kyi rgyal mtshan bzang pos** gsol ba nan gyis btab pa'i ngor bgyis nas || yul dbus kyi  
 klog pa ba **dpal shākyā mchog ldan** dri med legs pa'i blos || gtsang g.yas ru'i thig le thub  
 bstan gser mdog can zhes bya ba'i gtsug lag khang du nye bar sbyar ba 'di || yang dag par  
 rtogs pa'o ||

## 2a. English Translation of *Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges*<sup>68</sup>

*A Treatise Called Distinguishing Mahāmudrā* <sup>[376]</sup> [Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas]:

*Om swasti siddham hi. A Treatise Called Distinguishing Mahāmudrā.* Homage to [Mahāmudrā,] the king who ascertains the single intent of all buddhas in one! [I] have seen [among] ways of practicing Mahāmudrā, which is famous in the snowy country [Tibet], that some people scrutinize and repudiate one another in order to dispel each other's criticisms.

[1] Some claim that meditation on emptiness through analysis by way of Madhyamaka reasoning is the main practice of this teaching.

[2] Others say that the unity of bliss and emptiness while filling all the *cakras* with the succession of blessing from within (*svādiṣṭhāna*) is the main practice of this teaching.

<sup>68</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol 17, 346<sub>4</sub>–355<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol 17, 376<sub>1</sub>–385<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; vol 17, 457<sub>2</sub>–468<sub>3</sub>. The full title in Tibetan is: *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed ces bya ba'i bstan bcos* [or] *Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges* (= PCgn)

[3] Others yet maintain that seeing one's own naked (*rjen pa*) mind free from all thought-movements through calm abiding<sup>69</sup> is the main practice of this teaching.

[4] Some claim that the meditation in which the seeing mind is not found by searching anywhere—such as inside, outside, as blue or yellow—is the main practice of this teaching.

[5] Still others claim to meditate [on *mahāmudrā*] by ascertaining that “the creator of all is the ‘all ground consciousness’”.

These are not what was emphasized by the physician Gzhon nu [Sgam po pa], who, as illustrated by the example of the Self-sufficient White Remedy was skilled in eradicating extreme beliefs by means of few words with encapsulated meanings [that make] realization easy, without strenuous effort.

[1] Regarding the first, some who had taken to heart a Madhyamaka that became well-known at a later [stage] in the Snowy Country commenced by equating one with the other [i.e. Mahāmudrā with their own Madhyamaka]. [Yet] that [Mahāmudrā] is not that [Madhyamaka]. Why? <sup>[377]</sup> Because the Madhyamaka of the reasoning corpus is [taken as] a nonaffirming negation, whereas the emptiness of *mahāmudrā* is the primordial wisdom free from extremes. As for the nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) in these two traditions: [The first] is distinguished as an object of words and thoughts because it is simply an other-exclusion (*gzhan sel*). [The second] is distinguished as an object of direct [perception] because it is the particular<sup>70</sup> of wisdom. That is not all. There is also the distinction between [the first being] inscrutable and the [second] being evident, [the first being] mentally contrived and [the second being] naturally uncontrived. Moreover, regarding the respective means of realizing them, the emptiness known in the Madhyamaka is comprehended through reasoning that validates one's own scriptures and castigates those of others. The emptiness of *mahāmudrā* is attained through devotion to the *bla ma*, blessings, karmic connection and the accumulation of merit. And regarding the [respective] ways of familiarization: the expressions ‘analytical’ and ‘settling’ meditation are the terms used by scholars of former times.

[2] The second tradition, although it derives from the works of Saraha, is a Mahāmudrā of the Guhyamantra[yāna], and is therefore not what Dwags po pa [primarily] emphasized.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> In all three editions two syllables are missing right in the middle of this verse. Assuming that the two missing syllables are *ni zhi* the line would read *gzhan 'ga' zhig ni zhi gnas kyis*. I suggest this reading, because the next verse speaks about the freedom from all movements of thoughts induced by *gzhan 'ga' zhig ni zhi gnas kyis*, i.e., through calm abiding.

<sup>70</sup> In other words, it is a veridical particular that is amenable only to direct perception, and not a delusive universal that is amenable to inferential reasoning. On Dignāga's understanding, conceptual thought has access only to universals, not particulars.

<sup>71</sup> In other words, the tantric practices of bliss and emptiness arising from union with a consort were not the primary focus of Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā doctrine which primarily emphasized (for those of requisite abilities) a direct introduction to the nature of one's own mind, a theme also emphasized in many of Saraha's works.

[3] It was declared that his Self-sufficient White Remedy is not mixed with the three Great Ones.<sup>72</sup> Answering the objection that such [a claim] is inadmissible, he [Sgam po pa] explained that the three are not uncontrived because they are understood only through extraneous conditions, whereas his Self-sufficient [White Remedy], the self-occurring wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*), is said to not be something newly contrived.

[4] The fourth [way to] identify [Mahāmudrā] is the Pacification Teaching (*zhi byed*)<sup>73</sup>. The preparation and main [practice] is similar to the practice known as Mahāmudrā. [Query:] Isn't the [Zhi byed] way of directly introducing the experience of wisdom as emptiness in the phase of post-meditation taken over [from Mahāmudrā]? Though it is taken over, there is no fault in this. Still, preserving each exegetical tradition without adulteration [378] is said to be the way of the wise. The phase of the main practice in the second identification [i.e., the tantric tradition of Saraha] is no different from this way of seeing. However, if one clings [to the belief] “we have seen *mahāmudrā*,” it is poisonous. One-pointedness may count as calm abiding, but if freedom from fabrication is also taken as the main practice of this teaching, how do [you] identify it? If it is explained according to the Niḥsvabhāvavāda texts, it is poisonous. If [on the other hand] it is declared that it is nothing but nakedly seeing awareness, then how does this differ from the Consciousness-Spirit of the Sāṃkhya school?<sup>74</sup> If one thinks that it is distinguished from the Sāṃkhya tradition by the direct introduction to the selflessness of persons in the post-meditation phase, the reply is that it doesn't make sense that a post-meditation understanding that has not familiarized [itself] with the antidotes to self-grasping during the main practice phase would constitute a meditation based on thinking that severs superimpositions.

[5] The fifth identification: when mixed with the religious language of Rdzogs chen, if one knows how to [thereby] clearly identify [mind's nature], there is no problem. However, the question is how does one clearly identify the all-ground (*kun gzhi*) taught in *Sems sde*<sup>75</sup>? In

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<sup>72</sup> See Vol. I, 116 n. 299.

<sup>73</sup> This tradition derives from the eleventh-century Indian Siddha known to Tibetans as Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (d. 1117) who said to have visited Tibet several times (some sources say as many as seven) to spread the Pacification (*zhi byed*) teachings. He taught at the temple of Glang skor near Ding ri in southern Tibet. The Zhi byed system is counted as one of the eight central practice lineages of Tibet.

<sup>74</sup> Here *shes rig bdag* is short for *bdag shes rig gi skyes bu*, which refers to the conscious but inactive Spirit/Self (*ātman*) of the Sāṃkhya philosophy which is represented by the masculine principle *puruṣa*. This exists in isolation from the active but unconscious Nature, represented by the feminine principle *prakṛti*. The interaction between the two gives rise to the phenomenal world.

<sup>75</sup> *The Mind Series* is one of three divisions within Rdzogs chen. Germano 2005, 12: “The earliest revelations of the Great Perfection are those said to have been disseminated in Tibet in the latter half of the eighth century, and which retroactively were classified as the Mind Series to distinguish them from later developments. They begin with a collection of quite short texts known as The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series (*Sems sde bco brgyad*), and then subsequently proliferate into a large family of texts spawned by the original collection's expansion, modification, and so forth, culminating in a series of texts centered on *The All-Creating King* (*Kun byed rgyal*)



the great classical texts, the all-ground consciousness (*kun gzhi'i rnam shes : ālayavijñāna*) is explained in terms of unreal conceptualizing. Hence, when it is framed as an identification of *mahāmudrā*, it becomes the laughing-stock of scholars. If the all-ground is explained as the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*), it becomes mixed with the Lam 'bras [system]. Although this is no problem *per se*, if this “all-ground” is identified as wisdom itself, when explained according to one's own scriptural traditions, then one has to question what antidotes should be cultivated [to counteract] the clinging to the ideas of an “All-creative King (*kun byed rgyal po*)”<sup>76</sup>, “supreme self”, and “buddha nature”? If one answers that these teach the absence of grasping anything in the main practice phase, the reply is that this refers to the ineffable *mahāmudrā* <sup>[379]</sup> transcending the domain of concepts that is recognized by post-meditation cognition.

[*Query:*] If [its] identification could be shown by concepts, hasn't the main practice once again become poisoned? If that clinging mind has to be overcome yet again, isn't it similar to an elephant [repeatedly] bathing?<sup>77</sup> [*Reply:*] In reply to the objections of others concerning the Self-sufficient [Remedy] of the first [question], the cultivation of Mahāmudrā known as the Fivefold is not unwarranted.<sup>78</sup> However, in the Mahāmudrā emphasized by the Physician [Sgam po pa], are these five points indispensable or not? When we examine what these excellent members express, if the first [i.e., their indispensability] holds true, then the basic thesis [of self-sufficiency] is refuted.<sup>79</sup> If the latter [i.e., their not being indispensable] holds true, then it is mixed with the Lam 'bras and thus does not constitute an independent tradition.

Thus, being abundant in meanings yet succinct in words, [Mahāmudrā] is easy to practice for those with a karmic connection. If one realizes what is easy to realize, the two [types of] belief in a self along with their seeds are easily destroyed. This coemergence that is experienced by personal knowledge and not taken as an object of words and concepts does not require recourse to scripture and reasoning. It also does not depend on honoring the teacher

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*po*). Most of the resultant sub-divisions of the Mind Series rubric have names based upon geographical regions, clans, or individual founders.”

<sup>76</sup> The name of a famous Rdzogs chen synthesis of the early Sems sde teachings in which mind as such (*sems nyid*) is personified as an all-creative king (*kun byed rgyal po*) who gives rise to all phenomena.

<sup>77</sup> This is a metaphor used to convey the flaw of repetition. An elephant after bathing throws mud on its body (possibly for thermoregulation and/or to prevent sun burn) which causes itching as it dries. To alleviate the itching the elephant returns to the water and the cycle is repeated again and again.

<sup>78</sup> For the so-called Fivefold Mahāmudrā see for example the *Phyag chen lnga ldan gyi mgur* by 'Bri gung skyob pa 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po, which describes the five seals as: [1] the Great Seal of *bodhicitta* (*byang sems phyag chen*), [2] the Great Seal of the deity's body (*lhag sku'i phyag chen*), [3] the Great Seal of devotion (*mos gus phyag chen*), [4] the Great Seal of the abiding nature (*gnas lugs phyag chen*), and [5] the Great Seal of dedication (*bsngo ba phyag chen*).

<sup>79</sup> This remark implies that by making use of five methods, the criticism that Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā is a self-sufficient remedy (i.e., a single 'cure-all' treatment) is refuted.

with set observances<sup>80</sup>. However, being the Mahāyāna, encompassing everyone and comprising the definitive actuality of everything, it is without contradiction during the phase of the main practice. Although in the phase of preparation for its realization, there is no need for sundry methods of accomplishment, during the main practice phase, the aim to be accomplished is seen to be in accord with all sūtras and tantras.

What is to be seen (*mtshong bya*) is primordially present wisdom which is not newly established. Being similar to a wish fulfilling gem, if for the time being one can settle evenly in [this state] that is free from drowsiness and agitation, this is termed “one-pointedness”.<sup>[380]</sup> When there is freedom from grasping either phenomena or persons, it is termed “freedom from elaborations”. As for the enhancement in the post-meditation of that unity of calm abiding and deep insight of the main practice, when there is no [more] grasping whatever personal and phenomenal appearances arise as “this” or “that”, then even if, on the side of consciousness, the dualism of subject and object have not ceased, on the side of wisdom, both “selves” [personal and phenomenal] are naturally taken over [by] wisdom that is free from grasping anything at all. At that time, the entire phenomenal world becomes “one taste” with *mahāmudrā*. Once this manifests effortlessly, one senses that it is what has been given the name “no-meditation”.

In this regard, latter-day people<sup>81</sup> object: How is this not grasping or engaging the mind in anything at all during the main practice phase any different from the tradition of Heshang? And how is the deep insight that is not accomplished in conjunction with teachings from the sūtras and tantras any different from the traditions of the heretics (*tīrthika*)<sup>82</sup>? [They also] declare that “the Great Seal meditation of the ignorant, it is taught, usually becomes a cause of animal birth” and that “even if that meditation may be excellent, because it does not go beyond Madhyamaka meditation, it does not make sense to combine it with the Secret Mantra”.<sup>83</sup> How should one provide answers to settle such disputes?

<sup>80</sup> Compare with the purely tantric view expressed in *Hevajratāntra* I.viii.36b which states “Coemergence that is not expressed by others is also not found elsewhere. It is revealed by honouring (*upasevayā* : *bsten pa yis*) the Guru with set observances (*parva* : *dus thabs*) and from one’s own merit”. See Skt. *nānyena kathyate sahaṣaṃ na kasmīn api labhyate* | *ātamanā jñāyate puṇyād guruparvopasevayā* || Tib. *gzhan gyis brjod min lhan cig skyes* || *gang du yang ni mi rnyed de* || *bla ma’i dus thabs bsten pa yis* || *bdag gis bsod nams las shes bya* ||

<sup>81</sup> This term is generally used pejoratively by the author with reference to scholars (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) who had come under the influence of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka doctrinal system developed by Tsong kha pa.

<sup>82</sup> On the term *mu stegs [pa]* (*tīrthika*), which was used to refer to Buddhist or non-Buddhist traditions that were thought to contradict key Buddhist principles such as selflessness, see Volume I, 37 n. 65.

<sup>83</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161: *blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa* || *phal cher dud ’gro’i rgyu ru gsungs* || See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.) 117 (Eng.). *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162: *gal te de ni bsgom legs kyang* || *dbu ma’i bsgom las lhaḡ pa med* || *dbu ma’i bsgom de bzang mod kyi* || *’on kyang ’grub pa shin tu dka’* || See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.): “Even if that meditation may be excellent, it is no more than a Madhyamaka meditation. The latter meditation, while very good it itself, is nevertheless extremely difficult to accomplish.” See also III.162bcd:

[*Reply:*] When there is no comprehensive knowledge of the sūtras, tantras and esoteric instructions, the meaning is difficult [to understand]. Consequently, [these matters] shall be explicated here in detail. The Chinese abbot did not make the distinction between conventional and ultimate and likewise did not distinguish, within their respective contexts, between the view and its application; wisdom and consciousness; studying, thinking and meditation; and provisional and definitive meaning. He said that simply not engaging the mind in anything at all <sup>[381]</sup> is the essence.

[*Query:*] The main practice of *mahāmudrā* [comprises] the ultimate and the view, meditation and wisdom, and the mind that has eradicated the seeds of ignorance which is the root of all obscurations. Although this [*mahāmudrā*] is in this way distinguished into two [aspects]—viz., illustration and [its] object—because it is conceptless and nondeluded, are both [the illustration and object] also [mere] concepts about directly perceiving the innate?

[*Reply:*] Not exclusively. Because [*mahāmudrā*] is free from all unreal conceptualizing, it is comparable to the transworldly direct perception. For example, during the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), since the seven groupings of consciousness along with their associated factors cease, there is mental nonengagement and freedom from all grasping of characteristics. The meditation of Heshang is not like that. In this regard, some proclaim that the state of cessation in the Cittamātra tradition is wisdom in the Madhyamaka. [The response is as follows:] the state of cessation of the Niḥsvabhāva is a nonaffirming negation, [whereas] because there is wisdom in the state of cessation of the Alīkākaravāda Madhyamaka, this is called the “state of cessation of concomitant [mental factors]”. This is taken as something rotten by the latter-day people.

[*Query:*] Whence does one seek wisdom (*jñāna*) apart from the mentation consciousness (*manovijñāna*)? [*Reply:*] Because the six sense consciousnesses and the afflictive mentation (*kliṣṭamanas*) do not exist in the meditative equipoise of the Paths of Seeing and meditation and the rest, the mental faculty (*mano-indriya*) is negligible. Primordial wisdom (*gdod ma'i ye shes*) does not arise from the mental faculty as a dominant condition. In the classical texts of the Niḥsvabhāvavāda, it is asserted that all phenomena are empty of an own-essence and that settling one-pointedly in this emptiness is wisdom. I would say this is like calling a mother a ‘barren woman’. <sup>[382]</sup>

[*Query:*] It is said that at the time of meditative equipoise, discriminating wisdom (*pratyavekṣanajñāna*) must be accepted. [*Reply:*] This contradicts the example taught in the *Bhāvanākrama* scripture that although the arising of fire depends on kindling, the [latter] is nonetheless burned away by the [former].<sup>84</sup> Were there no means at all for directly seeing the

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*goms pa legs kyang dbu ma las | ma 'das phyir na gsang sngags dang | bsre ba don med yin* || A more detailed criticism is given by Sa skya Paṇḍita in his *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba'i bstan bcos* 105<sub>15</sub>–106<sub>16</sub>.

<sup>84</sup> On this famous analogy, see Volume I, 140 and n. 376 et passim.

ultimate wisdom without [first] training in tantric empowerments, blessings, and Madhyamaka reasoning, then [consider that] seeing that [ultimate wisdom] through bodily activities, waves of enjoyment, examples such as illusions and the rest—all known from instructions, scripture and reasoning—has been explained as inducing certainty in oneself by way of the inward-looking self-luminous self-awareness. If one is not alienated from the prerequisites for familiarizing oneself with that [wisdom], then doesn't that luminous clarity become the highest culmination?

[Query:] Without relying on reasoning that establishes emptiness, the mind that understands it does not constitute a valid cognition. Rather, the mind that does not depend on it constitutes an invalid cognition.

[Reply:] Such statements, which emerged in earlier and later [times], were praised by those [Niḥsvabhāvavādins] and disheartened all who adhered to the *upadeśas* (*man ngag pa*). Being dejected, people give up their efforts. So how is it possible for them to remain firm in their own tradition? The statement [by Sa paṅ] that “the *mahāmudrā* of the foolish becomes a cause for rebirth as an animal” was given with the intention to consider that in the main practice phase of these instructions no remedy for self-grasping was taught. However, the absence of any grasping to the two kinds of self [or individuating principle] is [precisely] the realization of that [*mahāmudrā*]. Isn't this nomenclature [what] all the Pāramitā[yāna] practitioners make [use of]? Saying that it is necessary to entertain the thought of ‘selflessness’ is a lie.

[Query:] Isn't such nomenclature intended for the preliminary analysis during the preparatory phase? [Reply:] In this [Mahāmudrā tradition], it is established by reasoning that negates extraneous extremes during the post-meditation phase.<sup>85</sup> [383]

[Query:] On what basis does one understand self-luminosity of the subjective aspect to be ultimate truth? [Reply:] It is understood on the basis of explaining that which is empty of duality as that [ultimate truth]. As for identifying that emptiness which is realized through wisdom that eliminates what obscures that, Saraha taught nothing else but this, and likewise Virūpa.<sup>86</sup> For realizing this, the reasonings of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika are pointless; it is established only [by] the reasoning [advocated by] the author of the [*Pramāṇa*]vārttika. The

<sup>85</sup> As actual *mahāmudrā* consists in being free from any extreme views such as holding on to the notion of a real self etc., it is logical that someone who is a true *mahāmudrā* practitioner, becomes free from notions of permanence etc. also in his post-meditative phases, in that the experiential understanding during the meditative state carries over into the post-meditative phase.

<sup>86</sup> Shākya mchog ldan's remark concerning Virūpa (Tib. *bir wa pa*), the Indian Siddha from whom the Sa skya tradition and its Lam 'bras system are said to derive, shows that he attempts to establish that the Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā system and the Sa skya's Lam 'bras system come down to one meaning and are fully based in the Indian Siddha tradition.

ways of practicing calm abiding that is the access to that [realization] are evident from other treatises.

[*Query:*] Because self-luminosity does not withstand logical analysis, it is called ‘conventional truth’. [*Reply:*] Because nothing other than that [self-luminosity] appears for a buddha, it is ultimate truth, plain and simple. Although it was said that the meditation of the Alīkākāra Cittamātra is like that, it is also possible that this be taken as the freedom from all extremes of existence and nonexistence through the proof of dependent arising in the post-meditation phase. While it may be replied that the way of settling in a fresh, uncontrived and natural way exists in the main meditation practice of the heretics as well, because they are fettered by the belief in a self, theirs is not a path to liberation.

It might be said that the identification of emptiness that eliminates obscurations does not exist in another way than in the [the two strains of Madhyamaka: Those who] Establish Illusoriness Through Reasoning (*sgyu ma rigs sgrub*) and [Those for Whom All Phenomena] are Nonfoundational (*rab tu mi gnas pa*). However, emptiness that is internalized via the Guhyamantra[yāna] Secret Mantra is subsumed under neither of these; it is nothing other than great bliss.

Concerning the culmination of Madhyamaka meditation, it is not certain that it requires enduring hardships for three countless eons because that [same] Madhyamaka wisdom explained in the Maitreya teachings is [also] the ground of accomplishment and most supreme means <sup>[384]</sup> among the two stages of the path of the supreme vehicle. Having in mind emptiness of a nonaffirming negation, the following song was sung: “When emptiness is a means [to an end], then buddhahood will not occur because the fruit is not different from the cause” and further on: “Therefore, the means called ‘the *maṇḍala*’s wheel’ is the binding of bliss. By the *yoga* of buddha-pride, buddhahood won’t take long.”<sup>87</sup> Learn this statement wisely!

Thus, through the virtue that accrues from having composed this [text, may] the Mahāmudrā tradition propagated by way of the discernment of Zla ’od gzhon nu blossom in this Land of Snow. Some among those who claim to be its adherents [but who] do not firmly maintain their own textual tradition boast that Mahāmudrā of the supreme vehicle was taught by Saraha<sup>88</sup>. Some others confuse [Mahāmudrā] with explanations of mental nonengagement

<sup>87</sup> Quote from *Āryaḍākinīvajrapañjaramahātantrārājakaḷpanāma*; Tib. *’Phags pa mkha’ ’gro ma rdo rje gur zhes bya ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po’i brtag pa*, H 379: vol. 79, folio, line 380<sub>76</sub>–381a, with a minor variation in the third line which reads *’bras bu rgyu las gzhan min phyir*. The first three lines of the quote are also contained in *Kaumudīnāmapañjikā* (Tib. *kau mu di zhes bya ba’i dka’ ’grel*), D 1185: vol. 4, folio, line 5b<sub>3</sub>. *Bhagavatīprajñāpāramitāhṛdayaṭīkāarthapradīpa*, Tib. *Bcom ldan ’das ma shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa’i snying po’i ’grel pa don gyi sgron ma*, D 3820, vol. 95, folio 295a<sub>4</sub>.

<sup>88</sup> Presumably, Shākya mchog ldan does not contest that Saraha’s *Dohā Trilogy* is an important source for Sgam po pa’s Mahāmudrā system. In his *Ascertaining the Intent* he states for example that “the source of this [tradition] is the *Dohā Trilogy* of Saraha along with related works” (see below, 50). However, he points out that the tantric aspect of Saraha’s teachings is not essential for Sgam po pa’s Mahāmudrā. At the very beginning of this text, he delineates five mistaken variants of Sgam po pa’s Mahāmudrā system. The second concerns those who “the unity

in [buddha] nature texts. With their prattle about devoting themselves assiduously to the mere emptiness as a nonaffirming negation, they disparage the wisdom of those having realization. Some who are mistaken regarding [Sgam po pa's] comments about “uniting the two streams of Bka' [gdams pa] and [Mahā]mudrā”, devote themselves assiduously to the *Madhyamakopadeśa* by Atiśa [though] the Madhyamaka of that [work] is [a matter of] conceptual [knowledge] and not a domain of nonconceptual knowledge.

Those *yogins* who familiarize themselves with the path of Mahāmudrā as explained here—whether or not they have at present already entered the great Secret Mantra [vehicle]—will have no difficulties in [first] receiving empowerments and blessings, then [realizing] the luminosity of the Five Stages (*Pañcakrama*) and Six Dharmas ([*Nā ro*] *chos drug*), and [finally] manifesting in embodiments of unity (*yuganaddhakāya*).<sup>89</sup> [385]

Thus, through the threefold sequence of methods of [1] refuting the claims of other exegetes of this system, [2] validating one's own system, and [3] answering objections with detailed explanations, the wish fulfilling gem of Mahāmudrā has been cleansed of all impurities, coarse and subtle, and it has been set atop the victory banner of the multitude of great authentic classical texts. Now the time has come to pray for anyone anywhere<sup>90</sup> who wishes for happiness. May [all that they] need and desire pour down like a monsoon rain.

This [text] called *Ascertaining the Intent of the Supreme Siddhas: A Treatise called 'Distinguishing Mahāmudrā'*, was composed by the spiritual friend 'Jam dpal dga' ba at the age of 76 upon the request of the virtuous Sa skyong mchog who has an undivided intent regarding this tradition. The scribe was Bsod nams ye shes lhun grub.

## 2b. Critical Edition of *Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges*<sup>91</sup>

[376] om swasti siddham hi | *phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed ces bya ba'i bstan bcos* | sangs rgyas thams cad dgongs pa gcig tu nges pa'i rgyal po la phyag 'tshal lo || kha ba can du phyis<sup>92</sup> grags pa'i || phyag rgya chen po'i nyams len tshul || la la'i rtsod pa spangs phyir du || gzhan du

of bliss and emptiness of filling all the *cakras* with the succession of blessing from within (*svādiṣṭhāna*) is the main practice of this teaching” (34). He explains a little further down (35) that “the second tradition, even though it derived from the works of Saraha, is a Mahāmudrā of the Guhyamantra[yāna], and is therefore not what Dwags po pa [primarily] emphasized”.

<sup>89</sup> Here Shākya mchog ldan seems to suggest that despite the fact that Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā system is not necessarily tantric, which he repeatedly points out in his three works on Mahāmudrā, he concedes that tantric methods may play a crucial role in the process of goal-realization.

<sup>90</sup> *gang gang la* can mean ‘whoever’ or ‘wherever’

<sup>91</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>, 346<sub>4</sub>–355<sub>1</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>, 376<sub>1</sub>–385<sub>4</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, 457<sub>2</sub>–468<sub>3</sub>. The full title is given at the end of the text.

<sup>92</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>; *phyir*

gzhan gyis brtags 'ga' mthong || kha cig dbu ma'i rigs pa yis || rnam par dpyad pa'i stong pa nyid || sgom pa chos 'di'i dngos gzhir 'dod || la la rang byin rlabs pa yi || rim pas 'khor lo kun khengs pa'i || bde stong zung du 'jug pa ni || chos 'di'i dngos gzhi yin zhes smra || gzhan 'ga' zhig ni zhi gnas kyis<sup>93</sup> || rtog pa'i 'gyu<sup>94</sup> ba thams cad dang || bral ba'i rang sems rjen pa ni || mthong ba chos 'di'i dngos gzhir 'dod || kha cig de ltar mthong ba'i sems || phyi dang nang dang sngon<sup>95</sup> ser sogs || gang du brtags pas ma rnyed pa || der bsgom chos 'di'i dngos gzhir 'dod || la la kun gyi byed pa po || kun gzhi'i rnam shes yin no zhes || thag gcod byas nas bsgom par 'dod ||

'di dag 'tsho byed gzhon nu yis || rtsal bton<sup>96</sup> dkar po gcig thub kyī || dpes bstan tshig nyung don 'dril ba || 'bad rtsol med par rtogs sla bas || mthar 'dzin drungs nas 'byin mkhas pa || de de min no dang po ni || kha ba can du phyis grags pa'i || dbu ma snying la zhugs gyur pa || 'ga' yis de dang de sbyar nas || brtsams pa yin no de de min || ci phyir zhe na<sup>[377]</sup> rigs tshogs kyī || dbu ma med par dgag pa ste || phyag rgya chen po'i stong nyid ni || mtha' bral gdod ma'i ye shes so || lugs de dag gi chos nyid ni || gzhan sel nyid phyir sgra rtog gi || yul dang ye shes rang mtshan phyir || mngon sum yul gyi khyad par can || de der ma zad lkog gyur dang || mngon du gyur dang blos byas dang || ma bcos lhug pa'i khyad par can || de de rtogs byed thabs kyang ni || dbu mar grags pa'i stong pa nyid || rang dang gzhan gyi gzhung sgrub dang || sun 'byin rigs pa las go zhing || phyag rgya chen po'i stong nyid ni || bla mar mos dang byin rlabs dang || las 'phro bsod nams tshogs las yin || grub nas goms par byed tshul yang || dpyad dang 'jog pa'i sgom zhes pa || sngon rab mkhas pa'i brda' las byung ||

lugs gnyis pa de **sa ra ha**'i || gzhung las byung mod gsang sngags kyī || phyag rgya che yin **dwags**<sup>97</sup> po pas || rtsal du bton<sup>98</sup> pa de ma yin ||

khong gi dkar po gcig thub der || chen po gsum gyis 'dres med bzhed || de 'dra'i<sup>99</sup> mi 'thad zer ba'i lan || gsum po gzhan rkyen kho na yis || brtags phyir ma bcos pa min la || kho bo'i chig thub rang byung gi || ye shes gsar du bcos min pa || yin zhes de nyid kyis gsungs so ||

<sup>93</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub> has an incomplete verse with two syllables missing: *gzhan 'ga' zhig gnas kyis*. SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> inserts the remark “two syllables missing” *'bru rkang gnyis chad: gzhan 'ga' zhig ('brug rkang gnyis chad) gnas kyis*. The two syllable *ni zhi* are there inserted to complete the sentence.

<sup>94</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: 'gyur

<sup>95</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: sngo

<sup>96</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: gton

<sup>97</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: dag

<sup>98</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: gton

<sup>99</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: 'dra. SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: 'dra'

ngos 'dzin bzhi pa zhi byed du || sbyor dngos phyag rgya cher grags kyi || nyams len dang  
mtshungs rjes kyi tshe || nyams myong ye shes stong nyid du || ngo sprod<sup>100</sup> tshul ni<sup>101</sup> rkus min  
nam || brkus kyang skyon yod ma yin mod || rang rang gi gzhang lhad med par || 'dzin<sup>[378]</sup> pa  
'dzangs pa'i lugs zhes bya || ngos 'dzin gnyis pa dngos gzhi'i dus || mthong tshul de las gzhan  
med kyang || kho bos phyag rgya che mthong zhes || zhen par byed na dug dang bcas || rtse  
gcig zhi gnas la 'thad mod || spros bral chos 'di'i dngos gzhi' yang || byed na de yi ngos 'dzin  
ci || ngo bo nyid med smra gzhang dang || mthun par bshad na dug dang bcas || rig pa rjen par  
mthong tsam la || gzhan med ce na grangs can gyi || shes rig bdag dang khyad par ci || rjes kyi  
dus su gang zag gi || bdag med nyid du ngo sprad pas || grangs can lugs las khyad par du ||  
'byed do snyam na dngos gzhi'i tshe || bdag 'dzin gnyen po ma goms pa || rjes shes sgro 'dogs  
gcod byed kyi || bsam byung bsgom du 'thad ma yin ||

ngos 'dzin lnga pa rdzogs chen po'i || chos kyi skad dang bsres pa'i tshe || ngos 'dzin shes na  
skyon med mod || sems sde nas bshad kun gzhi yi || ngos 'dzin gang la byed ces dri || kun gzhi'i  
rnam shes gzhang chen nas || yang dag min rtog la bshad phyir || phyag rgya chen po'i ngos  
'dzin du || bshad na mkhas pa'i gzhad gad gnas || kun gzhi rgyu rgyud la 'chad na || lam 'bras  
dang bsres skyon med kyang || rang gzhang 'chad tshe kun gzhi de || ye shes nyid la ngos 'dzin  
na || kun byed rgyal po zhes bya dang || dam pa'i bdag dang sangs rgyas kyi || snying po zhes  
byar zhen pa yi || gnyen po gang du bsgom zhes dri || dngos gzhi'i tshe na gang du yang || 'dzin  
pa med pa des bstan no || zhe na phyag chen brjod bral ba || rtog pa'i yul<sup>[379]</sup> las 'das gyur gang  
|| rjes kyi shes pas de de shes ||

rtog pas ngos zung bstan gyur na || dngos gzhi slar yang dug bcas su || btang ba min nam zhen  
blo de || slar bzlog byed na glang chen gyi || khrus dang mtshungs par gyur min nam || dang  
po'i chig thub la gzhan gyi || rgol ba'i lan du lnga ldan zhes || bya ba'i phyag rgya che bsgom  
pa || mi 'thad min mod lha rjes yis || rtsal du bton pa'i phyag chen der || don lnga med na mi  
'byung rgyu || yin nam phun sum tshogs yan lag || gang ces brtags tshe dang po ltar || yin na  
rtsa ba'i dam bca' nyams || phyi ma ltar na lam 'bras dang || bsres pas rang gzhang tshugs pa  
min ||

de nas don che tshig nyung zhang || las 'phro can gyis sgrub sla ba || rtogs sla rtogs na bdag  
'dzin gnyis || sa bon bcas de 'joms sla ba || so so rang rig gis myong zhang || sgra rtog yul du  
ma byas pa'i || lhan cig skyes 'di lung dang ni || rigs par brten dgos ma yin zhang || bla ma'i  
dus thabs bsten pa la || rag las min kyang theg chen pa || kun la khyab byed du 'gro zhang || kun  
gyi nges pa'i don dang ni || dngos gzhi'i tshe na 'gal med pa || 'di grub pa la sbyor ba'i tshe ||  
sgrub byed sna tshogs dgos min kyang || dngos gzhi'i tshe na bsgrub bya'i don || mdo rgyud  
kun dang mthun par mthong ||

<sup>100</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: addit. *byed*

<sup>101</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(C)</sub>: om. *ni*



mthong bya gsar du bsgrubs min gyi || gdod nas grub pa'i ye shes mchog || yid bzhin nor bu dang 'dra bas || bying dang rgod pa dang bral bar || re zhig mnyam par 'jog nus na || rtse gcig ming <sup>[380]</sup> can chos dang ni || gang zag nyid du'ang 'dzin med par || gyur pa spros bral ming can de || dngos gzhi'i zhi lhag zung du 'jug de la rjes thob kyis<sup>102</sup> || bogs 'byin pa ni gang zag dang || chos kyi snang ba ci shar yang || de der 'dzin pa med gyur tshe || rnam shes ngo na gzung 'dzin gyi || snang ba 'gags par ma gyur kyang || ye shes ngo na bdag gnyis po || gang du yang ni 'dzin med pa'i || ye shes ngang gis drangs gyur pa || de tshe snang srid kun thams cad || phyag rgya chen po ro gcig pa || yin no de nas 'bad med par || de mngon gyur la sgom med kyi || tha snyad btags pa yin snyam byed ||

'di la phyi rabs pas rgol<sup>103</sup> || dngos gzhi'i tshe na gang du yang || yid mi byed dang mi 'dzin pa || **hwa shang** lugs dang khyad par ci || zer dang mdo sngags nas gsungs pa'i || sbyor bas ma bsgrubs lhag mthong de || mu stegs lugs dang khyad par ci || blun pos goms pa'i phyag rgya che || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu zhes dang || goms pa legs kyang dbu ma las || ma 'das phyir na gsang sngags dang || bsre ba don med yin zhes sogs || rtsod rnam sel ba'i lan ji bzhin ||

mdo rgyud man ngag rgyas par ni || shes yod min pas don dka' ba || de phyir rgyas pa 'dir brjod bya || rgya nag mkhan po kun rdzob dang || don dam dbye ba mi 'byed cing || de bzhin lta dang spyod pa dang || ye shes dang ni rnam shes dang || thos bsam dus dang bsgom pa dang || drang ba'i don dang nges pa'i don || so so'i gnas skabs mi 'byed par || ci yang yid la mi byed pa || tsam <sup>[381]</sup> zhig snying po yin par 'dod ||

phyag rgya chen po'i dngos gzhi ni || don dam pa dang lta ba dang || mnyam par bzhag dang ye shes dang || sgrib kun rtsa ba ma rig pa'i || sa bon drungs nas 'byin byed blo || 'di la dpe dang don gnyis su || 'byed mod rtog bral ma 'khrul phyir || gnyis ka lhan skyes la mngon sum || rtog pa'ang zhe na kho nar ni || ma zad yang dag min rtog pa || kun dang bral phyir 'jig rten las || 'das pa'i mngon sum dang 'dra ba || dper na 'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug tshe || rnam shes tshogs bdun 'khor bcas pa || bkag pas yid la mi byed cing || mtshan mar 'dzin pa kun bral yang || **hwa shang** bsgom dang de mi 'dra || 'di na kha cig 'gog snyoms de || sems tsam lugs bzhin dbu ma yi || lugs la ye shes yin zhes smra || dbu ma ngo bo nyid med kyi || 'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug med par dgag || rnam brdzun dbu ma'i 'gog snyoms na || ye shes yod phyir de 'di la || mtshungs ldan bkag pa'i snyoms 'jug ces || phyi rabs pas 'di hrul por byas ||

yid kyi rnam shes ma gtogs pa'i || ye shes gang nas btsal zhe na || mthong bsgom sogs kyi mnyam gzhas tu || 'jug shes drug dang nyon mongs yid || med phyir yid kyi dbang po dkon || yid kyi dbang po'i bdag rkyen las || gdod ma'i ye shes 'byung ba min || ngo bo nyid med smra

<sup>102</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: the verse has twelve instead of seven syllables. SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: cuts the verse in two, the first with seven syllables, the second with only five, thus two syllables are missing: *dngos gzhi'i zhi lhag zung du 'jug || de la rjes thob kyis ||*

<sup>103</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: the verse has six instead of seven syllables. SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: inserts the remark "one syllable missing" '*bru gcig chad*."

gzhung du || chos kun rang rang ngo bo yis || stong la rtse gcig mnyam 'jog pa'i || ye shes khas len kho bo yis || ma ni mo gsham<sup>104</sup> zer dang mtshungs ||

mnyam par <sup>[382]</sup> bzhag dus sor rtog gi || ye shes khas len dgos zer ba || sgom rim gzhung du me 'byung ba || shing la rag mod de nyid kyis || de bsreg dpe bstan pa dang 'gal || sngags kyis dbang bskur byin rlabs dang || dbu ma'i rigs pas ma sbyangs par || don dam ye shes mngon sum du || mthong ba'i thabs 'ga' med gyur na || lus kyis byed cing longs spyod kyis || rlabs dang sgyu ma'i dpe sogs las || de mthong man ngag lung dang ni || rigs pa las kyang shes pa kun || nang ltar rang rig rang gsal bas || rang la nges pa 'dren par bshad || de goms byed pa'i yan lag dang || bral ma gyur na gsal ba de || rab kyis mthar phyin 'byung min nam ||

stong nyid bsgrub pa'i rigs pa la || brten pa min par de rtogs blo || tshad mar gyur pa yod min phyir || de la ma brten tshad min blo || zer ba sngon dang phyi mthar byung || de skad de yis bsngags pa dang || man ngag pa kun zhum par byas || zhum bcas rtsol ba dor ba'i mis || rang gzhung tshugs pa ga la srid || blun po'i phyag chen dud 'gro'i rgyur || song tshe gsung ba 'khrid de yi || dngos gzhi'i tshe na bdag 'dzin gyi || gnyen po ma bstan pa snyam du || dgongs pa yin mod bdag gnyis po || gang du yang ni 'dzin pa med || de la de rtogs pa yin ni || tha snyad phar phyin pa kun gyi || byed pa min nam bdag med do || snyam du 'dzin dgos zer ba brdzun ||

tha snyad de 'dra sbyor dus su || dpyad pa sngon song ba la dgongs || zhe na 'dir yang rjes thob tshe || mtha' gzhan 'gogs pa'i rigs pas grub ||

'dzin <sup>[383]</sup> rnam rang gsal don dam pa'i || bden par gang las shes ce na || de phyir gnyis stong gang yin pa || de nyid du bshad pa las shes || de nyid sgrib sel ye shes kyis<sup>105</sup> || rtogs bya'i stong nyid ngos 'dzin ni || de las gzhan du **sa ra has** || ma bshad **birwa pas** de bzhin || 'di rtogs pa la thal rang gi || rigs pa don med rnam 'grel gyi || mdzad po'i rigs pa kho nas grub || de la 'jug byed zhi gnas kyis || sgrub tshul gzhung gzhan las byung bzhin ||

rang gsal ba de rigs pa yis || dpyad mi bzod phyir kun rdzob kyis || bden zhes smras na sangs rgyas la || de las gzhan du snang med phyir || dam pa'i don gyi bden kho na || de 'dra sems tsam rnam brdzun pa'i || sgom zhes smra mod rjes thob tshe || rten cing 'brel par 'byung rtags kyis || yod med la sogs mtha' kun dang || bral bar byas pa'ang 'di la srid || so ma ma bcas lhug pa yi || 'jog tshul mu stegs byed pa yang || bsam gtan dngos gzhi la yod ces || zer mod dag tu 'dzin pa yis || bcings phyir thar pa'i lam ma yin ||

rmongs rnam sel byed stong nyid kyis || ngos 'dzin sgyu ma rigs grub dang || rab tu mi gnas las gzhan pa || yod min zer mod gsang sngags su || nyams su blang bya'i stong pa nyid || de der ma 'dus de nyid ni || bde chen po las gzhan du med ||

dbu ma'i bsgom mthar phyin pa la || grangs med gsum gyi dka' spyad ni || dgos par ma nges byams chos nas || gang bshad dbu ma'i ye shes de || theg mchog lam gyi rim pa <sup>[384]</sup> gnyis ||

<sup>104</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *bshad*

<sup>105</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *kyis*

sgrub pa'i gzhi dang thabs mchog phyir || med par dgag pa'i stong nyid la || dgongs nas gur du  
'di skad ces || gal te stong pa thabs yin na || de tshe sangs rgyas nyid mi 'gyur || rgyu las 'bras  
bu gzhan min phyir || zhes bshad nas ni de 'og tu || de phyir dkyil 'khor 'khor<sup>106</sup> lo zhes || thabs  
ni bde ba'i sdom pa ste || sangs rgyas nga rgyal rnal 'byor gyis || sangs rgyas nyid yun ring mi  
'gyur || zhes gsungs pa de mkhas par slob ||

de ltar de brtsams pa las ni || byung ba'i dge bas gangs can na || zla 'od gzhon nu'i rnam dpyod  
kyis || rtalsl bton phyag rgya chen po'i lugs || 'dzin por khas len byed mtha' dag || rang gzhung  
tshugs par 'dzin min pa || la la theg mchog phyag rgya che || **sa ra has** gsungs ngo sor byed ||  
'ga' zhig snying po'i gzhung dag tu || yid mi byed gsungs la 'khrul nas || med par dgag pa'i  
stong pa nyid || kho na lhur blangs ca co yis || rtogs ldan ye shes kun sun 'byin || kha gcig bka'  
phyag chu bo che || gnyis 'dus zer ba'i kha skad la || 'khrul nas jo bo'i dbu ma yi || man ngag  
lhur len byed po yod || de yi dbu ma rtog bcas dang || rtog med shes pa'i spyod yul min ||

'di bshad phyag rgya chen po'i lam || goms byed rnal 'byor pa de ni || gsang sngags chen por  
zhugs zin nam || da lta zhugs zin pa min yang || dbang dang byin gyis rlob thob nas || chos drug  
dang ni rim pa lnga'i || 'od gsal ba las zung 'jug sku || ldang la tshegs yod ma yin no || de ltar  
lugs 'di 'chad pa po || <sup>[385]</sup> gzhan zer dgag dang rang gi lugs || bzhag dang brgal lan rgyas bshad  
pa'i || byung tshul rim pa rnam gsum gyis || phyag chen yid bzhin nor bu yi || dri ma phra rags  
kun sbyangs nas || tshad ldan gzhung chen mang po yi || rgyal mtshan rtse mor 'di bkod pa ||  
de tshe gang gang la dga' ba'i || re 'dod gsol ba dus su thebs || dgos 'dod char chen 'dir phebs  
shog ||

ces phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed kyi bstan bcos || grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa rnam nges |  
zhes bya ba 'di ni | lugs de la mi phyed pa'i dgongs pa rnam par dkar ba'i **sa skyong mchog**  
gis gsol ba btab pa'i ngor bgyis nas | '**jam dpal dga' ba'i bshes gnyen** gyis | rang lo don drug  
pa la nye bar sbyar ba'i | yi ge pa ni **bsod nams ye shes lhun grub** bo ||

### 3a. English Translation of *Zung 'jug gi gru chen*<sup>107</sup>

*Distinguishing Mahāmudrā [or The Great Ship of Unity: A Treatise Dispelling Errors in the Interpretation of Mahāmudrā of Scripture and Reasoning]* <sup>[385]</sup>

<sup>106</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: om. 'khor lo

<sup>107</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 355<sub>1</sub>–379<sub>5</sub>; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 385<sub>4</sub>–412<sub>2</sub>; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>, vol. 17, 468<sub>3</sub>–499<sub>5</sub>. The full title is: *Phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed* [or] *Lung rigs gnyis kyi phyag rgya chen po'i bzhed tshul la 'khrul pa sel ba'i bstan bcos zung 'jug gi gru chen* (= PCks).

*Namo buddhāya.*

With deepest devotion [I] pay homage  
 To those who teach and uphold  
 The sublime [Mahāmudrā] teaching that dispels all  
 Obscurations of afflictions and regarding the knowable.  
 In former times, in this Land of Snow,  
 The sun of definitive meaning blazed brightly,  
 Free from the dense clouds of obscuration.  
 However, when some scholars scrutinized and analyzed [it],  
 The sun of emptiness went to sleep in the bed of darkness.  
 Henceforth, it has been close to a hundred years now since  
 Emptiness and empty prattle have been mixed together.  
 There previously appeared elaborate discourses on whether  
 Zla 'od gzhon nu's [teaching] of definitive meaning,  
 Which was given the name "Mahāmudrā",  
 Is either legitimate or illegitimate.  
 At that time, when all who had preserved distinct traditions  
 Each abandoned their own tradition,  
 Didn't they all in later times embark upon  
 The 'great paths' of their own devising (*rang bzo*)?

Having offered above an expression of homage and the thesis of the composition, the time has come to introduce the elaborate discourses [concerning Mahāmudrā]. It was said that

No substantial difference exists between the present-day Great Seal  
 And the Great Perfection of the Chinese tradition,  
 Other than a change in names from 'descent from above'  
 And 'ascent from below' to 'simultaneist' and 'gradualist'<sup>108</sup>.

And

The Great Seal meditation of the ignorant,  
 It is taught, usually becomes a cause of animal birth.  
 If not that, then they are born in the formless realm,  
 Or else they fall into the śrāvakas' cessation.<sup>109</sup>  
 Even if that meditation may be excellent,

<sup>108</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.167: *da lta'i phyag rgya chen po dang || rgya nag lugs kyi rdzogs chen la || yas 'bab dang ni mas 'dzogs gnyis || rim gyis pa dang cig char bar || ming 'dogs bsgyur ba rna gtogs pa || don la khyad par dbye ba med ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 118 (Eng.).

<sup>109</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161: *blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs || min na gzugs med kham su skye || yang na nyan thos 'gog par ltung ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.).

It is no more than a Madhyamaka meditation.  
 The latter meditation, while very good it itself,  
 Is nevertheless extremely difficult to accomplish<sup>110</sup>.

To these [verses] there are queries and replies.

### 1. Queries

Were there no difference between the ‘descent from above’ (*yas ’bab*) view of Mahāmudrā and the ‘simultaneist’ (*cig car ba*) path of Heshang, it would follow that Mahāmudrā followers would not accept loving kindness, compassion, the [first] five perfections and the cultivation of the mind of a bodhisattva and so on as the path. If this is claimed, it would contradict the elaborate explanations by these Mahāmudrā followers of the utmost importance of these aspects of skillful means.

And, if the view of Mahāmudrā as “Self-sufficient White Remedy” is inadmissible, this contradicts the [standard] explanation that the six perfections are all subsumed under the perfection of insight. [Hence] the controversy.

Next, if it is declared that the Mahāmudrā meditation of ignorant ones is a cause for animal [rebirths], what is the scriptural authority for such a statement? <sup>[387]</sup> What are explained as the propelling causes and the completing causes of these [rebirths]?<sup>111</sup> Is the Mahāmudrā view then claimed to be an affliction (*nyon mongs pa*) or is it the karmic actions that are [held to be] motivated by it? If any of these are maintained, what would then be the fault in asserting that the Madhyamaka view [likewise involves] such karmic actions and afflictions?

Moreover, is its operating as the cause for an animal [rebirth] a fault of the teaching or a fault of the person who meditates? In the first case, what would be the verification that [Mahāmudrā] meditation by learned persons, let alone ignorant ones, would *not* [invariably] function as a cause for lower existences? In the second case, what reason would [explain] why when an ignorant person practices the Lam ’bras, the *Five Stages of Guhyasamāja*<sup>112</sup> and so forth, it doesn’t equally become the cause of animal [rebirths]?

<sup>110</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162: *gal te de ni bsgom legs kyang || dbu ma’i bsgom las lhag pa med || dbu ma’i bsgom de bzang mod kyi || ’on kyang ’grub pa shin tu dka’ ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.).

<sup>111</sup> Propelling causes are those karmic causes that when activated at the time of death are said to propel a sentient being into the next rebirth. Completing causes are those which determine the characteristics of that rebirth such as the respective personality and environment. Virtuous propelling causes leading to pleasant rebirths might well be met with nonvirtuous completing causes of unpleasant environments and vice versa. Of course, both can be of either virtuous or nonvirtuous types as well. See *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, vol. I, Tsong kha pa, 2000, 239–40.

<sup>112</sup> See below, 66, n. 163.

Moreover in the statement that through meditating on *mahāmudrā* one falls into cessation, what cessation does that pertain to? Does it pertain to the state of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*) and the *nirvāṇa* that is without remainder? In any case, since actualizing these requires a path of transcendence, the view would be pure.

Furthermore, the view of Heshang and the view of the master Sgam po pa are not the same because in the *Ornament of Liberation of the Supreme Path* composed by the master Sgam po pa, he taught in detail the preliminary methods of analysis through discriminating insight in the context of the Prajñāpāramitā view.

2. The [answers] are twofold:

2.1. Setting forth what is at stake

2.2. Offering the substantive replies

2.1. The first is twofold:

2.1.1. Identifying the root of the doctrine by those known as Mahāmudrā proponents

2.1.2. Ways of designating each according to the claims of their followers

2.1.1. The first [Identifying the root of the doctrine] is threefold:

2.1.1.1. The root texts from which [Mahāmudrā] arose.

2.1.1.2. What is *mahāmudrā* in terms of the perceived object, and <sup>[388]</sup>

2.1.1.3. What is *mahāmudrā* in terms of the perceiving mind?

2.1.1.1. As for the first, the source of this [tradition] is the *Dohā Trilogy* (*do hā skor gsum*) of Saraha along with related works<sup>113</sup>.

2.1.1.2. Secondly, this [*mahāmudrā* as perceived object] is luminosity that is the innate nature of mind. Its synonyms are natural coemergent wisdom, *sugatagarbha*, great bliss and natural *dharmakāya*.

2.1.1.3. Thirdly, [the *mahāmudrā* of the perceiving mind,] is wisdom that experiences this very object. It is distinguished into two kinds: a simulated one (*rjes mthun pa*) that exists even in ordinary people and an authentic one (*mtshan nyid pa*) that is present in noble beings.

In this manner, both the subject and object are called Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*), because one does not perceive anything knowable at all that is not marked and sealed by this *mudrā*. Although there exist no phenomena that are not sealed by this *mahāmudrā*, there are nonetheless two methods that serve as preliminaries to it: [1] the tradition of the outer Vehicle of Characteristics (*lakṣaṇayāna*) and [2] the tradition of the inner *yogins*. [1] The first, [i.e., the outer Vehicle of Characteristics] consists in ascertainment by reasoning involving studying

<sup>113</sup> The trilogy comprises the *People Dohā*, *Queen Dohā* and *King Dohā*. Related works could include several other Dohās ascribed to Saraha and to other Mahāsiddhas as well as the commentarial literature on these.

and thinking. On the basis of such ascertainment, there are also two different methods of recognizing this *mahāmudrā* which is the mode of abiding that one experiences through knowledge based on meditation: [A] The Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Madhyamaka which maintains it is a space-like nonaffirming negation and the [B] Yogācāra-Madhyamaka which claims that it is coemergent wisdom. Regarding these two assertions, there are also two different methods of ascertainment through reasoning based on studying and thinking: [the former] by means of self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and [the latter] by means of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*). Although that which is <sup>[389]</sup> experienced based on the first system [i.e., self-emptiness] is not in accord with the root texts of Mahāmudrā, it is nonetheless acceptable to ascribe the “ascertainment of freedom from extremes leading to assimilation as unity” explained in that [system] to this Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition.

[2] Secondly, the skillful means employed in the tradition of the inner *yogins* are three-fold: [*mahāmudrā*] is made manifest by [A] relying on the skillful means of the teacher’s blessing, [B] the means of causing the wisdom beings to descend, and [C] the means of empowerment. The Mahāmudrā view which has been made manifest by these three means does not need to be preceded by analysis of discriminating insight because the systems of Pāramitā and Mantra are distinct. Of these two systems, the latter is superior because it discovers in an instant the nonpoisonous view [resulting from] the three means [i.e., blessing, wisdom beings, and empowerment] and because the former tradition’s discovery through discriminating insight is bound up with conceptualization.

Not only is there a difference in terms of the view of the experiencer but the latter [system] is also superior in terms of the definitive meaning of the experienced object because the emptiness as a nonaffirming negation of the former tradition, [i.e., the Niḥsvabhāvavāda-Mādhyamikas of the Lakṣaṇayāna] is explained as conventional truth since it is nothing other than nonexistence and abstraction. Hence it does not qualify as being of definitive meaning and does not go beyond the conceptualizing mind of the subject (*yul can*). On the other hand, when the mode of abiding of coemergent wisdom is explained as *mahāmudrā* as object—as it is claimed in the works of Maitreya such as the *Uttaratantra* [RGV]—this is no different from the Mantra system.

Hence, <sup>[390]</sup> there is a qualitative gradation<sup>114</sup> in the subject’s wisdom of self-awareness owing to the qualitative gradation in the means of actualizing it. However, all these [types of] wisdom of self-awareness, which are actualized by these outer and inner skillful means, are alike in being the wisdom of *mahāmudrā* because they consist in the wisdom of the union of bliss and emptiness. In that instance, “bliss” signifies “innate coemergent wisdom” which is that which is inseparably present in essence within all [beings] from buddhas up to sentient

<sup>114</sup> *bzang ngan gyi rim pa* literally means “gradation/stages of good and bad” (i.e., from worse to better).

beings “Empti[ness]” means being empty of concepts of clinging to the duality of grasped and grasping, existence and nonexistence and so forth.

Now with regard to *mahāmudrā* as object: it abides as the essence of innate wisdom. [Its] mode of empti[ness] is [its being] empty of conceptualizing that clings to the extremes of discursive elaborations. [Its] mode of realization is realization through personally experienced wisdom. There does not exist anything that is separately postulated as *saṃsāra* as long as this is not realized, and as *nirvāṇa* once it is realized. This being so, from the perspective of the three modes of abiding, [emptiness and realization], there is no differentiation in *mahāmudrā* between the two aspects of manifesting as great bliss in meditative equipoise and manifesting as illusion-like [appearances] in post-meditation. In short, [*mahāmudrā*] is ascertained simply as the modes of abiding (*gnas lugs*), emptiness (*stong lugs*) and realization (*rtogs lugs*) that are of definitive meaning as these are found in the tantra corpus, the Maitreya works, and the *Dohā Trilogy*.

It was in this sense that previous teachers of the Mudrā [tradition] used the designation *mahāmudrā*. For this the designation “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects”<sup>[391]</sup> is also attested in both the Mantra[yāna] and the Pāramitā[yāna]. The understanding of it is such that when one has arrived at the supramundane path, then the entire spectrum of qualities conducive to purification such as the [thirty-seven factors] of awakening, loving kindness, compassion and the rest, which are termed “great bliss,” are of one taste with the essence of the *dharmadhātu* wisdom. In that instance, this was definitely asserted in the statement that [Mahāmudrā] is similar to a Self-sufficient White Remedy.

### 2.1.2. Ways of designating each according to the claims of their followers

[Here] [1] a general indication and [2] a specific explanation will be given. [1] As for the first, all great meditators who are known as [Mahā]mudrā practitioners have said the following. This *mahāmudrā* is not realized through studying, thinking, and explaining. It [can]not be shown by the *bla ma*, it [can]not be meditated upon by the disciple. Having relied upon the *bla ma*’s blessing and the disciple’s devotion during the preparatory phase, one settles naturally into the uncontrived innate mind during the main practice phase. Settling in that way, mind dawns in meditative equipoise as the union of luminosity and emptiness, objects dawn in post-meditation as appearance and emptiness devoid of grasping. From within that state, anything and everything is enjoyed without grasping. By contrast, one does not awaken [to buddhahood] through activities by the three gates [of body, speech, and mind] involving willful effort.

[2] Secondly [the specific explanation]: In the words of some Mahāmudrā proponents, in general, among the two [kinds of] meditation, the analytical meditation of a *paṇḍita* and the settling meditation of a *kusāli*, ours is the latter tradition. Not a single other preliminary



practice is to be taught, not a single other main practice is to be cultivated. To settle naturally in the uncontrived mind in all three [phases]—preparation, main practice and post-meditation—is called *mahāmudrā*. [392]

In the words of some [others], it is said that there are two [types of practitioners], the gradualists (*rim gyis pa*) and the simultaneists (*cig char ba*). To the first, this Mahāmudrā is taught [once they have] adequately been made a suitable vessel for the Secret Mantra by taking refuge, developing *bodhicitta*, empowerment, blessing, and so on. To the simultaneists who, having thoroughly ripened their mind-streams during many previous lifetimes, do not need to rely on the ruse<sup>115</sup> of preliminary practices and so on in this life, the main practice is shown right from the start. In that regard, it is said that even though it is not possible to [directly] show them “this is *mahāmudrā*”, it will nonetheless transpire by simply instructing them to “rest naturally in uncontrived mind” once they are acquainted with the meaning of the words.

In the words of others yet, it is said that the practice of the simultaneists is what is called “descent from above view” and that the view of the gradualists is the “ascent from below conduct”. [But] when the view is realized, the conduct is spontaneously present, even without striving for it.

In the words of others, it is said that despite the many classifications of spiritual paths and levels according to the outer [vehicle of] characteristics, our *kusāli* tradition needs nothing more than [the four yogas of] one-pointedness, freedom from elaboration, one flavour, and no-meditation, in other [words], what is subsumed under the triad of “experience (*nyams*), intellectual understanding (*go ba*), and realization (*rtogs*)”. All the spiritual levels, paths and buddhas are subsumed under what is called the essence of mind, coemergent wisdom.

In the words of others yet, citing the statement “deluded are the fools who count the spiritual levels and paths within the self-sufficient Mahāmudrā”<sup>116</sup>, they state that by settling in meditative equipoise in the single wisdom of *mahāmudrā*, there will be awakening in a matter of years or months.

In short, it is said that Saraha’s tradition [393] is embraced as the tradition for simultaneist disciples, showing them the ‘all-at-once’ path. Regardless of how dull the acumen of simultaneists may be, they do not require any steps beyond the four [*yogas*] such as one-pointedness and the rest. When they are of sharp [acumen], realization [may] dawn in them by devotion alone even if the teacher has not taught them a single word. When this realization is taken as the path, awakening does not require progression through the steps of spiritual

<sup>115</sup> *mgo skor* literally means “deception”, the idea here being that such practices involve heuristic fictions or “white lies” of various kinds that may prove necessary as long as the aspirant is not yet adequately prepared to directly realize the nature of mind. Such deceptions and self-deceptions must eventually be relinquished.

<sup>116</sup> Quote could not be identified. Numerous authors quote the same two lines in their texts, for example Padma dkar po. Zhang Rin po che, Tshog drug rang grol or Mang thos klu sgrub rgya mtsho.

levels and paths and the hardships of countless eons and so forth as is prescribed in the Pāramitā[yāna].

2.2. Offering substantive replies is twofold:

2.2.1. How Sa skya [Paṇḍita] introduced the refutations

2.2.2. To show how all the proponents of empty talk here in later times represent a degeneration from two traditions

2.2.1. As for the first [Sa paṇ's refutations], the following words were proclaimed:

Is this Mahāmudrā view of yours a Mahāmudrā of the Pāramitā tradition or a Mahāmudrā of the Mantra tradition?<sup>117</sup>

In the first case, [argues Sa skya Paṇḍita,] it is not justified for three [reasons]: [1] it is not justified because it is not preceded by the insight of studying and thinking; [2] it is not justified because it does not advocate the classification of the five paths and the ten levels and [3] it is not justified because it does not accept need for hardship of three endless [eons]. In the second case, it is also not justified for three [reasons]: [1] it is not justified as a Mahāmudrā of the Yoga tantras; [2] it is not justified as a Mahāmudrā of the Unsurpassed [Yoga] tantras and [3] as it is not justified since it is not included in the [series] of the three: *karma-*, *jñāna-*, and *mahāmudrā*.

[*Rebuttal:*]<sup>118</sup> [Our view] does qualify as Mantra because it is a view that is realized through the power of a *bla ma*'s blessing. [*Sa paṇ's Response:*] This is not so because you [Mahāmudrā proponents] assert that self-occurring wisdom is produced in someone<sup>[394]</sup> through the power of devotion. Although this may be the case if you receive a nonerroneous bestowal of empowerment from such a *bla ma*—as in the saying “[By] whose kindness one attains, in an instant, the state of great bliss”<sup>119</sup>—someone who does not bestow empowerment does not count as a *bla ma*. This is shown in the following statements: “One who does not bestow

<sup>117</sup> This appears to be a summary rather than direct quotation since it is not found in Sa paṇ's well known criticisms of Mahāmudrā in the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* and *Skye bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge*. The following presentation of Sa paṇ's responses to actual or hypothetical counter-arguments appears to be largely based on these sources.

<sup>118</sup> Here begins a series of typical Bka' brgyud rebuttals or counter-arguments to Sa paṇ's refutations followed by responses typical of Sa paṇ and his successors. Shakyas mchog ldan was undoubtedly familiar with both sides of the controversy, having trained extensively in both Sa skya and Bka' brgyud doctrinal systems.

<sup>119</sup> *Śrīcakrasaṃvarasādhanaśāstra* D 1429 vol. 21, 197b<sub>5</sub>. This line occurs in the invocation to this *Cakrasaṃvara* sādhanā text.

empowerments is no *bla ma*”, and “even if one has devotion in the *bla ma*, such a *bla ma* is no *bla ma*”<sup>120</sup>.

[*Rebuttal*:] Our view does qualify as the Pāramitā tradition because in the works of the master from Dwags po it is said: “My Mahāmudrā and the view of the *Mahāyānottaratantra* [RGV] are the same in meaning”<sup>121</sup> and because in [his] detailed explanation of the method ascertaining the perfection of insight in [his] treatise entitled *Ornament of Liberation*, he explained precisely the goal (*don nyid*) that is ascertained through studying and thinking as the object of meditation. [*Response*:] In this case since [your teaching] has been assimilated to the Pāramitāyāna tradition, the designation *mahāmudrā* is not justified. [For in that case the claim that] there is no need to endure hardships for three incalculable eons would be unjustified. The claim that without having to ascertain the view during the phase prior to the pith instructions it is sufficient to let body, speech and mind naturally settle would [also] not be justified. As is said with respect to [these] statements:

If one wishes to practice in this way,  
There is no blessing of Vajravārāhi.  
One does not cultivate the coemergent and so on in this [system].  
It is without the path of means such as inner heat (*gtum mo*) and so forth.  
There is no designation *mahāmudrā*.  
This [tradition] does not maintain that there is awakening in this life,  
In the intermediate phase, or in the next [life].  
[However, it does accord with what is attested from the Mahāyāna  
scriptural collections.]<sup>122</sup>

Moreover, the practice of the view of the *Uttaratantra* requires the preliminaries of <sup>[395]</sup> studying and thinking, as it is stated in the [*Mahāyāna*]*sūtrālaṃkāra*:

If one could enter into meditation without having studied,  
The teachings would be pointless.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> These two quotations could not be identified.

<sup>121</sup> See above 17 and n. 11.

<sup>122</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.124: *gal te 'di bzhin bsgrub 'dod na || rdo rje phag mo'i byin rlabs med || lhan skyes la sags 'dir mi bsgom || gtum mo la sogs thabs lam bral || phyag rgya chen po'i tha snyad med ||* III.125: *tshe 'di dang ni bar do dang || phyi mar 'tshang rgya khong mi bzhed || 'on kyang theg pa chen po yi || sde snod rnams las 'byung ba bzhin ||* See Rhoton 2002, 301 (Tib.) 112 (Eng.). The final sentence in the translation has been added for context.

<sup>123</sup> This is the second part of stanza MSA XII.3cd: *dr̥ṣṭo 'rthaḥ śrutamātrakādyadi bhavet syādbhāvanāpārthikā aśrutvā yadi bhāvanāmanuviśet syāddeśanāpārthikā ||* MAS D 4026, 181a<sub>6</sub>: *gal te thos pa tsam gyis don mthong 'gyur na sgom pa don med 'gyur || gal te ma thos par yang sgom 'jug 'gyur na bstan pa don med 'gyur ||*

Further, in [your] system of ascertainment: to settle into equipoise in wisdom that is free from the subject-object duality during the main practice phase after having initially determined that appearances are mind, next that the apprehended is unreal, and [finally] that the apprehender is nonexistent, is not the intent of the Maitreya works. Rather, in that case, to reach the goal of such meditation, it is necessary to accumulate merit for three countless eons. As explained [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.163]:

As long as the accumulations are not perfected,  
For that long the meditation does not reach its goal.  
To complete the two accumulations,  
Endless eons are required.<sup>124</sup>

And [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162]:

The Madhyamaka meditation even though it is excellent,  
Is still very difficult to accomplish.<sup>125</sup>

[*Rebuttal:*] Where is the contradiction given that the process of realizing the view of the *Uttaratantra* is [that of] the Secret Mantra. [*Response:*] It is in this case a contradiction to assert that the empowerments and the two stages are not required as preliminaries.<sup>126</sup> As explained [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.134]:

When one does not cultivate the empowerments and the two stages,  
It is not a Vajrayāna teaching.<sup>127</sup>

[*Rebuttal:*] Then in that case our view is not included in either of these two traditions because in the words of the master Dwags po pa:

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<sup>124</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.163 *ji srid tshogs gnyis ma rdzogs pa || de srid bsgom de mthar mi phyin || 'di yi tshogs gnyis rdzogs pa la || bskal pa grangs med dgos par gsungs ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.).

<sup>125</sup> This is the second part of stanza *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162cd: *dbu ma'i bsgom de bzang mod kyi || 'on kyang 'grub pa shin tu dka' ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.).

<sup>126</sup> In other words, since the method of realization outlined in the RGV does not contain such tantric preliminaries as empowerments and Generation and Completion Stages, it is a contradiction to equate its means of realization with those of the Mantrayāna.

<sup>127</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.134ab: *dbang dang rim gnyis mi ldan pas || rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa min ||* See Rhoton 2002, 302 (Tib.); 113 (Eng.).

My Mahāmudrā is not touched by the three Great Ones in that the three great are intellectually appraised (*blos gzhal*) and intellectually fabricated (*blo byas*),<sup>128</sup> whereas this Mahāmudrā] is beyond the intellect [and] is not construed by causes and conditions.<sup>129</sup>

[*Response:*] A Mahāyāna that is not contained <sup>[396]</sup> in either the Mantra or Pāramitā system is impossible, as demonstrated [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.131–132]:

Either the practice is done  
According to the sūtras of the Pāramitā  
Or according to the  
Tantras of the Vajrayāna.  
A Mahāyāna other than these two  
Was not taught by the perfect Buddha.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, does your “descent from above” view require training in the conduct of the six perfections or not? If it is not required, then [this view] would be [equivalent to] the religious tradition of the Chinese abbot. If it is required, then does one train gradually or simultaneously? In the first case, how would there be any difference from the “conduct that ascends from below”? And if it simultaneous, would there be a distinction between the practices of view and conduct or would conduct be included within the view? In the first case, this view would contradict it being a Self-sufficient White Remedy. In the second case, is this tradition of inseparability of view and conduct practiced according to the Mantra tradition or according to the Pāramitā tradition? In the first case, it is in contradiction with [the Mantra system] in not taking empowerments and the two stages as being of crucial importance. In the second case, it is not admissible to have a teaching that [allows] beginners to awaken within a single lifetime. This is demonstrated [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III. 175cd–176]:

This present-day Mahāmudrā  
Is largely a Chinese religious system.  
The Mahāmudrā of Nāro and Maitrīpa

<sup>128</sup> See Volume I, 115 n. 299. The expression “three Great Ones” refers to Madhyamaka, Rdzogs chen, and Mahāmudrā as doctrinal-contemplative systems, as distinct from the actual *mahāmudrā* experience itself which is beyond intellectual appropriation.

<sup>129</sup> We were unable to locate this quotation in the editions of Sgam po pa’s Collected Works available to us (see Bibliography under Sgam po pa).

<sup>130</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.131cd–132: *yang na pha rol phyin pa yi || mdo las ji ltar ’byung bzhin gyis || yang na rdo rje theg pa yi || rgyud sde bzhin du nyams su long || ’di gnyis min pa’i theg chen ni || sangs rgyas rnams kyis gsungs pa med ||* See Rhoton 2002, 302 (Tib.); 113 (Eng.).

Is held to consist precisely in what was taught  
In the tantras of the Secret Mantra.<sup>131</sup>

[*Rebuttal*.:] There are those who in this life did not previously go through the two stages, but who have faith in this teaching and have had the blessing of the teacher enter their mind-streams. Since they have already gone through the purification by the empowerments and the two stages in previous lives, they are “those who have the simultaneist potential” (*cig car ba'i rigs can*)<sup>132</sup>. [*Response*.:] In that regard, as it has been said [*Sdom gsum rab dbye* III. 186–187]:

If one says that those who have gained faith in the Mahāyāna <sup>[397]</sup>  
Do not now need empowerment rituals  
Because they have undergone purification in previous[lives],  
Then in the case of conviction in one's *prātimokṣa* vows,  
What would be the point of ordination now  
Given that one [must have] had the vow in previous [lives]?<sup>133</sup>

Having already given initial replies to questions by these [critics at the beginning of this text], the second [series of replies is to follow]. The reply that [we] consider that it is the height of absurdity to say that Mahāmudrā becomes the cause for taking rebirth in animal [rebirths] and the formless realm must be explained as follows.<sup>134</sup> With regard to the steps of this method of guidance in this [Mahāmudrā] view by those who are renowned as Mahāmudrā proponents, not only are there no explanations that [these] require the preliminary analysis by means of discerning insight, but more [significantly] there are many explicit statements that if there is such analysis, *mahāmudrā* becomes intellectually fabricated. They do not explain the necessity of the preliminary conferral of empowerments to introduce one to the ground of the clearing process and the clearing process [itself]. Not only is that explanation not given, but they also do not consider [Mahāmudrā] to be the sort of view that derives from empowerment. Rather, during the main practice phase, at the moment when there appears nothing other than simply resting in the state of nongrasping called “not thinking of or pondering on anything”,

<sup>131</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.175cd–176: *da lta'i phyag rgya chen po ni || phal cher rgya nag chos lugs yin || na ro dang ni me tri ba'i || phyag rgya chen po gang yin pa || de ni las dang chos dang ni || dam tshig dang ni phyag rgya che || gsang sngags rgyud nas ji skad du || gsungs pa de nyid khong bzhed do ||* See Rhoton 2002, 305 (Tib.); 119 (Eng.).

<sup>132</sup> A less technical-sounding rendering would be “those who have the potential for all-at-once [realization].”

<sup>133</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.186–187: *gang dag theg chen dad thob pa || de dag sngar sbyangs yin pas na || da lta dbang bskur mi dgos zer || 'o na so sor thar pa yi || sdom pa dag la mos pa yang || snga ma'i sdom pa yod pa'i phyir || da lta rab ru dbyung ci dgos ||* See Rhoton 2002, 304 (Tib.); 120 (Eng.).

<sup>134</sup> This once again alludes to *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161ab: *blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.): “The Great Seal meditation of the ignorant, it is taught, usually becomes a cause of animal birth.”

such an individual who is generally [considered to be] of dull capacity—one who has neither gone through the purification of studying and thinking about the view of the Pāramitāyāna nor experienced even the preparations for embarking on the path of the Vajrayāna—is then shown this Mahāmudrā view by the teacher. When this has indubitably arisen, then to such a student whom it is not appropriate to categorize as “stupid”, the teacher without imparting any of the sequence of trainings [according to different] capacities shows [him], in the preliminary phase of preparation, [how] to let the triad of body, speech, and mind rest naturally in their uncontrived state. However, if by that alone one has become immersed <sup>[398]</sup> in a state of nongrasping such that it appears to be something called “the real Mahāmudrā,” then that which has the character of a mental factor in a phase of “not pondering and not thinking anything” belonging to the mind stream of a stupid person is [just plain] ignorance because it is a mental factor that is diametrically opposed to the wisdom of awareness.

To substantiate that, if one asks what is the wisdom of awareness [and] what is fundamentally opposite to it? Wisdom arises in two ways: through the methods of the Pāramitā[yāna] and the methods of the Mantra [system]. The first is the wisdom of not finding anything at all when investigating the [putative] essence of persons and phenomena by means of logical reasoning based on studying and thinking. The second is the wisdom of great bliss that arises from empowerments and so on. By contrast, the [state of] not thinking or pondering anything at all by an ignorant person in these phases is subsumed under the ignorance in the ground phase. Among the two types of ignorance—afflictive (*nyon mongs pa can*) and nonafflictive—it is the latter and [characterized as] a disorientation regarding suchness. Whereas these are subsumed under the latter of the two, actions motivated by the [afflicted ignorance]<sup>135</sup> were said to usually establish an animal [rebirth]<sup>136</sup> because it is explained that individual actions associated with each of the three poisons are actions that establish the three lower destinies. [This is what Sa skya Paṇḍita] had in mind.

*Query*<sup>137</sup>: Don’t you also accept that there is no grasping in the main practice of meditative equipoise pertaining to the view? [*Reply*:] Certainly, however it is necessary to distinguish kinds of application given the difference between [1] a [type of] settling (*’jog pa po*) in nongrasping which is insight that realizes the abiding mode and [2] [a type] which is ignorance. To continue, it was said [*Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161c]:

<sup>135</sup> The referent of the instrumentalized demonstrative *des* is confusing here but would seem to refer to the afflicted form of ignorance since the passage concerns actions motivated by the three poisons (or afflictions) that lead to rebirth in the lower three realms of hell-beings, hungry spirits or animals.

<sup>136</sup> See above, n. 134.

<sup>137</sup> The (probably hypothetical) query is posed by a Mahāmudrā adherent to an unidentified Sa skya pa critic.

... if not that, they are born in the formless realm<sup>138</sup> [399]

In the preliminary phase, having laid a foundation that is not embraced by the skillful means of the Secret Mantrayāna, one proceeds, without relying on the insight that distinguishes the two truths, to take as the preliminary the view that “phenomena in all there variety are like space”, that “apprehended objects are nothing whatsoever”, and that coarse conceptions are flaws. Then during the main practice phase as well, once a clear perception (*gsal snang*) of that has arisen, then the settling [in equipoise] is [just] the formless meditation which is in common with the non-Buddhists. Since even this [meditation] of yours is not other than a meditative settling into nongrasping both in states of preparation and main practice, [Sa skya Paṇḍita] had this thought in mind.<sup>139</sup>

To continue, it was said [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161d]:

... or else they fall into the disciples’ cessation<sup>140</sup>

This refers not to the state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) and the *nirvāṇa* without remainder (*nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*), but to a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation or to the state of nonideation (*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*).<sup>141</sup> The proof of that is that the view which is not linked with the two stages of the Mantra [system] has to be the Madhyamaka view. But if [this view] is not linked with the accumulation of merit for incalculable eons, then it is termed “śrāvakas’ cessation” which entails passing into a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation. This is because whatever drawbacks there are in actualizing the limit of reality (*bhūtaḥ*), without having engaged in the triad of perfecting, maturing, and purifying, are present in that [*nirvāṇa* of annihilation]. It is also because it is explained that even [bodhisattvas] when they have for a long time dwelled in the equipoise of emptiness on the eighth level, not to mention beginners, need to be aroused from that [state] by the victors. This is demonstrated [in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162ab]:

Even if that meditation may be excellent,

<sup>138</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161c: *min na gzugs med kham su skye* || See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.). This is the continuation of the preceding quotation.

<sup>139</sup> Shākya mchog ldan appears to base his remark on Sa skya Paṇḍita’s criticism in the latter’s *Thub pa’i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba’i bstan bcos*, 105<sub>15</sub>–106<sub>16</sub> where he goes in the details of this issue.

<sup>140</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.161d: *yang na nyan thos ’gog par ltung* || See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.). This again continues from the preceding quotation.

<sup>141</sup> The state of nonideation (short for *naivasamjñānāsamjñāsamāpatti*, “state of neither ideation nor nonideation”) pertains to the fourth and highest level of the four formless states of existences, here also referred to as a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation, since it involves a long period of stagnation in a formless state in which ideations are neither fully present or absent so long as *karma* remains operative.



It is no more than a Madhyamaka meditation.<sup>142</sup>

Alternatively, if <sub>[400]</sub> fools who have not previously gone into even a single teaching of any higher or lower vehicle are taught right from the start according your method of guidance in Mahāmudrā, then as is stated in the *Abhi[dharmakośa]*:

Mind and mental factors cease in [the state of] neither ideation nor nonideation (*naivasamjñānāsamjñā*).<sup>143</sup>

As explained here, there is the drawback of an absurd consequence because in this context there is no ascertainment through reasoning, nor does there appear any explanation that accessing the dharma of the Mantra tradition definitely requires preliminaries. If one thinks that [this occurs] through the blessing of the *bla ma*, this is indisputable provided that *bla ma* is a Mantra[yāna] *bla ma*, as in the explanation “One who does not bestow empowerments is no *bla ma*.” [According to *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.347d–f]:

Even if the result arose from a single [cause],  
It would be like the śrāvakas’ cessation.<sup>144</sup>

For these reasons, where emptiness is taught to foolish individuals and they also cultivate it without even understanding it, it is said to have the nature of temporarily [causing rebirth] in hell—not to mention animal [rebirth]—and of ultimately not passing into *nirvāṇa*. [According to Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XIII.8]

[Emptiness is declared by the victors to be  
The purgative<sup>145</sup> of all [metaphysical] views.]  
But those for whom emptiness is a view

<sup>142</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.162ab: *gal te de ni bsgom legs kyang || dbu ma’i bsgom las lhag pa med ||* See Rhoton 2002, 303 (Tib.); 117 (Eng.).

<sup>143</sup> *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, D4090, 74b: *’du shes med pa pa ’du shes || med par sems dang sems byung rnams || ’gog pa’o ||* Sanskrit, AK, (Ed. Thakur, 1975) chapt. II, verse 42, 68<sub>13–17</sub>: *nīrodhaś cittacaittānām vipākah ||* The state of neither ideation nor nonideation (*naivasamjñānāsamjñā*) pertains to the fourth *dhyāna* state.

<sup>144</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.347df: *gal te gcig las ’bras bu zhig || byung yang nyan thos ’gog pa bzhin || ’bras bu de yang gcig tu ’gyur ||* See Rhoton 2002, 313 (Tib.); 141 (Eng.).

<sup>145</sup> The Sanskrit *niḥsaraṇam* (Tib. *nges par ’byin pa*) here seems to convey the sense of “a remedy to get rid of”, i.e., a purgative. See Böhtlingk and Monier-Williams s.v. *niḥsaraṇa*.

Are declared to be incurable<sup>146, 147</sup>.

And [Nāgārjuna also] said [in *Ratnāvali* II.20]

Fools who pride themselves in being learned,  
Having a nature corrupted by rejecting [emptiness],  
Plunge headlong into the Avīci hell.<sup>148</sup>

And it is said that if emptiness is taught to such fools—as in the words [of Śāntideva] “when emptiness is imparted to sentient beings whose minds are not properly trained”<sup>149</sup>—then the teacher commits a root downfall.

[*Query*:] What happens if this Mahāmudrā of ours is taught to learned people and cultivated by them? [*Reply*:] There are <sup>[401]</sup> two types of learned persons: those who trained their mind-stream through the Perfection Vehicle and those who fully matured through the authentic bestowal of empowerments. Where this Dwags po Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā is taught by a *bla ma* known as the “teacher” to either of these two, not only is there not the slightest fault [in it], but individuals who are worthy vessels are directly introduced to profound suchness. This is because, at the time of teaching the Madhyamaka view, when the time is ripe to show learned people who have previously trained in studying and thinking the view of the main practice, this is nothing other than settling spontaneously into the uncontrived state, not thinking anything (*cir mi yang sems*), not mentally engaging in anything (*gang du yang yid la mi byed*). It is also because, in this context, it has been explained that even discriminating insight itself must cease, as in the example of the flame that arises from rubbing two sticks together.<sup>150</sup>

The master Atiśa explained that

Candrakīrti is the student of Nāgārjuna.  
By the *upadeśas* transmitted through them,

<sup>146</sup> Sanskrit term *āsadhya* has various meanings including [1] unable to be completed or accomplished, [2] not susceptible of proof, and [3] incurable or irremediable. The Tibetan rendering as *bsgrub tu med pa* seems to be based on either [1] or [2] but the context suggests [3] as the more natural reading.

<sup>147</sup> MMK 13.7–8 (Ye 2011 ed.): Skt.: *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnām proktā niḥsaraṇam jinaiḥ | yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādrṣṭis tāt asādhyaṇ babhāṣire ||* [8]. Tib.: *| lta kun nges par ’byung bar gsungs || gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba || de dag bsgrub tu med par gsungs ||* [8]

<sup>148</sup> *Rājaparīkathāratnāvali* I.120, D 4158, 111a<sub>7</sub>–111b<sub>1</sub>. Skt. Hahn 1982 ed. [*aparo ’py asya durjñānān*] *mūrkhaḥ paṇḍitamānikaḥ | pratikṣepavinaṣṭātmā yāty avīcim adhomukhaḥ ||*

<sup>149</sup> *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, D 3940 43a<sub>7</sub>. This occurs as the fifth in a list of twelve root downfalls.

<sup>150</sup> See also above, 40, 70 and Volume I, 139 f., 140 n. 376 et passim.

The truth of *dharmatā* will be realized.<sup>151</sup>

As for the recognition of these *upadeśas*, he composed the treatise entitled *Madhyamakopadeśa*<sup>152</sup> wherein the main practice—the way of settling into meditative equipoise—was set forth exactly in the way it was presented in the written instructions on that [topic] by the Mahāmudrā proponents.

Also in regard to the second [type]—the learned ones who have matured through empowerments—when [they are] taught precisely according to the teaching methods of the [Mahā]mudrā proponents, it is extremely profound and excellent. [This is] because this way of resting evenly in wisdom right after the bestowal of the forth empowerment, [that] of all the realized scholars who lived in India and Tibet was set forth in exactly the same way as it was taught in this teaching method of the Mahāmudrā instructions.

Be that as it may, [402] while it is true that those learned in the perfections familiarize themselves with the view of emptiness, as long as they have not fully perfected all the accumulations of merits in the course of many countless eons, it will not be possible to actualize that view in post-meditation because they instead fall into the extreme of a *nirvāṇa* of annihilation. When understood in this way, the saying [by defenders of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā]: “Lam 'bras meditation by the ignorant usually becomes a cause of animal rebirth as well”<sup>153</sup> is not comparable because the way of teaching Lam 'bras to the ignorant is [as follows]. In the beginning, the mind-stream is purified through the ordinary vehicle by way of the three appearances<sup>154</sup>. In the middle phase, one generates the mind directed toward great awakening (*mahābodhicitta*). Thereafter, the mind-stream is matured through the vase-empowerment, and the view of the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is divulged. This kind of teaching is no different from the main practice of the methods of guidance of Mahāmudrā because it is exactly what they are talking about when they say that appearances are mind, that this mind is empty of anything that could be established as a shape and so on, and that the indivisibility of its natural luminosity and being empty of concepts is called the view consisting in the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

Likewise, the Lam 'bras proponents teach that the view known as “self-occurring coemergent wisdom” that arises from the first three empowerments [and] is inseparable from the method of great bliss is the actual wisdom of *mahāmudrā*. However, the Sa skya pa do not maintain that it is necessary to first produce the view and then, in the middle phase of

<sup>151</sup> *Satvyadvayāvatāra*, D 3902, 72b<sub>4-5</sub>. Verses 15d–16ab.

<sup>152</sup> D3829.

<sup>153</sup> Quotation not identified.

<sup>154</sup> The ground or preparation for the practice in the Lam 'bras system of the Sa skya pa which correspond to the perfection vehicle: impure appearances, the appearances of meditative experiences and pure appearances.

sustaining it, to analyze it by discriminating insight and to [finally] cultivate it with analysis and [more] analysis<sup>155</sup>.

2.2.2. The way how the followers of this [Mahāmudrā] in latter-day period do not conclusively explain<sup>156</sup> their own respective traditions <sup>[403]</sup> is twofold:

2.2.2.1. How the latter-day Sa skya pa followers do not explain their [own tradition]

2.2.2.2. How the latter-day Bka' brgyud followers do not explain their [own tradition]

2.2.2.1. [Sa skya misrepresentations:]<sup>157</sup> Those who do not correctly understand the point of [Sa paṇ's] refutation of the Self-sufficient White Remedy think that the whole collection of ways of conduct must be practiced by leaving the conventional, however things appear, be just as it is without negating it. Thus when everything is determined to be emptiness, they absurdly conclude that this is the Self-sufficient White Remedy. Having this in mind, they promote this version of the dharma. They do not differentiate between the categories of the two vehicles. In the case of the Pāramitāyāna, the following words [from Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga* 21ab] apply just as stated: "Because [the conventional] corresponds to appearances, don't subject it to analysis."<sup>158</sup> However, in the Mantra[yāna], all ways of conduct, whether one is in meditative equipoise or not, must be practiced from within the state of emptiness.

[Assertion:] It has been stated that while [phenomena] are empty of reality, the appearances of subject and object are not negated [or do not cease]. [Response:] While such an explanation represents a tradition of those late-comers in the Land of Snow who harbored antipathy toward the earlier traditions, it does not represent the tradition of the Sa skya pa. This is because the Sa skya pas, considering the meaning of the Mantra [vehicle], have statements [claiming] that the entire complex of *skandhas*, *dhātus*, and *āyatanas* is empty in the sense of not being perceived, but do not have statements [claiming] that [it] is empty in the sense of not being perceived *as real*.

[Assertion:] Though all conduct of Secret Mantra is indeed established on the basis of wisdom, it is not a view. [Response:] What is wisdom realizing emptiness is a view, as in the example of nonreferential compassion. Hence there is entailment (*khyab* : *vyāpti*). Great bliss, the cornerstone of skill in means, <sup>[404]</sup> is also the wisdom of emptiness. In this way, [the reason]

<sup>155</sup> Literally "to analyze and analyze and cultivate" (*dpyad cing dpyad cing bsgom*).

<sup>156</sup> By saying the modern-day scholars do not conclusively explain (*dpyis phyin par mi 'chad*) their respective traditions, the author implies that they do not do justice to the ultimate intent of these traditions as it had been understood by their earlier masters.

<sup>157</sup> Here begins a series of assertions made by modern-day Sa skya masters concerning Mahāmudrā which is followed by Shakya mchog ldan's critical response to these claims.

<sup>158</sup> *Satyadvayavibhaṅga* 21ab. See Eckel 1987, 89 and clarification of Lindtner 1990, 256–57.

is established. Were it not established, [your thesis, that tantric conduct cannot be a view] would be negated due to the fact of the inseparability of bliss and emptiness.<sup>159</sup>

[*Query:*] Now when [Sa paṇ] attributed to his opponent the proposition that “Nāgārjuna was liberated through realizing the view”<sup>160</sup> [and that various siddhas were liberated through various other means]<sup>161</sup>, then don’t all the [ensuing] refutations such as “Hence, none of the siddhas was liberated through a unilateral technique”<sup>162</sup> end up backfiring. [*Reply:*] This indeed refutes those existing scholars who say that the view of the Pāramitāyāna alone is sufficient and that the various kinds of interdependent means [of Mantrayāna] are not necessary. However, where is there any contradiction in characterizing the view as that wisdom in the context of practice wherein the full spectrum of the paths of skillful means of Secret Mantra having as their essence the unity of clarity and emptiness?

[*Assertion:*] Again, the modern-day Sa skya pa followers thinking unequivocally that the realization of the Secret Mantra view requires the preliminary analysis of insight as taught in the Madhyamaka, promote this version of the dharma. And they speak [this way] based on the assumption that if one accepts that emptiness is realized only with the blessing of the teacher, one becomes an opponent of this [Sa skya] tradition. [*Response:*] That is not the case because the assertion of the noble Sa skyas is that although the goal to be realized in both Mahāyāna traditions—the view of freedom from elaborations—is the same, it is due to the absence of the means of realization in the Pāramitāyāna that this view is held to be [a matter of] realization.

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<sup>159</sup> The opponent’s thesis (*pratiñā*) is that although all tantric conduct is established on the basis of wisdom, it is not a view. Shākya mchog ldan’s counter-thesis is that tantric conduct is a view. The entailment (*vyāpti*) is that wisdom realizing emptiness (= *līṅga*: reason) is a view (= *sādhya*: to be proven), as in the example (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) of nonreferential compassion. Now, given that great bliss, the cornerstone of (compassionate) skill in means, is also the wisdom of emptiness, it is established that tantric conduct is a view. If unestablished, the opponent’s thesis (*pratiñā*) that tantric conduct cannot be a view would be negated due to the fact of the inseparability of bliss and emptiness. The author here employs a three-step chain of reasoning (known as ‘*khōr gsum*, ‘triple circle’) which is used in Tibetan debate to force an opponent, who has been boxed in by the refutation, to accept, on the basis of his own presuppositions, conclusions at odds with his own original thesis. The three circles are: proof or reason (‘*grub*), entailment (*khyab*) and elimination (*bsal*): defeat is admitted when one is forced accept a proof entailed by valid cognition that eliminates or undermines one’s original thesis. Thus by considering the entailment, one must accept the proof, and thus abandon one’s thesis. This follows the well-known Indian Buddhist paradigm of syllogistic reasoning involving the subject (*chos can* : *dharmin*), the predicate to be proven (*bsgrub bya’i chos* : *sādhya*dharma), and the sign (*rtaḥ* : *līṅga*) or reason.

<sup>160</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.105c: *lta ba rtogs pas klu sgrub grol* || See Rhoton 2002, 300 (Tib.); 109 (Eng.).

<sup>161</sup> Sa skya paṇḍita argues at some length in *Sdom gsum rab dbye* III.105–119 that despite the accounts of various siddhas being liberated through various different skillful means, they were all exclusively liberated through the dawning of wisdom as a result of the Generation and Completion Stages of Vajrayāna.

<sup>162</sup> *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, III.110ab: *des na grub thob thams cad kyang* || *phyogs re’i thabs kyis grol ba min* || See Rhoton 2002, 300 (Tib.); 110 (Eng.). Note that Shākya mchog ldan’s text has *stongs* instead of the *thabs* given in the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.

[*Query:*] What are these means? [*Reply:*] They are claimed to consist in [1] working with the vital points of the adamantine body (*vajrakāya*) through the stages of the invitation of the wisdom beings in the phase of preparations, blessing from within through the bestowal of the vase-empowerment and the secret empowerment during the phase of the main practice, and [2] actualizing the wisdom of the view by depending on the Prajñāmudrā [tantric consort] <sup>[405]</sup> at the time of the higher empowerment.

Moreover, it is also not the case that it was not accepted that there could be the eliciting of the wisdom of emptiness merely through the blessings of the teacher and the devotion of the student without preliminary analysis by reasoning based on thinking because there are claims like this in the compositions *Five Stages of Cakrasaṃvara*,<sup>163</sup> *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*<sup>164</sup> and *Stages of Instructions of Great Simplicity*<sup>165</sup>.

In short, the explanation that to realize the view of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra it is unequivocally necessary to rely on a conclusive determination through Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka reasonings is not the tradition of those who found certainty in the view of the noble Sa skya pas.

#### 2.2.2.2. How the latter-day Bka' brgyud followers do not explain their [own tradition]

[*Assertions:*] As for the second [section], some of the latter-day Dwags po pa Bka' rgyud tradition-holders think that the identification of emptiness, the object of this Mahāmudrā view, is explained as the aspect of a nonaffirming negation in accordance with the Rang stong Madhyamaka tradition. And they think that as an adjunct to giving rise to the view which realizes that, it must be preceded by the logical reasonings of the Niḥsvabhāva-vāda [Mādhyamikas]. Others yet appear to be of the opinion that although the object of the view must be characterized as coemergent wisdom, as an adjunct to realizing this, it must be preceded by the analysis through the reasoning that at first there is no object, and subsequently that, since there is no object, there must also be no subject, and so forth.

[*Responses:*] It is not tenable to [construe] emptiness that is the object of the view presented in the *Dohās* as a nonaffirming negation because while the claim that this Madhyamaka view is self-aware wisdom was emphatically negated by the teachers Bhāviveka and Candra[kīrti], <sup>[406]</sup> it was emphatically affirmed in these [*dohās*]. Neither do [the *dohās*] conform with Rang stong vis-à-vis the method of negating the object of negation because in

<sup>163</sup> *Śrīcakrasaṃvarapañcakrama*, D1433, wa 224b–227a, attributed to Luipa (Rdo rje dril bu).

<sup>164</sup> This likely refers to Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's *Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor*. See *Sa paṅ gsung 'bum* (dpe bsdur ma) Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, Pe cing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007, vol. 2, 92–108. Shākya mchog ldan himself authored a text with the title: *Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor*. See *Shākya mchog ldan gsung 'bum*. SCsb(B); vol. 17, 75–79.

<sup>165</sup> *Shin tu spros pa med pa'i khrid yig gi zhal shes dang gsung sgros nam bris pa'i spros med mdzes rgyan*. See *Kun dga' bzang po gsung 'bum*. *The Complete works of Ngor-chen kun-dga'-bzang-po*. 4 vols., Dehradun: Sakya Centre, 1997, vol. 2, 750–90.

this Rang stong system, even coemergent wisdom when analyzed by reasoning about one and many turns out to be nonexistent, along with [its] aspects of mere bliss and clarity, whereas in the [*dohās*], “mind as such alone” is left un-negated, and a statement [stanza 20ab] from [Sara-ha’s] *Dohā in Forty [Stanzas]* outlined the grave drawbacks of ascertaining self-luminous self-awareness in terms of self-emptiness:

By analyzing mind in terms of one and many [and thus]  
Abandoning luminosity, one strays into worldly existence.<sup>166</sup>

Were it necessary that this view be preceded by logical reasoning, this would contradict the statement that “since the three Great Ones are views that are intellectually fabricated, we do not accept them in this [tradition].”<sup>167</sup>

And although when it comes to coemergent wisdom, the belief in extremes such as existence and nonexistence is explained as what is to be relinquished, the explanation that this very wisdom is self-empty does not appear at all in the root [texts] of this tradition.

The second tradition [i.e., Other-emptiness] is also not the intent for the following reasons. The exegetical tradition of Other-emptiness Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma*) reasoning ascertains first that appearances are mind, then that outer objects are not established, and then that the inner apprehender is not established. However, in these [*dohās*], leaving appearances just as they are, one proceeds to not adulterate them with conceptual grasping. Then in the post-meditation of this tradition, without subjecting the manifold display and the luminous nature of mind as such to the operations of conceptual analysis, to simply settle into [407] the self-luminous non-grasping is the method of resting in meditative equipoise of this tradition. Consequently, in this tradition, there is nothing good about the view of meditative equipoise and nothing bad about post-meditation. Even still, their distinctive features are to let the nature of phenomena remain in a state of nongrasping [in meditation] and to let phenomena remain free from elaboration [in post-meditation].

As to the claim that even if conceptual grasping is switched off by leaving the mind spontaneously present in its uncontrived state, if one has not engaged in the conclusive determination through the Madhyamaka reasonings, it will be impossible to have a pure view and to eliminate the seeds of what is to be relinquished. This is the style of those harboring aversion toward [Mahā]mudrā followers, but not of those having conviction.

Likewise the identification of emptiness during the phases described as “the object being appearance-emptiness”, “the subject being clarity-emptiness”, and “the body being

<sup>166</sup> *Caryādohākoṣagītikā* (*Spyod pa'i do ha mdzod kyi glu*) D2347, verse 20a–b, p.27b<sub>6-7</sub>.

<sup>167</sup> This appears to be a paraphrase of the previously mentioned unidentified quotation attributed to Sgam po pa. See above, 16 and 157 et passim.

bliss-emptiness” has to be explained in terms of these three—the object and the rest—being [respectively] empty of reality, of essence and of self-nature. But to explain it as being empty of concepts is not an adequate representation of emptiness. This too is the style of those harbouring aversion toward [Mahā]mudrā followers, but not the style of those having conviction because without conceptually fabricating and manipulating the whole spectrum of appearance and existence, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—whatever arises as objects of consciousness—the proponents of this tradition must accept this wisdom which has become self-liberated of its own accord where there is no grasping as the wisdom of the Mahāmudrā of unity. Also, as for comprehending [this] unity, it is said that “while [things] appear, they are nonetheless devoid of grasping, and while devoid of [grasping] they nonetheless appear”. Conversely, to explain that this manifold appearance is verified by valid epistemic instruments (*tshad mas grub*) and that it is empty of being real as so verified (*grub bzhin du bden*)<sup>[408]</sup> is not the style of those dedicated to the [Mahā]mudrā adepts.

[Mahā]mudrā proponents ascertain the view by understanding that all that appears as objects of consciousness is a delusory appearance and that the entire range of delusory appearances are apparitions of the mind, but they do not depend on Madhyamaka reasoning. Among the teachings of spiritual guides (*man ngag pa*) of yore it is stated explicitly that “dialecticians (*mtshan nyid pa*) make outward observations, severing superimpositions outwardly. Yoga-practitioners make inward observations, severing superimpositions inwardly”.<sup>168</sup> The meaning established by such statements is that this view of the [Mahā]mudrā practitioners is exactly the view taught in the third [*dharma*]cakra.

Moreover, from among the two, the system of severing superimpositions and the system of experiencing, this tradition of the [Mahā]mudrā practitioner is the latter. Concerning the former, there are the two great traditions, the system of Self-emptiness and the system of Other-emptiness. However, the [Mahā]mudrā practitioner follows neither. The view of severing superimpositions by means of studying and thinking is taken [by him or her] to be an intellectually fabricated view and a poisonous view. As for the arising of the wisdom of *mahāmudrā*, it is not asserted that this must unequivocally depend on the bestowal of the higher empowerments, let alone on the logical reasoning of the Madhyamaka. Nevertheless, an unmistakable view grounded in first-hand experience that has arisen due to familiarizing oneself with the stream of studying and thinking, and the self-occurring coemergent wisdom that has come about due to the bestowal of the higher empowerments must definitely be accepted as the view of Mahāmudrā [as well]. Thus it is established.

<sup>168</sup> Quotation not identified. Padma dkar po (1527–1592) writes a few decades later in his *Phyag chen gyi zin bris*, PKsb vol. 21, 384<sub>1-2</sub>: “This type of analysis is called the analytical meditation of a *kusāli* because it is an analysis through inward-directed self-awareness. It is not the analytical meditation of a *paṇḍita* because [that is] an analysis through outward-looking [conventional] knowledge.” *de lta bu'i dpyad pa ni kha nang du bltas pa'i rang rig gis dpyod pa'i phyir | ku sa li'i dpyad sgom zhes bya la | paṇḍita'i dpyad sgom ni ma yin te | de dag kha phyir lta'i shes pas dpyod pas so ||*



Let it be stated here<sup>169</sup>: In bygone times in this Land of the Snows, the two sects of Bka' [gdams pa] and [Mahā]mudrā dispelled the darkness of living beings [409] by upholding their respective victory banners of exegesis (*bshad pa*) and praxis (*sgrub pa*), [thereby] illuminating and beautifying everything like the sun and the moon.

The Sa skya pa, preserving the integrity of their own traditions of both exegesis and praxis [in connection] with all sūtras and mantras<sup>170</sup> purified the jewel of the doctrine of this land of snow, applying all manner of cleansing activities.

Although there have been many eloquent expositions by the author himself [Sa paṇ] as well as his bright followers, they became saturated with the stains of exegetical fallacies imputed by many people with inferior intelligence in the following ways:

It is said that the object of the view of Mahāmudrā of unity is nothing but self-emptiness, a nonaffirming negation. [Yet] to claim that great bliss taken as an object of a nonaffirming negation is a concept is not the doctrine of [Sa paṇ].

It is said that wisdom being unreal, empty of an essence, is the meaning of the unity of bliss and emptiness. [Rather] it is the three aspects of bliss, clarity and appearance being empty of grasping that is held to be the meaning of unity.

It is said that the stages of a view superior to the freedom from elaboration of the Pāramitā[yāna] does not exist in the Mantra[yāna]. [Yet] he [Sa paṇ] claimed four distinctive features of the [Mantra] view in the context of the four empowerments such as the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

As for reasoning that ascertains freedom from extremes, although he did not accept [anything] superior to the Madhyamaka, [he] did explain the superiority of [Mantra] objects of knowledge: the experiential view, natural coemergence, and coemergent melting bliss.

It is said that the identification of the ultimate in the Sa skya system is freedom from elaborations of the four extremes. [Yet] the venerable master Grags pa<sup>171</sup> has clearly explained the freedom from elaborations of the four extremes as the veridical conventional.

It is said that the statement ‘that which is *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*’<sup>172</sup> [410] is explained as signifying the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. [Yet] being empty of grasping phenomena

<sup>169</sup> Here begins the closing section of the work written in nine-syllable meter.

<sup>170</sup> The expression *mdo sngags* is a coordinative (*dvandva*) compound quasi-synonymous with *mdo rgyud* “sūtras and tantras”.

<sup>171</sup> Sa skya rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216), the third of the five patriarchs of the Sa skya tradition (*sa skya gong ma rnam lnga*).

<sup>172</sup> Quote from the *Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya* by Sthiramati, D 4034, vol. 125, 78a<sub>5</sub>–78a<sub>6</sub>: ‘*khor ba gang yin pa de nyid mya ngan las 'das pa yin* with a slight variation in the wording.

comprising appearances and sounds is explained as the meaning of unity, the inseparability of the two truths.

It is said that the emptiness [deduced by] analysis by means of Madhyamaka reasoning is the definitive meaning of the Secret Mantra system. [Yet] he [Sgam po pa] declared that the view of emptiness understood by studying and thinking is a poisonous view.

It is said that if reifications are not analyzed through Madhyamaka reasoning, the emptiness of the Secret Mantrayāna will not be realized. [Yet] the skillful means of realizing emptiness through empowerment is held to be the skillful means of the Vajrayāna.

It is said that *mahāmudrā* is preceded by analysis through reasoning, even by some Bka' brgyud [Mahā]mudrā followers. [Yet] this does not accord with the texts of Saraha, nor was this explained in all the authoritative instructional manuals.

It is said that the object of view in the main practice of Mahāmudrā is that which was explained by the glorious Candrakīrti. [Yet] the object of view in the Mahāmudrā of the noble Saraha is explained as coemergent primordial wisdom itself.

It is said that the great bliss, ultimate *mahāmudrā*, is inseparable from the nonaffirming negation of self-emptiness. [Yet] Saraha explained that when the essence of bliss is analyzed through reasoning, it leads to worldly existence.

It is said that the determination that everything conventional is a delusion is the fundamental view of Mahāmudrā. However, latter-day scholars say that the conventional is validly established. With this statement, aren't [they] just singing a repetitive song?

It is said that the object of the profound view of the Bka' gdams system is what is to be realized by the valid instruments of direct [perception] and inferential [reasoning]. [Yet] the glorious Atiśa said that such explanations are the system of the ignorant who have a superficial perspective. [411]

It is said that the main practice of the Bka' gdams view is conceptual cognition (*zhen pa'i blo*) because it is a mode of apprehension that opposes the view of self (*ātmadṛṣṭi*). [Yet] the glorious Atiśa presented not thinking, not pondering, and not being mentally engaged as the main practice of the view.

It is said that the validly established conventional is the unsurpassable way of positing the two truths of the Bka' gdams [tradition]. [Yet] it is clear from all the Bka' gdams texts that the conventional is said to be delusory appearances.

It is said that continuous reliance on the certitude of analytical meditation is the instruction of Po to ba. [Yet] Atiśa taught that even discriminating wisdom is consumed by the fire-tongues of emptiness.

According to a few renowned luminaries who appeared in later generations, the great strands of exegesis of the individual traditions and the full range of topics of view and meditation of most among all the upholders of the exegetical and practice transmissions that had appeared in the Land of Snow in former times—i.e., those lineage-holders of yore [with their] countless light-garlands of the sun and moon of scripture and reasoning—have gone to sleep in the bed of darkness.

Deluded perceptions feed on the brilliance of the sun and moon and are able to harm the great earth [Sa skya tradition]<sup>173</sup> of the completely perfect doctrine. [But] some adepts in playing the tenfold<sup>174</sup> game of applying scripture and reasoning [can] soar unimpededly through the sky of definitive meaning.

This *The Great Ship of Unity: A Treatise Dispelling Errors in the Interpretation of Mahāmudrā of Scripture and Reasoning* was composed by the glorious Shākya mchog ldan Dri med legs pa'i blo in the seminary called Thub bstan gser mdog chen in response to some questions regarding the treatise *Sdom pa gsum kyi rab tu dbye pa* [by Sa skya Paṇḍita] which were eloquently posed by the spiritual friend Karma Dbang phyug dpal who advocates a wide range of scriptural traditions. The scribe was Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. Mangalam.

### 3b. Critical Edition of *Zung 'jug gi gru chen*<sup>175</sup>

[385] *phyag rgya chen po'i shan 'byed* bzhugs || na mo buddha ya | nyon mongs pa dang shes bya yi || sgrib kun sel byed dam pa'i chos || de ston mdzad dang de 'dzin la || rab tu gus pas phyag btsal nas || sngon dus gangs can yul ljongs su || nges don nyi ma che 'bar ba || sgrib byed sprin stug dang bral yang || mkhas 'ga' brtag cing dpyod par mdzad || de<sup>176</sup> dus stong nyid nyi ma ni || mun pa'i mal du gzims gyur nas || lo grangs brgya phrag gcig tu nye || stong nyid 'chol gtam gcig tu 'dres || **zla 'od gzhon nu**'i nges don la || phyag rgya chen po'i mtshan 'dogs pa || 'thad dang mi 'thad tsam zhig ni || sngon gyi 'bel ba'i gtam du snang || de dus so so'i lugs 'dzin pa | [386] mtha dag rang rang lugs bor nas || phyi dus rang bzo'i<sup>177</sup> lam chen por || kun kyang zhugs zin ma yin nam || zhes mchod par brjod cing rtsom pa dam bca' ba sngon du btang nas | skabs

<sup>173</sup> This penultimate stanza exploits the double meaning of *sa chen* (“great earth”) which refers at once to the great Sa skya tradition and to the great earth. This polysemy extends to the use of other metaphors in this stanza: the sun and moon which illuminate the great earth allude to the lucid applications of scripture and reasoning by the earlier Sa skya masters who illuminated their tradition; and the gluttonous pot-bellied fire-swallowing demon Vajradāka (referred to as *za byed*, “devourer”, also an epithet of fire), a form of Vajrapāṇi, alludes to the latter-day Sa skya interpreters who feed on the inspired brilliance (*spobs pa*) of the past luminaries but whose mistaken interpretations only feed their deluded perceptions.

<sup>174</sup> We were unable to determine what the “tenfold game of applying scripture and reasoning” alludes to.

<sup>175</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub> vol. 17, 355<sub>1</sub>–379; SCsb<sub>(B)</sub> vol. 17, 385<sub>4</sub>–412; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub> vol 17, 468<sub>3</sub>–499.

<sup>176</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *deng*

<sup>177</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *gzo'i*

su bab pa'i 'bel gtam du gleng ba ni | ji skad du | da lta'i phyag rgya chen po dang || rgya nag  
lugs kyi rdzogs chen gnyis || yas 'bab mas 'dzeg ces bya ba || rim gyis pa dang cig car ba'i ||  
ming 'dogs sgyur ba ma gtogs pa || don la khyad par 'ga' yang med || ces dang || blun pos  
phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs || min na gzugs med khams su  
skye || yang na nyan thos 'gog par ltung || gal te de ni bsgom legs kyang || dbu ma'i bsgom las  
'da' ba med || dbu ma'i bsgom de bzang mod kyi || de nyid 'grub pa shin tu dka' || grangs med  
gsum gyi dka' spyad dgos || zhes pa la |

dri ba dang | lan no | dang po gal te | phyag chen yas 'bab kyi lta ba dang | **hwa**<sup>178</sup> **shang** gi lam  
cig car ba'i lta ba khyad med na | phyag chen pas | byams pa snying rje pha rol tu phyin pa lnga  
dang | byang chub sems dpa'i sems bskyed sogs lam du mi 'dod par 'gyur la | 'dod na phyag  
chen pas thabs kyi cha de dag la shin tu gces che bar bshad pa dang 'gal |

yang phyag chen gyi lta ba dkar po chig thub tu mi 'thad na | sher phyin gyi nang du phar phyin  
drug ka 'dus par 'chad pa dang 'gal | zhes rgol ba dang |

yang phyag chen blun pos bsgom pa de dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs zhes zer na | de ltar gsungs  
pa'i lung gang yin | de <sup>[387]</sup> de'i 'phen byed kyi rgyu dang | 'grub byed rgyu gang du 'chad |  
phyag chen gyi lta ba de nyon mongs par 'dod dam | des kun nas bslangs pa'i las su 'dod | de  
dag gang du 'dod kyang dbu ma'i lta ba de las dang nyon mongs pa gang rung du khas blangs  
na skyon ci yod | yang de dud 'gro'i rgyu byed pa de chos kyi skyon yin nam sgom pa po gang  
zag gi skyon yin | dang po ltar na | blun pos zer ci dgos | mkhas pas bsgom na yang | ngan song  
gi rgyur mi 'gro ba'i shes byed gang yin | gnyis pa ltar na | de'i tshe blun pos lam 'bras dang  
gsang 'dus rim lnga la sogs pa bsgom na yang dud 'gro'i rgyur mi mtshungs pa'i rgyu mtshan  
ci yin |

yang phyag chen bsgoms pas 'gog par ltung zhes pa'i 'gog pa de gang la byed | 'gog pa'i  
snyoms 'jug dang | lhag med kyi myang 'das gang la byed kyang | de dag mngon du byed pa  
la 'das lam dgos pas lta ba de rnam dag du 'gyur |

yang **hwa shang** gi lta ba dang **rje dwags po**'i lta ba don gcig pa min te | **rje dwags** pos mdzad  
pa'i lam mchog thar pa'i rgyan las | sher phyin gyi lta ba la so sor rtog pa'i shes rab kyi dpyad  
pa sngon du 'gro ba'i tshul rgyas par gsungs pa'i phyir | zhes pa'o |

gnyis pa la gnyis te | don gyis khog phub pa dang | dngos lan gdab pa'o | dang po la gnyis te |  
phyag rgya bar grags pa dag gis bzhed pa'i rtsa ba ngos bzung | rjes 'jug gi 'dod pas so sor  
btags pa'i tshul lo | dang po la gsum ste | rtsa ba'i gzhung gang las byung ba | dmigs pa yul gyi  
phyag rgya chen po <sup>[388]</sup> gang yin pa | dmigs byed blo'i phyag rgya chen po gang yin pa'o ||

dang po ni | **dpal sa ra ha**'i *gzhung dohā skor gsum* yan lag dang bcas pa ni 'di'i khungs so ||

<sup>178</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: hā

gnyis pa ni | gnyug ma sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba 'di nyid do || 'di la ni ming gi nram  
grangs | rang bzhin lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes dang | bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po dang | bde  
ba chen po dang | rang bzhin chos sku zhes bya'o ||

gsum pa ni | yul de nyid nyams su myong ba'i ye shes te | rjes mthun pa so skye la yang yod  
pa dang | mtshan nyid pa 'phags pa la yod pa'i dbye bas gnyis so |

de lta bu'i yul dang yul can gnyis ka la yang phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ste | phyag rgya 'dis  
ma btab pa dang ma thebs pa'i shes bya ci yang ma dmigs pa'i phyir ro | phyag rgya des ma  
thebs pa'i chos gang yang yod pa ma yin mod | de sngon du byed pa'i thabs ni gnyis te | phyi  
mtshan nyid kyi theg pa'i lugs dang | nang rnal 'byor pa'i lugs so ||

dang po ni | thos bsam gyi rigs pas gtan la 'bebs pa'o | de ltar gtan la phab nas sgom byung gi  
shes pas nyams su myong byar gyur pa'i gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po de la'ang ngos 'dzin  
tshul mi 'dra ba gnyis te | dbu ma ngo bo nyid med pa bas med dgag nam mkha' lta bur bzhed  
pa dang | dbu ma rnal 'byor spyod pa bas lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes su 'dod pa'o || de ltar 'dod  
pa de gnyis la thos bsam gyi rigs pas gtan la 'bebs tshul yang mi 'dra ba gnyis te | rang stong  
gi tshul gyis dang | gzhan stong gi tshul gyis so | lugs dang po las <sup>[389]</sup> byung ba'i nyams su  
myong bya de ni phyag chen gyi rtsa ba'i gzhung dang ma mthun mod kyang | mtha' bral du  
gtan la phab nas | zung 'jug du nyams su len pa zhes bya ba der 'chad pa ni | bka' brgyud<sup>179</sup>  
pa'i lugs kyi phyag chen der bzhag tu rung ba yin no |

gnyis pa nang rnal 'byor pa'i lugs su byas pa'i thabs mkhas la gsum ste | bla ma'i byin brlabs<sup>180</sup>  
kyi thabs mkhas la brten pa dang | ye shes pa phab pa'i thabs dang | dbang bskur ba'i thabs las  
mngon du byas pa'o | thabs 'di gsum gyis mngon du byas pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i lta ba de  
la ni so sor rtog pa'i shes rab kyi dpyad pa sngon<sup>181</sup> du 'gro dgos pa ma yin te | pha rol phyin  
pa dang sngags kyi lugs so so ba yin pa'i phyir |

lugs gnyis las phyi ma 'di khyad par du 'phags pa yin te | thabs de gsum gyi lta ba dug med  
skad cig tsam la mngon du byas pa'i phyir dang | lugs snga ma so sor rtog pa'i shes rab kyi<sup>182</sup>  
mngon du byas pa de ni rtog pa dang bcas pa'i phyir ro ||

myong byed kyi lta ba la khyad par yod pa kho nar ma zad nyams su myong bya'i nges don  
de yang phyi ma khyad par du 'phags pa yin te | lugs snga ma'i stong nyid med dgag de ni  
dngos por med pa dang spyi mtshan las ma 'das pas kun rdzob bden par bshad pa yin gyi | nges  
don du mi rung ba'i phyir dang | yul can blo rtog pa las ma 'das pa'i phyir | yang rgyud bla ma

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<sup>179</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *dkar rgyud*

<sup>180</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)(C)</sub>: *rlabs*

<sup>181</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *mngon*

<sup>182</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *kyi*

sogs byams chos pas 'dod pa ltar lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes kyi gnas lugs yul gyi phyag rgya chen por 'chad pa de'i tshe ni sngags lugs dang khyad par med do |

de ltar <sup>[390]</sup> mngon du byed pa'i thabs bzang ngan gyi rim pa las byung ba'i yul can rang rig pa'i ye shes de la bzang ngan gyi rim pa yod kyang | phyi nang gi thabs mkhas de dag gis mngon du byas pa'i rang rig pa'i ye shes de thams cad phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes su 'dra ba yin te | bde stong zung du 'jug pa'i ye shes yin pa'i phyir | de'i tshe bde ba ni gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes zhes bya ba | sangs rgyas nas sems can gyi bar thams cad la ngo bo dbyer med du bzhugs pa de yin la | stong pa ni | gzung 'dzin gnyis dang yod med sogs su zhen pa'i rtog pas stong pa'o ||

de na yul gyi phyag rgya chen po ni | gnyug ma ye shes kyi ngo bor gnas | stong lugs spros pa'i mthar zhen pa'i rtog pas stong | rtogs lugs so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes kyis rtogs pa'o || 'khor 'das kyi rnam rol ji snyed pa 'di las logs su gyur pa ni ci yang yod pa ma yin te | 'di ji srid ma rtogs pa de srid du 'khor ba dang | rtogs nas mya ngan las 'das par 'jog pa'i phyir | de bas na mnyam gzhag bde ba chen por 'char ba<sup>183</sup> dang | rjes thob sgyu ma lta bur 'char ba gnyis ka yang gnas lugs sogs gsum gyi ngos nas phyag rgya chen por khyad par med do ||

mdor na rgyud sde dang | byams chos dang || *dohā skor gsum*<sup>184</sup> nas 'byung ba'i nges don gyi gnas lugs | stong lugs dang | rtogs lugs 'di kho nar nges la | don 'di la phyag rgya'i bla ma gong ma rnam kyis phyag rgya chen po'i tha snyad mdzad pa yin no || 'di la ni rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid ces bya ba'i tha snyad kyang sngags dang <sup>[391]</sup> phar phyin gnyis nas 'byung ba yin la || de'i go ba ni | 'jig rten las 'das pa'i lam du slebs pa na || byang phyogs dang byams snying rje sogs rnam byang gi yon tan ji snyed pa | bde ba chen po'i ming can chos dbyings ye shes kyi ngo bo ro gcig pa'i phyir ro || de'i tshe sman dkar po chig thub dang 'dra ba yin no || zhes bya ba 'di bzhed par nges so ||

gnyis pa rjes 'brang gis 'dod pas so sor brtags pa'i tshul la | spyir bstan pa dang so sor bshad pa'o || dang po ni | phyag rgya bar grags pa'i sgom chen pa mtha' dag 'di skad ces gsungs ste | phyag rgya chen po 'di thos bsam dang bshad pas mi rtogs | bla mas bstan du med | slob mas bsgom du med | sbyor dus su bla ma'i byin brlabs dang slob ma'i mos gus la brten nas | dngos gzhi'i dus su gnyug ma'i sems ma bcos pa lhug par 'jog | de ltar bzhag pas mnyam gzhag tu sems gsal stong zung 'jug du 'char | rjes thob tu yul snang stong 'dzin med du 'char | de'i ngang nas gang shar thams cad 'dzin med du longs spyod pa yin gyi | sgo gsum 'bad brtsol gyi bya bas 'tshang mi rgya | zhes pa'o ||

gnyis pa ni | phyag chen pa la la'i gsung gis | spyir bsgom pa paṇḍi ta'i dpyad bsgom dang ku sa li pa'i 'jog bsgom gnyis las | rang re phyi ma'i lugs yin | 'di la sngon 'gro logs pa gcig bstan

<sup>183</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: 'chad pa

<sup>184</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: dva ha bskor gsum; SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: do ha skor gsum

rgyu med | dngos gzhi logs pa gcig bsgom rgyu med | sbyor dngos rjes gsum thams cad du sems  
ma bcos pa lhug par 'jog pa nyid la phyag rgya chen po zhes zer ba yin | zhes <sup>[392]</sup> gsungs |

la la'i gsung gis | gdul ba'i gang zag la | rim gyis pa dang gcig car ba gnyis | dang po la skyabs  
'gro sems bskyed<sup>185</sup> dbang byin brlabs sogs kyis gsang sngags kyi snod rung du byas | bzod  
phyag rgya chen po 'di ston pa yin no || cig car ba tshe rabs mang por rgyud yongs su smin pa  
la tshe 'dir sngon 'gro sogs kyi mgo skor la ma ltos par dang po nyid nas dngos gzhi de ston  
pa ni | de yang phyag rgya chen po de 'di yin zhes ston nus pa ma yin gyi | 'on kyang sems ma  
bcos lhug par zhog shig ces bstan pa tsam gyis brda' don 'phrod nas 'ong pa yin gsungs |

yang la la'i gsung gis cig car ba'i nyams len 'di lta ba yas 'bebs bya ba yin | rim gyis pa'i lta  
ba 'di la spyod pa mas 'dzeg bya ba yin | lta ba rtogs na spyod pa la ma 'bad kyang lhun gyis  
grub pa yin | zhes gsungs | yang la la'i gsung<sup>186</sup> gis | phyi mtshan nyid pa ltar na sa lam gyi rnam  
gzhas mang po byed kyang nged ku sa<sup>187</sup> li pa'i lugs kyis | rtse gcig | spros bral | ro gcig | bsgom  
med bzhi las lhag pa mi dgos | yang na nyams dang go ba dang | rtogs pa zhes bya ba gsum du  
'dus | sa dang lam dang sangs rgyas thams cad kyang sems kyi ngo bo lhan cig skyes pa'i ye  
shes bya ba 'di nyid du 'dus gsungs |

yang la la'i gsung gis | phyag rgya chen po chig chod la | sa lam rtsi ba'i rmongs pa 'khrul |  
zhes bton nas | phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes gcig nyid la mnyam par bzhas pas | lo zla tsam  
gyis 'tshang rgya ba yin no || zhes gsungs |

mdor na **sa ra ha** 'i lugs 'di <sup>[393]</sup> gdul bya gcig car ba'i lugs su byas | lam cig car ba nyid yang  
ston | ci car ba de yang dbang po ji ltar rtul yang | rtse gcig sogs bzhi las lhag pa'i rim pa mi  
dgos | dbang po rno na bla mas tshig gcig ma bstan kyang mos gus tsam gyis rtogs pa 'di 'char  
| rtogs pa 'di lam du byas nas 'tshang rgya ba la bskal pa grangs med la sogs pa'i dka' spyad  
dang sa lam gyi rim pa pha rol tu phyin pa nas bshad pa ltar bgrod dgos pa ma yin no || zhes  
bzhed pa yin no ||

gnyis pa dngos lan btab pa la gnyis te | don de la sa skya pas | dgag pa ji ltar mdzad pa ni phyi  
ma'i dus 'dir stong skad smra ba po mtha' dag lugs gnyis las nyams par bstan pa'o || dang po  
ni 'di skad ces 'chad pa yin te | khyed kyi phyag rgya chen po'i lta ba 'di pha rol tu phyin pa'i  
lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po yin nam | sngags kyi lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po yin | dang po  
ltar na mi 'thad pa gsum ste | thos bsam gyi shes rab sngon du ma song pas na mi 'thad | lam  
lga sa bcu'i rnam bzhas khas mi len pas der mi 'thad | grangs med gsum gyi dka' spyad dgos  
par mi 'dod pa i 'thad pa'o ||

gnyis pa ltar na yang mi 'thad pa gsum ste | rnal 'byor rgyud kyi phyag chen du mi 'thad | rnal  
'byor bla med kyi phyag chen du mi 'thad | las dang ye shes dang phyag rgya chen po gsum

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<sup>185</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *skyed*

<sup>186</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *gsungs*

<sup>187</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *sā*

du ma gtogs pas na der mi 'thad pa'o | gal te sngags su 'thad pa yin te | bla ma'i byin brlabs  
kyi stobs kyis rtogs pa'i lta ba yin pa'i phyir zhe na ma yin te | khyed kyis gang la mos <sup>[394]</sup> gus  
byas pa'i stobs kyis rang byung gi ye shes skyed par khas len pa'i bla ma de la | khyed kyis  
dbang bskur phyin ci ma log pa thob na | ji skad du || gang gi drin gyi bde chen gnas<sup>188</sup> || skad  
cig nyid la thob 'gyur ba<sup>189</sup> || zhes gsungs pa de lta yin mod kyang | dbang ma bskur bas bla  
mar mi 'thad do | zhes ston pa ni | ji skad du || dbang ma bskur la bla ma med || ces dang | bla  
ma la ni mos na yang || de 'dra'i bla ma bla ma min || zhes bshad do ||

gal te nged kyi lta ba 'di pha rol tu phyin pa'i lugs su 'thad de | **rje dwags po ba'i** gsung gis |  
nga'i phyag rgya chen po 'di theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i lta ba dang don gcig ces dang |  
thar pa'i rgyan zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos su sher phyin gyi lta ba gtan la 'bebs tshul rgyas par  
bshad pa na | thos bsam gyis gtan la phab pa'i don de nyid bsgom byar bshad pa'i phyir snyam  
na | de'i tshe phar phyin theg pa'i lugs su song bas phyag rgya chen po ba'i tha snyad mi 'thad  
| grangs med gsum gyi dka' spyad mi dgos pa mi 'thad | khrid kyi sngon 'gro'i dus su lta ba  
gtan la mi 'bebs par lus ngag yid gsum rang babs su bzhag pas chog par 'dod pa de mi 'thad  
pa'o || zhes 'chad pa ni ji skad du | gal te 'di bzhin bsgrub 'dod na || rdo rje phag mo'i byin  
brlabs med || lhan skyes la sogs 'dir mi bsgom || gtum mo la sogs thabs lam bral || phyag rgya  
chen po'i tha snyad med || tshe 'di 'am ni bar do dang || phyi mar 'tshang rgya khong mi bzhed  
|| ces so || yang rgyud bla'i lta ba de nyams su len pa la ni thos bsam sngon du 'gro <sup>[395]</sup> dgos te  
| mdo sde rgyan las | gal te ma thos par yang sgom<sup>190</sup> 'jug 'gyur na bstan pa don med<sup>191</sup> 'gyur ||  
zhes so ||

gtan la 'bebs lugs kyang | thog mar snang ba sems dang | de nas gzung ba bden med dang | de  
nas 'dzin pa med par thag bcad nas | dngos gzhi tshe gzung 'dzin gnyis su med pa'i ye shes la  
mnyam par 'jog pa nyid byams chos kyi dgongs pa ma yin la | de'i tshe ni bsgom de mthar  
phyin pa la bskal pa grangs med gsum du bsod nams kyi tshogs bsog dgos pa yin no || zhes  
'chad pa ni | ji srid tshogs gnyis ma rdzogs pa || de srid bsgom de mthar mi phyin || 'di yi tshogs  
gnyis rdzogs pa la || bskal pa grangs med dgos par gsungs || zhes dang || dbu ma'i bsgom de  
bzang mod kyi || de ni 'grub pa shin du dka' || zhes so || gal te rgyud bla ma'i lta ba de rtogs  
byed gsang sngags yin pas ci 'gal snyam na | de lta na dbang dang | rim gnyis sngon du 'gro  
mi dgos par 'dod pa 'gal lo || zhes 'chad pa ni | dbang dang rim gnyis mi bsgom na || rdo rje  
theg pa'i bstan pa min || zhes so ||

yang gal te || nged kyi lta ba 'di lugs gnyis po gang du yang 'du ba ma yin te | **rje dwags po  
pa'i** gsung gis | nga'i phyag rgya chen po 'di la ni chen po gsum gyi ma reg pa yin te | chen po  
gsum ni | blos gzhal blos byas pa yin la || 'di ni blo las 'das pa || rgyu dang rkyen gyis ma bcos

<sup>188</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub> *nyid* corrected as per D 1429 (*Śrīcakrasaṃvarasādhanaṭattvasaṃgrahanāma*)

<sup>189</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub> 'char ba gang corrected as per D 1429

<sup>190</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub> *bsgom* corrected as per D 4026 (*Sūtralaṃkāravākyā*)

<sup>191</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub> *pa* om. as per D 1429



pa || zhes gsungs pa'i phyir ro || snyam na | sngags dang pha rol tu phyin pa gang rung du ma  
'dus pa'i <sup>[396]</sup> theg pa chen po mi srid do zhes ston pa ni | yang na pha rol phyin pa yi || mdo las  
ji ltar 'byung bzhin gyis || yang na rdo rje theg pa yi || rgyud sde bzhin du nyams su long || 'di  
gnyis min pa'i theg chen ni || rdzogs sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa med || ces so ||

yang khyed kyi lta ba yas 'babs 'di la spyod pa phyin drug la slob dgos sam mi dgos | mi dgos  
na rgya nag mkhan po'i chos lugs su song | dgos na rim gyis sam | cig car du slob | dang po ltar  
na spyod pa mas 'dzeg dang khyad par ci yod dam cig car du na | lta spyod kyi nyams len so  
sor 'byed dam | lta ba'i khongs su spyod pa bsdu | dang po ltar na | lta ba de dkar po chig thub  
du 'gal | gnyis pa ltar na | lta spyod dbyer med kyi lugs de sngags lugs ltar nyams su len nam |  
phar phyin ltar len | dang po ltar na | dbang dang rim gnyis la gtso bor mi byed pa dang 'gal |  
gnyis pa ltar na | las dang po pa tshe geig la 'tshang rgya ba'i chos su mi 'thad ces ston pa ni |  
da lta'i phyag rgya chen po ni | phal cher rgya nag chos lugs yin || **nā ro** dang mi **mai trī**<sup>192</sup> pa'i  
|| phyag rgya chen po gang yin pa || gsang sngags rgyud las ji skad du || gsungs pa de nyid  
khong bzhed do || zhes so ||

gal te tshe 'dir rim gnyis sngon du ma song yang | chos di la dad pa dang | bla ma'i byin brlabs<sup>193</sup>  
rgyud la zhugs pa de dag | tshe snga ma la dbang dang rim gnyis kyi sbyangs pa sngon song  
yin pas cig car ba'i rigs can no || zhes zer ba de la ni || ji skad du | gang dag theg chen dad thob  
pa || de dag sngar <sup>[397]</sup> sbyangs yin pas na || dbang bskur cho ga mi dgos zer || 'o na so sor thar  
pa yi || sdom pa dag la mos pa yang || snga ma'i sdom pa yod pa'i phyir || da lta rab tu byung  
mi dgos || zhes so ||

de dag gis dri ba dang po'i lan btab zin nas | gnyis pa phyag rgya chen po dud 'gro dang gzugs  
med khams par skye ba len pa'i rgyur 'chad pa ha cang thal lo snyam pa de'i lan ni | 'di ltar  
'chad dgos te | phyag chen par grags pa rnams kyis lta ba de'i khrid lugs kyi rim pa la | so sor  
rtog pa'i shes rab kyis dpyad pa sngon du 'gro dgos pa'i bshad pa med tsam du ma zad | de ltar  
dpyad na phyag rgya chen po blos byas su song zhes gsungs pa nyid mang bar 'dug cing |  
sbyang gzhi sbyong byed ngo 'phrod pa'i dbang bskur sngon du 'gro dgos pa'i bshad pa mi  
mdzad cing | bshad pa de mi mdzad pa tsam du ma zad | dbang las byung ba'i lta ba nyid du  
yang mi bzhed la | dngos gzhi'i dus su ni | ci yang mi bsam mi mno zhes 'dzin med du 'jog pa  
nyid las gzhan mi snang ba de'i tshe na | 'di ltar gang zag spyir dbang po rtul po | phar phyin  
theg pa'i lta ba la thos bsam gyi sbyangs pa ni sngon du ma song | rdo rje theg pa'i lam du 'jug  
pa'i sta gon tsam yang byed ma myong ba zhig la | bla mas phyag chen gyi lta ba 'di ston pa  
zhig rtsod med du yod pa de'i tshe gdul bya de blun por 'jog pa 'os med pa de la | bla mas  
dbang po sbyong ba'i rim pa gang yang ma bstan par | sbyor ba sngon 'gro'i tshe lus ngag yid  
gsum ma bcos lhug par 'jog pa tsam zhig ston la | de tsam gyis 'dzin <sup>[398]</sup> med du song ba la  
phyag rgya chen po dngos su 'chad par snang ba de ltar yin na | blun po de'i rgyud kyi ci yang

<sup>192</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>; *mai tri*

<sup>193</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>; *rlabs*

mi mno zhing ma bsam pa'i dus kyi sems byung de chos can | ma rig pa yin te | rig pa ye shes kyi 'gal ba mi mthun phyogs su gyur pa'i sems byung yin pas so || de sgrub pa la | rig pa ye shes ni gang | de de'i dngos kyi mi mthun phyogs yin pa ci zhe na | ye shes kyi kye tshul ni gnyis te | pha rol tu phyin pa'i thabs las dang | sngags kyi thabs las so || dang po ni thos pa dang bsam byung gi rigs pas gang zag dang chos kyi ngo bo la dpyad pa na | gang du yang ma rnyed pa'i ye shes shig yin zhing | gnyis pa ni | dbang sogs las skyes pa'i bde chen gyi ye shes shig yin la | de dus kyi blun pos cir yang mi sems shing mi mno ba de ni gzhi'i dus kyi ma rig pa nyid du 'dus pa'i phyir | ma rig pa la'ang | nyon mongs pa can yin min gnyis las phyi ma dang de kho na nyid la rmongs pa gnyis las | phyi ma der 'dus la | des kun nas bsangs pa'i las ni gtso bor dud 'gro 'grub byed du gsungs pa yin te | dug gsum dang mtshungs ldan kyi las so so ba dag | ngan song gsum 'grub byed kyi las su 'chad pa'i phyir snyam du dgongs so ||

'o na khyod kyang lta ba'i mnyam gzhag dngos gzhi'i 'dzin med du 'dod pa ma yin nam zhe na | yin mod | sbyor ba'i sgo nas 'byed dgos te | 'dzin med du 'jog pa po gnas lugs rtogs pa'i shes rab yin pa dang | ma rig pa yin pa'i khyad par las so || yang ji skad du | min na gzugs med khams su skye || zhes pa <sup>[399]</sup> yang | gsang sngags theg pa'i thabs la mkhas pas ma zin pa gzhir byas nas sngon 'gro'i dus su bden gnyis rnam 'byed kyi shes rab la ma brten par | chos ji snyed pa nam mkha' lta bu'o zhes dang | gzung bya ci yang med do zhes dang | 'du shes rags pa la skyon du lta ba sngon du btang nas | dngos gzhi'i dus su yang de nyid la gsal snang skyes nas 'jog pa ni phyi rol pa dang thun mong pa'i gzugs med pa'i bsgom yin la | khyed kyi 'di la'ang sbyor dngos gnyis ka'i skabs su 'dzin med du 'jog pa las gzhan mi 'dug pas so snyams du dgongs so ||

yang na nyan thos 'gog par ltung zhes pa | 'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug dang lhag med kyi myang 'das zer ba ma yin gyi | chad pa myang 'das sam | 'du shes med pa'i snyoms 'jug go | de'i shes byed kyang | sngags kyi rim pa gnyis dang ma 'brel ba'i lta ba de ni dbu ma'i lta ba nyid las ma 'das la | bskal pa grangs med du bsod nams kyi tshogs bsogs pa dang ma 'brel na | nyan thos kyi 'gog pa zhes pa'i ming can | chad pa'i myang 'das su 'gro ba yin no || rdzogs smin sbyangs gsum ma byas par yang dag pa'i mtha' mngon du byas pa la nyes dmigs gang yod pa de nyid 'di la yod pa'i phyir dang | las dang po pa lta smos | sa brgyad par stong nyid la mnyam par 'jog pa yun ring na rgyal ba rnams kyis de las slong dgos par bshad pa'i phyir | zhes ston pa ni | gal te de ni bsgom legs kyang | dbu ma'i bsgom las 'das pa med | ces gsungs|

yang na ni | theg pa gong 'og <sup>[400]</sup> gang gi yang chos sna gcig tsam yang sngon du ma song ba'i blun po la thog ma nyid nas khyed kyi phyag rgya chen po'i khrid lugs de ltar bstan na | mngon pa las | ji skad du | 'du shes med pa pa 'du shes || med par sems dang sems byung rnams 'gog pa'o || zhes bshad pa der thal ba'i nyes dmigs yod pa yin te | skabs der rigs pas gtan la ni mi 'bebs | sngags lugs kyi chos sgo 'byed byed ni nges par sngon du 'gro dgos pa'i bshad pa ni mi snang ba'i phyir | bla ma'i byin brlabs<sup>194</sup> gyis so snyam na | bla ma de gsang sngags kyi bla

<sup>194</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *rlabs*

ma yin na ni rtsod pa med do || zhes 'chad pa ni | dbang ma bskur la bla ma med | gal te gcig  
las 'bras bu zhig || 'byung yang nyan thos 'gog pa bzhin || zhes so ||

de bas na gang zag blun po la stong pa nyid bstan pa dang || des kyang de mi shes bzhin du  
bsgoms pa la ni dud 'gro lta ci smos | gnas skabs su dmyal ba dang | mthar gtan yongs su mya  
ngan las mi 'da' ba'i chos can nyid du yang gsungs te || gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba || de dag  
bsgrub du med par gsungs || zhes dang | blun po mkhas pa'i nga rgyal can || spong bas ma rungs  
bdag nyid ni || mnar med par ni spyi'u tshugs'gro<sup>195</sup> || zhes gsungs pa dang | de 'dra'i blun po  
la stong pa nyid bstan na ston pa po yang ji skad du | blo sbyangs ma byas sems can la || stong  
pa nyid ni brjod pa dang || zhes rtsa ba'i ltung bar gsungs so ||

gal te 'o na | nged<sup>196</sup> kyi phyag rgya chen po 'di mkhas pa la bstan zhing | des bsgoms na cir  
'gyur | zhe na | mkhas<sup>[401]</sup> pa ni gnyis te | pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pas rgyud sbyangs ba dang  
| dbang bskur mtshan nyid pas yongs su smin pa'o || gnyis po de gang yang rung ba la ni dwags  
po bka' brgyud<sup>197</sup> kyi phyag rgya chen po 'di ston zhes pa'i bla mas bstan pa la ni skyon du  
'gyur ba cung zad kyang lta ci smos | snod ldan gyi gang zag la zab mo'i de kho na nyid bstan  
pa yin te | dbu ma'i lta ba ston pa'i tshe thos bsam gyi sbyangs pa sngon du song ba'i mkhas  
pa la | lta ba dngos gzhi ston pa skabs su bab pa na | cir yang mi<sup>198</sup> sems | gang du yang yid la  
mi byed | ma bcos lhun grub du 'jog pa nyid las gzhan med pa'i phyir dang | skabs der shing  
gnyis drud pa las me 'byung ba dper byas nas | so sor rtog pa'i shes pa nyid kyang 'gog dgos  
par bshad pa'i phyir |

**jo bo rje a ti shas** | **klu sgrub** slob ma **zla grags** yin || de las brgyud pa'i man ngag gis || chos  
nyid bden pa rtogs par 'gyur || zhes bshad nas man ngag de ngos 'dzin pa la | dbu ma'i man  
ngag ces bstan bcos mdzad pa der lta ba dngos gzhi la mnyam par 'jog tshul phyag rgya ba  
dag gis de'i khrid yig na ji ltar bkod pa de nyid ji lta ba bzhin du zhugs pa'i phyir |

yang gnyis pa dbang gis smin pa'i mkhas pa la yang | phyag rgya ba'i ston tshul de kho na ltar  
bstan na shin tu zab cing bzang ba yin te rgya bod du byon pa'i mkhas grub kun gyi | dbang  
bzhi pa bskur ba'i de ma thag tu de ye shes la mnyam par 'jog tshul ni | phyag rgya ba'i khrid  
kyi ston tshul ji ltar mdzad pa de kho na sha stag tu zhugs pa'i phyir ro |

de lta mod kyi<sup>[402]</sup> phar phyin pa mkhas pa des stong nyid kyi lta ba de la 'dris par byed pa yin  
gyi | ji srid bskal pa grangs med mang por rjes thob tu bsod nams kyi tshogs mtha' dag yongs  
su ma rdzogs pa de srid du lta ba de mngon du byed rung ma yin te | gzhan du na chad pa'i  
myang 'das kyi mthar ltung bas so || de ltar shes pa na | ji skad du | blun pos lam 'bras bsgoms  
pa yang || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru 'gyur || zhes zer ba yang mtshungs pa ma yin te | blun

<sup>195</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *spyi'u tshugs mnar med dag tu 'gro*; corrected as per Hahn 1982 ed.

<sup>196</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *nges*

<sup>197</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *dkar rgyud*. SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: *dka' rgyud*

<sup>198</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *om. mi*

po la lam 'bras ston pa'i tshul ni | thog mar snang ba gsum gyi sgo nas thun mong gi theg pas rgyud sbyangs | bar du byang chub chen por sems bskyed | de nas bum pa'i dbang gis rgyud smin pa la 'khor 'das dbyer med kyi lta ba brda sprod pa'i phyir | de ltar ston pa de yang phyag rgya ba'i khrid lugs kyi dngos gzhi las 'das med do || snang ba sems yin pa dang | sems de dbyibs sogs gang du yang<sup>199</sup> grub pas stong pa dang | rang bzhin gsal ba dang | rnam rtog gis stong pa dbyer mi phyed pa de la lta ba 'khor 'das dbyer med ces gsung gin 'dug pa'i phyir | de bzhin du dbang gong ma gsum las skyes pa'i lta ba rang byung lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes zhes bya ba thabs bde ba chen po dang dbyer med du gyur pa de la phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes dngos yin zhes lam 'bras pas gsungs pa yin la | lta ba de dang por bskyed pa dang | bar du skyong ba'i tshe so sor rtog pa'i shes rab kyis dpyod pa dang | dpyad cing dpyad cing bsgom dgos par ni | sa skya pa mi bzhed do ||

gnyis pa phyi ma'i dus 'dir rjes 'brang so so rang rang gi lugs dpyis<sup>[403]</sup> phyin par mi 'chad pa'i tshul gnyis te | sa skya pa'i rjes 'brangs phyi mas der mi 'chad pa dang | bka' brgyud<sup>200</sup> pa'i des der mi 'chad pa'o ||

dkar po chig thub bkag pa'i don ji bzhin du mi shes pa dag | spyod pa nyams len gyi tshogs thams cad kun rdzob ji ltar snang ba 'di mi 'gog par thad sor bzhag nas nyams su len dgos pa yin te | thams cad stong pa nyid du thag bca'd na dkar po chig thub du thal bas so snyam du yid la bzhag nas chos kyi gtam smra bar byed do || de ni theg pa gnyis kyi rnam dbye so sor ma phyed pa yin te | phar phyin theg pa'i tshe ji skad du | ji ltar snang bzhin<sup>201</sup> ngo bo'i phyir || 'di la dpyad pa mi 'jug go || zhes pa ltar yin du chug kyang sngags su ni | mnyam par bzhag pa dang ma bzhag pa'i kun spyod mtha' dag stong pa'i ngang las bsgrub dgos pa'i phyir |

gal te bden pas stong pa yin gyi | gzung 'dzin gyi snang ba 'gog pa ma yin no || zhe na | de ltar 'chad pa de ni | gangs can du phyis byung ba lugs snga ma rnams sdang ba dag gi lugs yin gyi | sa skya pa'i lugs ma yin te | sa skya pas ni sngags don bsam pa'i tshe | phung po dang kham dang skye mched ji snyed pa mi dmigs te stong pa zhes gsung gin yod pa yin gyi | bden par mi dmigs te stong pa zhes gsung gi med pa'i phyir |

gal te gsang sngags pa'i kun spyod mtha' dag ye shes las grub pa yin mod | lta ba ma yin no || zhe na | gang stong nyid rtogs pa'i ye shes yin na lta ba yin pas khyab | dper na dmigs pa med pa'i snying rje bzhin | thabs mkhas kyi gtso<sup>[404]</sup> bo bde ba chen po yang stong pa nyid kyi ye shes yin no || zhes pas 'grub la | mi 'grub na bde stong dbyer med kyi don las nyams so ||

<sup>199</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *addit. ma*

<sup>200</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *bka' rgyud*

<sup>201</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *snang zhing*; D 3881: *rang bzhin*; corrected as per D 3882 (*Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti*) and Eckel 1987

'o na ji skad du | lta ba rtogs pas **klu sgrub** grol zhes pa phyogs sngar bzhag nas | des na grub thob thams cad kyang | phyogs re'i stongs<sup>202</sup> kyi grol ba min || zhes sogs bkag pa thams cad slar 'ong ba ma yin nam zhe na ni phar phyin<sup>203</sup> theg pa'i lta ba rkyang pas chog pa yin gyi | thabs rten 'brel sna tshogs pa mi dgos zhes zer mkhan byung ba de bkag pa yin mod | gsang sngags kyi thabs lam mtha' dag gsal stong zung 'jug gi ngo bor gyur nas nyams su len la | ye shes de lta ba yin zer ba la 'gal ba ci yang yod |

yang sa skya pa'i rjes 'brang phyi ma dag | gsang sngags kyi lta ba rtogs pa la yang dbu ma nas bshad pa'i shes rab kyi dpyad pa sngon du 'gro dgos pa zhig yin no snyam du nges par bsams nas | chos kyi gtam smra ba dang | yang bla ma'i byin brlabs<sup>204</sup> rkyang pas stong nyid rtogs par khas blangs na | lugs 'di'i phyogs snga mar song snyam pa gzhi byas na smra bar byed do || de ni ma yin te | sa skya'i rje btsun de dag gi bzhed pa ni | theg pa chen po'i tshul gnyis rtogs bya spros bral gyi lta ba gcig yin kyang | rtogs byed kyi thabs phar phyin pa la med pa zhig gis lta ba de rtogs par bzhed pa'i phyir ro ||

thabs de yang gang zhe na | sta gon gyi tse ye shes pa phebs pa dang | dngos gzhi'i tshe bum dbang bskur ba dang | gsang dbang bskur nas rang byin gyi brlob pa'i rim pas rdo rje'i lus gnad du bsnun pa dang | dbang<sup>[405]</sup> gong ma'i tshe shes rab phyag rgya la brten nas lta ba'i ye shes mngon du byed par bzhed pa yin no || yang bsam byung gi rigs pas dpyad pa sngon du ma song bar bla ma'i byin brlabs dang | slob ma'i mos gus tsam gyis stong pa nyid kyi ye shes skyed pa zhig yod par mi bzhed pa yang ma yin te | 'khor lo sdom pa'i rim lnga dang | lam zab bla ma'i rnal 'byor dang | shin tu spros pa med pa'i khrid kyi rim pa dag mdzad pa na de ltar bzhed kyin 'dug pa'i phyir ro ||

mdor na gsang sngags bla med kyi lta ba rtogs pa dbu ma thal 'gyur ba'i rigs pas lta ba'i phu<sup>205</sup> thag chod pa la nges par ltos dgos so zhes 'chad pa de ni | rje btsun sa skya pa'i lta ba la nges shes rnyed pa dag gi lugs ma yin no ||

gnyis pa ni | rje dwags po bka' brgyud<sup>206</sup> kyi srol 'dzin phyi ma la la dag gis ni phyag rgya chen po'i lta ba de'i yul stong pa nyid kyi ngos 'dzin ni dbu ma rang stong pa'i lugs ltar | med dgag gi cha la 'chad pa yin no snyam pa dang | de rtogs pa'i lta ba bskyed<sup>207</sup> byed kyi yan lag du ngo bo nyid med pa ba'i rigs pa de sngon du 'gro dgos so snyam pa dang | yang la la dag gis ni | lta ba'i yul lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes la 'chad dgos kyang | de rtogs pa'i yan lag tu | thog mar gzung ba med pa dang | de'i 'og tu gzung ba med na 'dzin pa med dgos pa la sogs pa'i rigs pas

<sup>202</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *stongs*; *Sdom gsum rab dbye: thabs*

<sup>203</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: *phyir*

<sup>204</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *rlabs*

<sup>205</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *phugs*

<sup>206</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: *dkar rgyud*. SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *bka' rgyud*

<sup>207</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *skyed*

dpyad pa sngon du 'gro dgos pa yin no | snyam du dgongs pa dag snang ngo | dohā<sup>208</sup> nas 'byung ba'i lta ba'i yul stong nyid med dgag la mi 'thad de | slob dpon legs ldan 'byed dang | slob dpon [406] zla bas ni dbu ma'i lta ba de rang rig pa'i ye shes su 'dod pa 'bad nas 'gog pa yin la | 'dir ni 'bad nas bsgrub pa'i phyir | dgag bya 'gog tshul yang rang stong dang mthun pa ma yin te | rang stong gi lugs der ni lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes kyang gcig dang du ma'i rigs pas dpyad pa na bde ba dang gsal tsam gyi cha yang med par 'gro la | 'dir ni sems nyid gcig bu mi 'gog par 'jog pa dang | dohā<sup>209</sup> bzhi bcu pa las | gcig dang du mas sems la dpyad pa yis | gsal ba spangs nas srid pa dag tu 'gro | zhes rang rig rang gsal rang stong du gtan la phab pa'i nyes dmigs bshad pa'i phyir dang | lta ba 'di la rigs pas dpyad pa sngon du 'gro dgos na | ji skad du | chen po gsum ni blos byas kyi lta ba yin pas nged<sup>210</sup> der mi 'dod ces gsungs pa dang 'gal ba'i phyir dang |

lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes la yod med la sogs pa mthar 'dzin pa spang byar 'chad kyang | ye shes de nyid rang stong du 'chad pa lugs 'di'i rtsa ba la cung zad kyang mi snang ba'i phyir | lugs gnyis pa de yang dgongs pa ma yin te | gzhan stong dbu ma pa'i rigs pa'i 'chad lugs | thog mar snang ba sems dang | de nas phyi rol gyi don ma grub pa dang | de nas nang 'dzin pa ma grub pa gtan la 'bebs pa yin mod | 'dir ni snang ba thams cad thad sor bzhag nas | de la rnam rtog gi 'dzin pas ma gos par byed pa nyid lugs 'di'i rjes thob kyi rnam rol dang | sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba nyid la rtog dpyod kyi byed pa mi 'jug par 'dzin med rang [407] gsal du 'jog pa nyid lugs 'di'i mnyam gzhag gi 'jog tshul yin pa'i phyir | de'i phyir na lugs 'di'i mnyam gzhag gi lta ba la bzang rgyu med | rjes thob kyi lta ba la ngan rgyu med do | de lta na yang khyad par ni | chos nyid 'dzin med kyi ngang du 'jog pa dang | chos can spros bral du 'jog pa'o ||

'jog tshul dang | sems ma bcos lhun grub tu bzhag pas rnam rtog gi 'dzin pa khegs pa yin gyi | dbu ma'i rigs pas phu<sup>211</sup> thag chod par ma byas na lta ba rnam dag tu 'gyur zhing | spang bya'i sa bon spong mi nus so zhes zer ba de ni phyag rgya ba la sdang ba dag gi lugs yin gyi | dad pa dag gi ma yin no |

de bzhin du yul snang stong dang | yul can gsal stong dang | lus bde stong zer ba'i dus kyi stong pa'i ngos 'dzin | yul la sogs pa gsum po bden pas dang | ngo bo nyid kyis dang | rang gi mtshan nyid stong pa la 'chad dgos kyi | rtog pas stong pa la bshad na stong nyid go chod po ma yin no | zhes zer ba de yang phyag rgya ba la sdang ba dag gi lugs yin mod | dad pa dag gi lugs ma yin te | lugs 'di pas ni snang srid 'khor 'das thams cad rnam shes kyi yul du gang shar ba 'di la rtog pas bzo bcas mi byed par | 'dzin med rang sar rang grol du song ba'i ye shes 'di la zung 'jug phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes su khas len dgos pa'i phyir | zung 'jug gi go ba yang | snang bzhin du 'dzin pas stong | des stong bzhin du snang zhes pa nyid yin gyi | snang ba sna tshogs

<sup>208</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *dva ha*

<sup>209</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)(C)</sub>: *dva ha*

<sup>210</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *deng*

<sup>211</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *phugs*

'di tshad mas grub cing | grub bzhin du bden pas stong pa <sup>[408]</sup> la 'chad pa de ni phyag rgya ba  
la mos pa dag gi lugs min no |

phyag rgya bas ni nram shes kyi yul du snang tshad 'khrul snang yin pa dang | 'khrul snang ji  
snyed pa sems kyi cho 'phrul du go ba nyid kyis lta ba gtan la phebs pa yin gyi | dbu ma'i rigs  
pa la mi ltos so | sngon gyi man ngag pa dag gi gsung las | mtshan nyid pa ni lta rtog phyi ru  
byed | sgro 'dogs phyi nas bcod | rnal 'byor pas ni lta rtog nang du byed sgro 'dogs kyang nang  
nas gcod | zhes gsungs pa nyid do | de ltar bshad pas grub pa'i don ni | phyag rgya ba'i lta ba  
'di ni | 'khor lo gsum pa nas bshad pa'i lta ba de nyid yin |

de'ang sgro 'dogs gcod lugs dang | nyams su myong lugs gnyis las | phyag rgya ba'i lugs 'di  
phyi ma de yin | snga ma de la rang stong pa'i lugs dang | gzhan stong pa'i lugs srol chen po  
gnyis yod kyang | phyag rgya ba gnyis ka'i rjes su mi 'jug | thos bsam gyis sgro 'dogs bcad  
pa'i lta ba de blos byas kyi lta ba dang dug can gyi lta bar bzhed pa yin | phyag rgya chen po  
ba'i ye shes skye ba dbu ma'i rigs par ma zad | dbang gong ma bskur ba la yang nges par ltos  
dgos nyid du mi bzhed mod kyang | thos bsam gyi rgyun goms pa las byung ba'i nyams su<sup>212</sup>  
myong gi lta ba ma 'khrul ba de dang | dbang gong ma bskur ba las byung ba'i rang byung  
lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes de dang de ni | phyag rgya chen po lta ba nyid du nges par bzhed  
dgos pa yin no || zhes bya ba 'di grub pa'o ||

'dir smras pa | sngon dus gangs can ljongs su bshad pa dang || sgrub pa'i rgyal mtshan so sor  
'dzin mdzes <sup>[409]</sup> pas || 'gro ba'i mun sel bka' phyag rnam pa gnyis || nyi zla lta bur kun la gsal  
zhing mdzad ||

mdo sngags kun dang bshad bsgrub gnyis ka yang || rang gzhung tshugs par 'dzin mdzad sa  
skya pas || gangs can ljongs kyi bstan pa'i nor bu la || dag byed khrus kyi sbyor ba ci yang  
mdzad ||

mdzad po nyid la'ang blos bzang rjes 'brang gis || legs par bshad pa'ang mang du byung gyur  
mod || blo ngan du mas brtags pa'i nyes bshad kyi || dri mas sbags par gyur pa 'di ltar snang ||

zung 'jug phyag rgya chen po lta ba'i yul || rang stong med dgag kho nar zad ces zer || med  
dgag yul du byed pa'i bde chen po || rtog par 'dod pa gang de'i bzhed pa min ||

bden med ye shes ngo bos stong pa ni || bde stong zung du 'jug pa'i don yin zer || bde dang  
gsal dang snang ba gsum ka yang || 'dzin pas stong pa zung 'jug don du bzhed ||

pha rol phyin pa'i spros bral las lhag pa'i || lta ba'i rim pa sngags la med ces zer || dbang bzhi'i  
lam la 'khor 'das dbyer med sogs || lta ba'i khyad par rnam bzhi khong gis bzhed ||

mtha bral gtan la 'bebs kyi rigs pa ni || dbu ma las lhag khong gis mi bzhed kyang || nyams  
myong lta ba rang bzhin lhan skyes dang || zhu bde lhan skyes shes bya'i khyad par 'chad ||

<sup>212</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: om. *sa*

sa skya'i lugs kyi don dam ngos 'dzin ni || mtha' bzhi spros dang bral ba yin zhes zer || mtha' bzhi'i spros bral yang dag kun rdzob tu || **rje btsun grags pa**'i zhabs kyi gsal bar bshad ||

'khor ba gang yin myang <sup>[410]</sup> 'das yin zhes pa || 'khor 'das dbyer med don du 'chad ces zer || snang grags chos rnam 'dzin pas stong ba la || bden gnyis dbyer med zung 'jug don du 'chad ||

dbu ma'i rigs pas dpyad pa'i stong pa nyid || gsang sngags lugs kyi nges don yin zhes zer || thos bsam gyis rtogs stong nyid lta ba ni || dug can lta ba yin par khong gis bzhed ||

dbu ma'i rigs pas sgro 'dogs ma dpyad na || gsang sngags theg pa'i stong nyid mi rtogs zer || dbang gis stong nyid rtogs pa'i thabs mkhas ni || rdo rje theg pa'i thabs mkhas yin par bzhed ||

bka' brgyud<sup>213</sup> phyag rgya'i rjes 'brang 'ga' yis kyang || phyag chen rigs pas dpyad pa sngon song zer || **mda' snun** zhabs kyi gzhang dang mi mthun zhing || khrid yig tshad ldan kun la de ma bshad ||

phyag chen dngos gzhi'i lta ba'i yul de<sup>214</sup> yang || **dpal ldan zla bas** gang bshad de yin zer || **mda' snun** zhabs kyi phyag chen lta ba'i yul || lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes nyid la bshad ||

phyag chen mthar thug bde ba chen po de || rang stong med par dgag dang dbyer med zer || **mda' snun** zhabs kyi bde ba'i ngo bo la || rigs pas dpyad na srid par 'gro zhes gsungs ||

kun rdzob ma lus 'khrul bar thag chod pa || phyag chen rtsa ba'i lta ba yin pa la || phyi rabs mkhas pas kun rdzob tshad grub ces || zer ba'i rjes zlos dbyangs su blangs min nam ||

bka' gdams lugs kyi zab mo lta ba'i yul || mngon rjes<sup>215</sup> tshad ma'i rtogs bya yin zhes zer || de ltar 'chad pa tshu rol mthong ba yi || rmongs pa'i lugs zhes **mar** <sup>[411]</sup> **me mdzad** dpal gsungs ||

bka' gdams lta ba'i dngos gzhi bdag lta dang || 'dzin stangs 'gal phyir zhen pa'i blo zhes zer || mi bsam mi mno yid la mi byed pa || lta ba'i dngos gzhi **mar me mdzad** dpal gsungs ||

kun rdzob tshad mas grub pa bka' gdams kyi || bden gnyis 'jogs tshul bla med yin zhes zer || kun rdzob 'khrul pa'i snang ba yin zhes pa || bka' gdams gzhang lugs kun las gsal de yin ||

dpyad bsgom nges shes rgyun du brten byed pa || **po to ba yi**<sup>216</sup>gdams ngag yin zhes zer || sor rtog ye shes nyid kyang stong nyid kyi || me lces bsregs zhes **a ti sha** yis gsungs ||

phyi rabs byon pa'i grags pa gsal ldan 'gas || sngon dus gangs can byon pa'i bshad rgyud dang || sgrub rgyud 'dzin po de kun phal cher gyi || rang rang lugs kyi bshad pa'i srol chen dang ||

<sup>213</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)</sub>: *dkar rgyud*. SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *bka' rgyud*

<sup>214</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *des*

<sup>215</sup> SCsb<sub>(B)</sub>: *rje*

<sup>216</sup> SCsb<sub>(A)(B)</sub>: *ba'i*



lta dang sgom pa'i gnas rnams ji snyed pa || lung rigs<sup>217</sup> nyi<sup>218</sup> zla'i 'od phreng bgrang yas kyi  
|| sngon gyi lugs 'dzin mun pa'i mal du gzims ||

'khrul snang nyi zla'i spobs pa za byed cing || yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i sa chen 'debs nus pa ||  
lung rigs 'jug pa rnam bcu'i rol rtsed mkhan || 'ga' zhig nges don mkha' la thogs med rgyu ||

zhes lung rigs gnyis kyi phyag rgya chen po'i bzhed tshul la 'khrul pa sel ba'i bstan bcos zung  
'jug gi gru chen zhes pa 'di ni || gzhung lugs rab 'byams du smra ba'i **bshes gnyen karma**  
**dbang phyug dpal** zhes bgyi bas || sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i bstan bcos kyi dri ba  
'gag' zhig nye bar bkod<sub>[412]</sub> pa'i lan du | **dpal shākya mchog ldan** dri med legs pa'i blos | thub  
bstan gser mdog can zhes bya ba'i chos kyi grwar nye bar sbyar ba'i yi ge pa ni | **blo bzang**  
**chos kyi rgyal mtshan** no || mangalam ||

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<sup>217</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *rig*

<sup>218</sup> SCsb<sub>(C)</sub>: *nyid*

KARMA PHRIN LAS

SELECTED MATERIALS

ON MAHĀMUDRĀ

English Translations and

Critical Editions

## PERSPECTIVES ON RANG STONG AND GZHAN STONG

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The text translated and edited below is a succinct essay by Karma phrin las pa on Rang stong and Gzhan stong.<sup>219</sup> In it he follows the viewpoint of his teacher the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) that Rang stong and Gzhan stong views do not contradict each other because, when correctly understood, self-emptiness is not a nonaffirming negation and other-emptiness, natural luminosity or the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, does not attribute true existence to the ultimate. This is how the extremes of nihilism and eternalism are avoided.

In Karma phrin las pa's eyes, self-emptiness refers to the fact that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic essence and therefore empty of the appearances of an apprehending subject and apprehended object. But it should not be understood as a nonaffirming negation because in the absence of reifications of subject and object, nondual wisdom remains. Karma phrin las here asks the reader to consider that this nondual wisdom is the sense of the affirmative suffix “-ness” (*nyid* : -*ta*) in the term “emptiness” (*stong pa nyid* : *śūnyata*). This nondual wisdom is precisely “ultimate truth” but this should not to be understood as a truly established, permanent, stable, and enduring entity. The nature of mind with its inherent sixty-four qualities only becomes manifest once the adventitious stains are relinquished. Therefore, even though the buddha qualities are inseparable from mind's true nature in all phases, they are functionally manifest only at the time of goal-realization. This is the sense in which Karma phrin las pa understands *gzhan stong*. At the same time, he explicitly equates it with *\*sugatagarbha* in the ground phase when it remains veiled by obscurations. What obscures this buddha nature is the impure aspect of mind, the *ālayavijñāna* along with adventitious impurities that are collectively responsible for saṃsāric phenomena. This account is indebted to the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's (1284–1339) Yogācāra-based distinction between pure and impure mind and his identifications of the former with buddha nature and the latter with the conditioned *ālayavijñāna*. It is equally indebted to the Seventh Karma pa's view of the commensurability of Rang stong and Gzhan stong.

The following translation and critical edition are based on the only extant edition of the *Dri lan yig kyi mun sel* as reproduced in the *Collected Works of Karma phrin las pa* by Ngawang Topgay based on blocks from Rin chen ri bo dating back to 1539:

KPdl: *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel zhes bya ba lcag mo'i dris lan* (ca 88<sub>1</sub>–92<sub>7</sub>), in: *Chos rjes karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las thun mong ba'i dri lan gyi phreng ba rnams*. New Delhi: 1979, vol. ca 87–223.

<sup>219</sup> See also the partial translation by Burchardi 2011, 317–43.

### 1a. English Translation of *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*

*A Discussion to Dispel Mind's Darkness: A Reply to Queries of [Bsod nams lhun grub, the Governor of] Lcags mo*

Homage to the adamant mind!

I bow down to the sun, the mighty victor, who—with the light of wisdom that knows everything and sees all—eliminates the darkness of doubts and illuminates the perfect Madhyamaka path of the mode of abiding.

Dear questioner, please listen to this! [I am] addressing [you] after devoting a little consideration to the wording of the questions posed by you. I ask whether your questions are [the following:] Through attachment and aversion to the philosophical systems of ourselves and others, [is it possible] to become liberated or not? When one is not liberated from the cause of either *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, will one realize the profound intent of the tantras by giving up a mentality based on attachment and aversion? Or is your question: What is the difference between the philosophical systems of ourselves and of others?

Please listen! In case it is the first: Due to attachment, aversion, and ignorance [sentient beings] wander in cyclic existence. Moreover, all attachments and aversions [in the context of] clinging to philosophical systems are to be given up through the [path of] vision because the victor taught that they are obscurations of conceptual imputations. Therefore, who could find certainty in the profound tantras without having relinquished attachment, aversion, and ignorance?

This tradition [of ours] is renowned for the reputed “greatness of having realized that all the teachings are not contradictory”. Nowadays, upholders of the teachings say that the Dharma of their own tradition <sup>[89]</sup> is supreme while that of others is inferior. These statements are made not out of aversion against others, but [in order to] praise the unmistakable Dharma, just as those who, when separating the barley [grain] from the chaff, don’t do so out of aversion against barley. Thus, these [statements] have arisen from compassion and are therefore not produced by attachment and aversion, right! The victor is skillful and definitively liberated from falsehood; his teachings are free from any deception. Nonetheless, according to commentators, it appears as if [they] are categorized into diverse philosophical views and tenets that are said to belong to oneself and others. Nevertheless, the intent of the victor is always one. So do not place your trust in personally fabricated words. All [of the Buddha’s teachings] are in harmony and should be taken in that way.

It is crucial to cultivate unbiased pure perception. Contrived ascertainment must simply be given up. Who puts his trust in words spoken by Māra? Therefore, analysis that discriminates between what is and is not the case, [like] the top and back of the head, is required, and

is not just blind faith. Because the words of the victor are profound,<sup>220</sup> they are difficult to understand. Given that even the analysis of those expert in their meaning, appears to be contradictory when considered separately, I hold the explanations of my teacher to be authoritative. <sup>[90]</sup> If you ask why, [my response is] because all buddhas of the three times, having displayed embodiments in accordance with the fortunes of each individual are said to thereby function as guides on the right path, such is the emanation of [my] root teacher.

In the case of the second [question], i.e., the philosophical system of ourselves and others, generally there are many views in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist [philosophies]. In Tibet, there are no [non-Buddhist] *tīrthikas*<sup>221</sup>; however, there appear to be many Buddhist *tīrthikas*. Still, what is the point of identifying ‘this’ and ‘that’ way of falling into the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. It is like the Buddha who when asked whether the world had an end took a vow of silence.

Be that as it may, having been reproached about [the question of] whether or not Rang stong and Gzhan stong are contradictory, I must say a bit in reply to it, having seen this is a topic that is bound up with the wording [of your] question.

Nowadays, some who pride themselves in being Rang stong proponents speak of “emptiness that consists in these phenomena being empty of reality”. By merely refuting the ‘real existence’ added to these phenomena, they assert a nonaffirming negation as the ultimate truth. Clinging to such a view of nihilism, they declare their own account to be Madhyamaka. However, this is not the genuine Rang stong known among learned ones. By strongly adhering to emptiness as a mere nonaffirming negation, they meditate on nonexistence that is like a hare’s horn, but they will not experience the mode of abiding [thereby]. The reason is that this nonexistence is not within the range of valid cognition. Hence, how could it become the personally realized self-awareness? By focusing on Rang stong as a nihilistic view, how will one see the correct emptiness? Because even the expression *rang stong* is just a mere name [for them], it is in this way diametrically opposed to the actuality of the mode of abiding.

As for the Rang stong as asserted by learned ones of the past, like an empty vase that is emptied of water, all phenomena are empty of an intrinsic essence, but [this is] not a nonaffirming negation. The vase that is empty of water is established. Despite the emptiness of the appearances of the apprehended and the apprehender, the wisdom without the duality of the apprehended and the apprehender exists; it is not an empty absolute nothingness. Consider how at the end of the word ‘empty’ the affirmative syllable ‘ness’ (*nyid*) was indicated. My omniscient lama has explained that “that emptiness which is empty of an own-nature <sup>[91]</sup> is indeed the authentic Rang stong, but emptiness is *not* said to be a nonaffirming negation.”

<sup>220</sup> *brling*: second meaning for *brling po* according to the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* is: *zab bo*, profound.

<sup>221</sup> On the interpretation of the Tibetan term *mu stegs pa*, see Volume I, 37 n. 65.

My omniscient lama continued: “Nowadays, some who pride themselves as being Gzhan stong proponents wrongly proclaim that the ultimate—that which is permanent, stable, enduring, unchanging, and truly established—is profound Gzhan stong because it is empty of the adventitious [stains of] the apprehended and the apprehender.” Being fond of such a view of permanence, they describe the clinging to an extremist belief<sup>222</sup> as profound emptiness. But these are false, deceptive words. It is not the pure Gzhan stong taught in the sūtras. Being confused about the teachings of the victorious Maitreya that “mind’s nature is not empty of unsurpassable qualities,” they take *gzhan stong* [to mean] that the sixty-four qualities already present at the [time of] the ground are empty of adventitious stains. [Thus they] deprecate the victor because [the consequence would be that] a perfect buddha in whom all obscurations are exhausted and wisdom is fully unfolded experiences the suffering of the six types of migrators such as the hell-states etc. and therefore wanders in cyclic existence.

The meaning taught in the tantras, the [Bodhi]sattva commentaries<sup>223</sup>, the various sūtras, the Maitreya works and by those following [this system], is the Gzhan stong Rang byung rdo rje professed which I heard from the teachings of the mighty victor [Chos grags rgya mtsho] in these words:

Mind’s nature is uncurtailed and unbiased; natural luminosity, the great seminal postency as the inseparability of expanse and awareness, the natural awareness, the essence of which is without any change whatsoever. From the perspective of it being buddha when it has been purified of adventitious stains, it is known as *gzhan stong*. That the primordial ground is untainted by obscurations is the basic meaning of empty of other. This nature of mind not recognizing itself by itself is called adventitious obscuration, which means that the [nature of] mind can become free from them. Therefore, because mind’s nature is empty of them, it is empty of other. The sixty-four qualities that are present in the basic nature are indeed never separated from the mind. However, let us call it obscured buddhahood at the time of the ground and immaculate buddhahood at the time of the fruition. The thirty-two qualities of dissociation from all obscurations and [92] the thirty-two of maturation that unfold as enlightened activity, are special qualities exclusive to perfect buddhahood. They are not asserted to be present at the time of the ground. The sixty-four qualities present in the ground are veiled by obscurations. When these

<sup>222</sup> Extremist views (*antagrāhadṛṣṭi* : *mthar ’dzin pa’i lta ba*), such as eternalism and nihilism, one of the so-called five wrong view (*drṣṭi* : *lta ba*).

<sup>223</sup> *Sems ’grel skor gsum*, the “three Bodhisattva-commentaries”: the *Vimalaprabhā* by Puṇḍarīka, i.e., a commentary to the *Kālacakra* tantra; the *Lakṣhābhīdhānāduddhitalaghutantrapīṇḍārthavivatāṇa* by Vajrapāṇi, i.e., a commentary to the *Cakrasaṃvara* tantra, and the *Hevajrapīṇḍārthatīkā* by Vajragarbha, i.e. a commentary to the *Hevajra* tantra. See also Callahan 2007, 269–70 and 405, note 877.

stains are overcome, [one] becomes an immaculate victor. Thus the ground of emptiness that is empty of other (*gzhan stong*) is *\*sugatagarbha*, mind's nature, this very natural luminosity. What it becomes empty of, what is to be relinquished, are the adventitious stains that are referred to as the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender. Therefore, ultimate truth is nothing but the nature of mind that is free from the concepts of the apprehended and the apprehender. [This], i.e., natural luminosity, unity, coemergence, the inseparability of the expanse and awareness, natural awareness itself, is the profound view of *Gzhan stong*.

Thus, my teacher explained that “even the so-called *Rang stong* and *Gzhan stong* are not contradictory”. If you wish to achieve further certainty in this, seek the oral explanations of someone who can unravel the indications and words. The one who can answer all questions is the Buddha because he has the *samādhi* that knows the aspirations and situations [of others]. Regarding all your questions and sources of doubt, how [could I have] the self-confidence to answer them correctly? However, please say whatever you wish to ask. Those which I can answer, I have addressed without holding anything back. Regarding those [issues] that remain inscrutable, I request your patience.

I have previously acquainted [my] mind with straightforward communication. May the sun of virtue of explaining things in this way, drawn perfectly by the golden carriage of pure intentions, dispel the gloomy darkness of doubts<sup>224</sup>. And may all migrators thereby gain victory over the abyss of delusion.

This was written by the monk of prodigious learning, the expounder of Dharma, Karma phrin las pa in response to written questions by the Governor of *Lcags mo*, *Bsod nams lhun grub*, in the encampment on top of *Zings po 'bum pa* on the seventh day of the second month of the year of the hare [according to the] Mongolian [calendar]. May this blazing splendor of auspiciousness be an ornament of the world.

### 1b. Critical Edition of the *Dri lan yid kyi mun sel*

*Dri lan yid kyi mun sel zhes bya ba lcag mo'i dris lan bzhugs* ||

na ma citta vajra<sup>225</sup> ya | thams cad mkhyen cing thams cad gzigs pa yi || ye shes 'od kyis the tshom mun sel zhing || gnas lugs dbu ma'i lam bzang snang mdzad pa || rgyal ba'i dbang po nyi ma de la 'dud ||

<sup>224</sup> The analogy provided by the author reminds of the Indian image of Varuṇa and in later days Viṣṇu, the solar deities whose passage across the sky is said to redeem the world from darkness.

<sup>225</sup> Ms.: *shtshitta badzrā*. Replaced with correct Sanskrit transliteration *citta vajra* throughout Ms.

kye lags dri bo tshur gson khyed kyis ni || dris pa'i tshig<sup>226</sup> la chung zad dpyad nas smra'i ||  
rang dang gzhan gyi grub mtha'i chags sdang gis || thar ram mi thar 'khor 'das gang gi rgyu ||  
mi thar na ni chags dang sdang ba'i sems || dor bas rgyud sde'i dgongs zab rtogs sam zhes ||  
dri ba yin nam rang gzhan grub mtha' yi || khyad par gang yin dri ba yin no kyee || dang po  
ltar na chags sdang rmongs pa las || 'khor bar 'khor gyi grub mtha' la zhen pa'i || chags sdang  
mtha' dag mthong bas spang bya ste || kun tu brtags pa'i sgrib par rgyal bas gsungs || de phyir  
chags sdang rmongs pa ma spangs par || zab mo rgyud sde'i nges pa su yis rnyed ||

bstan pa mtha' dag 'gal ba med rtogs pa'i || che ba zhes bya brgyud pa 'di la grags || ding dus  
bstan 'dzin rnams ni rang lugs kyi || chos<sup>[89]</sup> 'di mchog yin gzhan rnams dman no zhes || gsung  
'di gzhan la sdang bas ma yin gyi || 'khrul pa med pa'i chos la bsngags pa ste || nas dang sbub  
ma dbye phyir 'bad pa dag || nas la sdang bas min pa ji bzhin no || des na 'di dag snying rje las  
byung phyir || chags dang sdang bas bskyed pa min kwa ye || rgyal ba thabs mkhas brdzun las  
nges grol ba || de yi gsung rnams ldem po dang bral mod || 'grel byed rnams kyis rang dang  
gzhan zhes pa'i || lta grub so sor dbye ba ltar snang yang || rgyal ba'i dgongs pa gang yin thams  
cad gcig || rang bzo'i tshig la yid brtan bya ba min || thams cad mthun rnams thams cad bzhin  
du gzung ||

phyogs ris med pa'i dag snang bsgom pa gces || bcos mar nges na dor bya kho na ste || bdud  
kyis smras pa'i tshig la su yid rton || de phyir yin min mgo ltag phyed pa yi || rnam dpyod dgos  
kyi rmongs dad kho nas min || rgyal ba'i bka' rnams brling phyir rtogs par dka' || de yi don la  
mkhas pa'i rnam dpyod kyang || so sor zhugs nas 'gal ba ltar snang na || rang gi bla ma'i gsung  
nyid tshad<sup>[90]</sup> mar gzung || ci slad ce na dus gsum sangs rgyas rnams || rang rang skal par  
'tsham pa'i skur bstan nas || yang dag lam gyi sa mkhan mdzad bzhed pas || rtsa ba'i bla mar  
sprul pa yin phyir ro ||

gnyis pa ltar na rang gzhan grub pa'i mtha' || phal cher phyi nang gnyis la 'dod pa mang || bod  
na mu stegs byed pa med mod kyi || nang pa'i mu stegs mang zhig snang lags kyang || rtag  
dang chad pa'i mtha ru lhung ba'i tshul || 'di dang 'di zhes ngos 'dzin ci zhig gi<sup>227</sup> || 'jig rten  
mtha' dang ldan nam zhes zhus tshe || thub pas mi smra'i brtul zhugs mdzad bzhin no ||

de lta mod kyang rang stong gzhan stong dag || 'gal dang mi 'gal bdag la co 'dri ba || dri tshig  
'di yi zhen pa'i brjod bya ru || mthong nas de lan cung zad smra byar bya ||

ding sang rang stong smra bar rlom pa 'ga' || chos de bden pas stong pa'i stong nyid ces || chos  
de'i steng du bden grub bkag tsam gyis || med par dgag pa don dam bden par 'dod || 'di 'dra  
chad pa'i lta ba la zhen nas || rang 'dod dbu mar smras kyi mkhas rnams la || grags pa'i rang  
stong rnal ma de ma yin || stong nyid med dgag kho nar mngon zhen nas || ri bong rwa ltar  
med pa de bsgoms kyang || gnas lugs nyams su myong bar mi 'gyur te || med de tshad ma'i  
spyod yul ma yin pas || so so rang gis rig par ci ste 'gyur || rang stong chad pa'i lta ba la dmigs

<sup>226</sup> Ms.: *chig*

<sup>227</sup> Ms.: *kyi*



pas || yang dag stong nyid mthong ba lta ci zhig || rang stong zhes pa'ang ming tsam du byas  
pas || 'di 'dra gnas lugs don dang rgyab 'gal yin ||

sngon gyi mkhas rnam bzhed pa'i rang stong ni || bum stong chu yis stong ltar chos rnam  
kun || rang rang ngo bos stong yang med dgag min || chu yis stong pa'i bum pa sgrub pa yin ||  
gzung dang 'dzin pa'i snang ba 'dis stong yang || gzung 'dzin gnyis su med pa'i ye shes yod ||  
stong pa cang med ma yin stong par'i mthar || nyid ces bya ba'i sgrub tshig gsungs la soms<sup>228</sup>  
|| rang rang ngo bos stong pa'i stong pa nyid ||<sup>[91]</sup> 'di ni rang stong rnal ma de yin mod || stong  
nyid med pa dgag par ma smra zhes || bdag gi bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa gsung || ding sang  
gzhan stong smra bar rlom pa 'ga' || don dam rtag brtan ther zug mi 'gyur ba || bden par grub  
'di gzung 'dzin glo bur<sup>229</sup> bas || stong phyir gzhan stong zab mo 'di yin lo || 'di 'dra rtag pa'i  
lta ba la dga' bas || mthar 'dzin stong nyid zab mor smra byed pa'i || brzun gyi zol tshig yin  
gyi mdo sde<sup>230</sup> las || gsung pa'i gzhan stong rnam dag de ma yin || bla med chos kyis sems nyid  
mi stong zhes || **rgyal ba byams pas** gsungs pa la 'khrul nas || gzhi la bzhugs pa'i yon tan drug  
bcu bzhi || glo bur<sup>231</sup> dri mas stong la gzhan stong zhes || sgrib pa kun zad ye shes rab rgyas  
pa'i || rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas dmyal ba la sogs pa || 'gro ba drug gi sdug bsgnal myong ba'i  
phyir || 'khor bar 'khor zhes rgyal la skur btab bo ||

rgyud dang sems 'grel mdo sde du ma dang || byams chos rjes 'brang bcas las gsungs pa'i don  
|| **rang byung rdo rje** bzhed pa'i gzhan stong ni || **rgyal ba'i dbang po**'i gsung las 'di skad thos ||

sams nyid rgya chad phyogs lhung dang bral zhing || rang bzhin 'od gsal dbyings  
rig dbyer med pa'i || thig le chen po tha mal shes pa yi || ngo bo gang du'ang 'gyur  
ba med pa la || glo bur<sup>232</sup> dri ma dag tshe sangs rgyas su || gyur pa'i cha nas gzhan  
stong zhes byar grags || gdod ma'i gzhi la sgrib pas ma gos pa || 'di ni gzhan gyis  
stong pa'i go don yin || sems nyid rang gis rang nyid ma rig pa || 'di la glo bur<sup>233</sup>  
sgrib pa zhes bya ste || sems dang 'bral du rung ba'i don yin pas || de yis sems nyid  
stong phyir gzhan stong yin || gshis la bzhugs pa'i yon tan drug bcu bzhi || de ni  
nam du'ang sems dang mi 'bral mod || gzhi yi dus su sgrib bcas sangs rgyas dang |  
| 'bras dus dri med sangs rgyas zhes smras shig || sgrib kun bral 'di yon tan so gnyis  
dang ||<sup>[92]</sup> phrin las rgyas pa'i rnam smin sum bcu gnyis || rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas  
kho na'i khyad chos te || 'di ni gzhi la bzhugs par mi 'dod do || gzhi la bzhugs pa'i  
yon tan drug bcu bzhi || sgrib pas bsgribs shing dri ma de bcom pas || dri med rgyal  
bar 'gyur phyir gzhan stong gi || stong gzhi bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po ni || sems

<sup>228</sup> Ms.: *gsoms*

<sup>229</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

<sup>230</sup> Ms.: *sda*

<sup>231</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

<sup>232</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

<sup>233</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

nyid rang bzhin 'od gsal 'di nyid yin || stong byed spang bya glo bur<sup>234</sup> dri ma de ||  
 gzung dang 'dzin pa'i rnam rtog 'di la zer || de phyir gzung 'dzin rnam rtog dang  
 bral ba'i || sems nyid kho na don dam bden pa ste || rang bzhin 'od gsal zung 'jug  
 lhan cig skyes || dbyings rig dbyer med tha mal shes pa nyid || gzhan stong zab mo'i  
 lta ba yin zhes gsung ||

des na rang stong gzhan stong zhes pa yang || 'gal ba min zhes bdag gi bla ma bzhed || 'di la  
 slar yang nges shes 'drongs 'dod nas || brda don bkrol gyi ngag las len par mdzod || dri ba kun  
 lan 'debs pa sangs rgyas kyi || smon gnas mkhyen pa'i ting nge 'dzin yin phyir || khyed kyi  
 dogs gnas dri bzhed ma lus la || bdag gis kun lan tshul bzhin ci zhig spobs || 'on kyang dri 'dod  
 gang yod smros shig dang || lan ldon nus rnams dpe mkhyud med par smra || lkog tu gyur  
 rnams khyed la bzod par gsol || zol med gtam la bdag blo snga nas 'dris || 'di ltar smras pa'i  
 dge ba'i nyin byed ni || lhag bsam gser gyi shing rtas legs drangs nas || the tshom mun thibs  
 sel bar byas pa des || 'gro kun rmongs pa'i g.yang las rgyal gyur cig ||

ces pa **lcags mo dpon po bsod nams lhun grub** kyis dris pa'i tshig la lan du smras pa 'di ni  
**mang du thos pa'i dge slong chos smra karma 'phrin las pas** yos lo hor zla gnyis pa'i tshes  
 bdun la zings po 'bum pa sgang gi sgar du yi ger bris pa bkra shis dpal 'bar 'dzam gling rgyan  
 du shog ||

### *A MYSTICAL SONG OF THE VIEW PROCLAIMING THE MODE OF BEING*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following poem entitled *Yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur* was composed by Karma phrin las in Klong yangs. It belongs to a particular subgenre of Tibetan mystical songs, the so-called *vajra*-songs (*rdo rje'i mgur*). The author sang it as a spontaneous self-expression (*rang sgra*) of mystical experiences between his meditation sessions and directly expressed his core vision of the unity of appearances and emptiness. No date or any other indication regarding the dating was provided.

Here the author summarizes his main view regarding the way how a practitioner is supposed to relate to appearances, concepts, and delusion etc., advising him to hold them in awareness. By doing so, whatever occurs does not strain the mind. Appearances are understood as the radiance of emptiness, concepts as mere appearances of naked wisdom, delusion as the reflection of awareness. Sustaining the awareness of emptiness means that one comes to realize that whatever is empty nonetheless embodies unsurpassable qualities; and being empty of adventitious stains, it is untainted by delusion. To sustain this awareness allows is to maintain a view free from any extremes.

For Karma phrin las, recognizing mind's nature as empty yet imbued with unsurpassable qualities without attributing any true existence to it is the actual view, the essence of the

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<sup>234</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

expanse which goes beyond the domain of words, thoughts and expressions and is not tainted by the clinging to extremes. Meditation consists in lucidly resting in a natural undistracted state untainted by mental agitation and tension, while conduct consists in the six perfections untainted by acceptance and rejection. By beholding the essence of natural awareness, the fruition manifests, i.e., the accomplishment of mind's true nature as the *dharmakāya* not tainted by hopes and fears.

To establish mind's emptiness of dualistic notions—of appearances and delusions—and to recognize that it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities is to understand the Gzhan stong view. For Karma phrin las this comprises the freedom from elaborations that enables the practitioner to realize the true nature of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

The only extant edition of this text is the one found in the Collected Works of Karma phrin las pa. They were reproduced by Ngawang Topgay based on blocks from Rin chen ri bo dating back to 1539:

KPdG: *Yin lug sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur* (ga 8<sub>5</sub>–10<sub>4</sub>),  
in: *Chos kyi rje karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las do rje mgur kyi 'phreng ba rnams*.  
New Delhi: 1979, vol. ga 1–86.

## 2a. English Translation of the *Yin lug sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur*

Homage to the *adamantine* mind!

Lord of the Dharma who has realized the essential meaning,  
Who has the compassion to teach the mode of abiding,  
To [you] Sangs rgyas bsam grub who is endowed with kindness,  
I prostrate wholeheartedly; please consider [me] benevolently.  
I bow with all my heart to the kindly Sangs rgyas bsam grub,  
Lord of Dharma who has realized the essential meaning [and]  
Who has the compassion to teach the abiding nature.  
Please think caringly [of me]! <sup>(1)</sup>

Through your skillful means and compassion and  
[My] tendencies of habituation from previous [lives]  
Or [re]gaining familiarity in this life,  
[I] realized the genuine abiding nature in this way: <sup>(2)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of appearance,  
Whatever appears is but the radiance of empti[ness],  
Only appearance in the space of the *dharmadhātu*

Untainted by marks of identification. <sup>(3)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of thoughts,  
Whatever wells up is but the creative energy of the mind,  
Only appearance as naked wisdom  
Untainted by marks of fabrication. <sup>(4)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of mindfulness,  
Whatever one is mindful of is but the essence of coemergence,  
Only appearance as self-aware lucidity  
Untainted by marks of egocentricity. <sup>(5)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of delusion,  
Any delusion is but the primordial course of things,  
Only appearance of reflected images of awareness  
Untainted by the marks of subject and object. <sup>(6)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of stability,  
Any kind of stability is but the expanse of equality,  
Only self-awareness free from elaborations,  
Untainted by the marks of drowsiness. <sup>(7)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of movement,  
Any movement is but the space of luminosity,  
Only self-recognition of one's nature  
Untainted by marks of agitated rumination. <sup>(8)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of cyclic existence,  
Any circling around is but a matter of illusion,  
Only the actualization of the four *kāyas*  
that are not tainted by the marks of happiness and suffering. <sup>(9)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of peace,  
Any peace is just a perceived reflection,  
Only the pure expanse of the intrinsic essence as such,  
Untainted by the mark of primordial nonexistence. <sup>(10)</sup>

Simply knowing the true face of birth,  
Any way of being born is but the *nirmāṇakāya*,

Just meditation of the pure Generation Stage,  
Untainted by the marks of tenacious clinging. (11)

Simply knowing the true face of dying,  
Any way of dying is but the Completion Stage,  
Only the vision of ultimate truth.  
Untainted by the marks of karmic appearances. (12)

Simply knowing the true face of bliss,  
Any kind of bliss is without movement and change,  
Only spontaneously present great bliss  
Untainted by the marks of defilements. (13)

Simply knowing the true face of clarity,  
Any kind of clarity is but the reflection of emptiness,  
Only the Mother of Victors<sup>235</sup> manifesting in space  
Untainted by the marks of elaborations. (14)

Simply knowing the true face of emptiness,  
Any kind of empti[ness] still [has] unsurpassable qualities [and is]  
Only empty of adventitious stains  
Untainted by the marks of delusion. (15)

Simply knowing the true face of the view,  
However viewed, it is but the dimension of [*dharma*]*dhātu*,  
Only what transcends expression in words and thoughts  
Untainted by the marks of extremist beliefs. (16)

Simply knowing the true face of meditation,  
Any kind of meditation is but the natural state,  
Only relaxing loosely without distraction.  
Untainted by the marks of stressful tension. (17)

Simply knowing the true face of conduct,  
Any conduct is but the six perfections,  
Only freely enjoying [whatever] naturally happens  
Untainted by the marks of acceptance and rejection. (18)

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<sup>235</sup> Mother of victors is an epithet for the perfection of wisdom.

Simply knowing the true face of fruition,  
 Anything accomplished is but one's own mind as such,  
 Only the realization that one's own mind is *dharmakāya*  
 Untainted by the marks of hopes and fears. (19)

Finding the definitive mystery of the profound,  
 The blessing of [my] Lama has entered [my] heart.  
 As naked freedom from elaboration arose from within  
 I recognized the true face of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. (20)

Beholding the essence of natural awareness,  
 I clearly ascertained the view free from extremes.  
 Even if Buddha appeared [before me] in person  
 I wouldn't have any queries or theories to scrutinize. (21)

In this song of the view proclaiming the mode of being  
 [In] words drawn forth from the depths of certain knowledge,  
 The visions of direct experiences between meditation sessions  
 Were received [in their own] unobstructed self-expression. (22)  
 This [song] was expressed in Klong yangs.

## 2b. Critical Edition of the *Yin lug sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur*

Na ma citta vajra<sup>236</sup> ya ||  
 snying po'i don rtogs chos kyi rje || gnas lugs ston pa'i thugs rje can || drin can sangs  
 rgyas bsam grub la || snying nas 'dud do brtser dgongs shig || (1)  
 khyed kyi thabs mkhas thugs rje dang || sngon nas 'dris pa'i bag chags sam || tshe 'dir  
 goms pa'i nyer len gyis || gnyug ma'i gnas lugs 'di ltar rtogs || (2)  
 snang ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar snang yang stong pa'i dgangs || ngos gzung  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || chos dbyings mkha' la snang ba tsam || (3)  
 rtog pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar 'phro yang sems kyi rtsal || bzo bcos mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || ye shes rjen par snang ba tsam || (4)  
 dran pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar dran yang gnyug ma'i ngang || ngar 'dzin  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || rang rig gsal bar snang ba tsam || (5)  
 'khrul pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar 'khrul yang gdod ma'i babs || gzung 'dzin  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || rig pa'i mig yor snang ba tsam || (6)

<sup>236</sup> Ms.: *shtsitta badzrā*

gnas pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar gnas kyang mnyam nyid dbyings || bying  
 rmugs mtshan ma ma gos pa'i || rang rig spros dang bral ba tsam || (7)

'gyu ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar 'gyu yang 'od gsal klong || 'phro rgod mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || rang ngo rang gis shes pa tsam || (8)

'khor ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar 'khor yang sgyu ma'i dngos || bde sdug  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || sku bzhi mngon du gyur ba tsam || (9)

zhi ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar zhi yang snang brnyan nyid || ye med mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || ngo bo nyid dbyings dag pa tsam || (10)

skye ba'i rang 'tsang rig tsam na || ji ltar skye yang sprul ba'i sku || mngon zhen mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || rnam dag skyed rim bsgom pa tsam || (11)

'chi ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar shi yang rdzogs pa'i rim || las snang mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || don dam bden pa mthong ba tsam || (12)

bde ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar bde yang 'pho 'gyur med || zag pa'i mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || bde chen lhun gyis grub pa tsam || (13)

gsal ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar gsal yang stong pa'i gzugs || spros pa'i mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa'i || rgyal yum mkha' la snang ba tsam || (14)

stong pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar stong yang bla med chos || 'khrul pa'i mtshan  
 mas ma gos pa || glo bur<sup>237</sup> dri mas stong pa tsam || (15)

lta ba'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar bltas kyang dbyings kyi ngang || mthar 'dzin  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa || smras bsam brjod las 'das pa tsam || (16)

sgom pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar bsgoms kyang lhug pa'i ngang || sdug btsir  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || ma yengs lhod der gnas pa tsam || (17)

spyod pa'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar spyod kyang phar phyin drug || blang dor  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || shugs 'byung ci dgar spyod pa tsam || (18)

'bras bu'i rang 'tshang rig tsam na || ji ltar bsgrubs kyang sems nyid rang || re dogs  
 mtshan mas ma gos pa'i || rang sems chos skur rtogs pa tsam || (19)

bdag gis zab mo'i nges gsang rnyed || bla ma'i byin brlabs snying la zhugs || spros bral  
 rjen pa nang nas shar || 'khor 'das gnyis kyi rang 'tshang rig || (20)

tha mal shes pa'i ngo bo mthong || mtha' bral lta ba'i phu thag chod || sangs rgyas dngos  
 su byon na yang || dri rtsad sgro 'dogs dpyod rgyu med || (21)

nges shes nang nas 'drongs pa'i tshig || *yin lugs sgrog pa lta ba'i mgur* || thun mtshams  
 nyams kyi 'char sgo la || 'gag pa med pa' rang sgrar blangs || shes pa yang klong yangs  
 su smras pa'o || (22)

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<sup>237</sup> Ms.: *blo bur*

## A VAJRA SONG

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following poem bearing the generic title *A Vajra Song* (*rdo rje mgur*) which Karma phrin las addresses to his disciple Chos rgyal mtshan in Gdam pa tsal dbus gling eloquently summarizes the principal Bka' brgyud view that the nature of mind is the gist of all practice and its recognition is the unexcelled goal of the Buddhist path. Karma phrin las begins by describing the core Mahāmudrā view, the inseparability of appearance and emptiness which is not found apart from one's own mind. Mind, in its purity is the expression of wisdom. When distorted by self-identifications, it is karmic movement. Clarity, he explains, is mind's manifestations; emptiness is its essence, and their unity is its nature. This unity of clarity and emptiness is *mahāmudrā*, the ground for all phenomena, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. It is for this reason that ignorance, the stains of mind, can be purified by self-awareness so that the sixty-four qualities that are primordially present in mind—the *dharmakāya*—become manifest. Therefore, Karma phrin las pa explains (verse 14) that fruition abides in the mind as well. On this view, mind as such is never separated from the fruition of buddhahood, being inseparable from its qualities. The text encapsulates the central viewpoint of Karma phrin las pa and the Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā teachings: the inseparability of appearance and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*) and the understanding that since mind's true nature is naturally luminous and empty, the defilements that obscure it can be purified away by self-awareness that perceives things as they are. With this realization, mind's inherent qualities manifest naturally and spontaneously.

The only extant edition of this text is the one found in the Collected Works of Karma phrin las pa. They were reproduced by Ngawang Topgay based on blocks from Rin chen ri bo dating back to 1539:

KPdg: (ga 43<sub>2</sub>–44<sub>5</sub>). In: *Chos kyi rje karma 'phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum las do rje mgur kyi 'phreng ba rnams*, New Delhi: 1979, vol. ga 1–86.

### 3a. English Translation of the *Rdo rje mgur*

Homage to the adamant mind!

I bow down to the Karma pa, my own mind, uniting without exception the body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of all buddhas of the three times. <sup>(1)</sup>

All victors along with their [spiritual] sons of the past, future and present are [but] the pure appearances of mind as such. Therefore, my own mind is the lineage lama. <sup>(2)</sup>

The whole variety of objects and subjects are rainbows, the illusory embodiments of appearance of emptiness. Recalling [this], even the tutelary deity (*yi dam*) who bestows the supreme attainments, is nothing apart from mind. <sup>(3)</sup>



This mind as such is the *ḍākinīs* and dharma protectors, pacifying in one instant entanglement in hostility and error, adverse circumstances and hindrances. <sup>(4)</sup>

The attachments to this [life]—karma, afflictions, tendencies, and the eight [wordly] vices may be purified just by looking at mind. [So] practice also does not exist apart from mind. <sup>(5)</sup>

Texts that teach the clarification between right and wrong, what to accept and reject in terms of view, meditation, and conduct, as well as the mode of abiding of ground, path, and fruition, is likewise one's own mind pure and simple. <sup>(6)</sup>

The washing away of negativities and obscurations of body, speech, and mind, and the initiations bringing forth the *kāyas* and empowering [one] on the path of skillful means in the Generation and Completion [stages], are likewise solely mind as such. <sup>(7)</sup>

One's body, the *maṇḍala* of the victors, is also the pure visionary experience of mind. The Generation Stage [with its] illusory beings as the nonduality of appearance and mind, is likewise the unimpeded creative energy of mind. <sup>(8)</sup>

The radiant mind is the energy wisdom wind (*jñānavāyu*). Karmic winds (*karmavāyu*) is the clinging to I and self. If they are inseparably coemergent, then even harnessing the life-force (*prāṇāyāma*) is a reference to mind. <sup>(9)</sup>

The blazing and trickling [in *gtum mo* practice] is the self-illumination of mind. The melting bliss is the unimpeded effulgence of mind. The level of beholding the nature of mind is coemergent bliss. [So,] the path of skillful means is also solely mind as such. <sup>(10)</sup>

Clarity is the manifestations of mind and empti[ness] is the essence of mind. [Their] unity is the nature of mind, thus mind as such is *mahāmudrā*. <sup>(11)</sup>

Being without beginning and end and free from elaborations, being uncurtailed and without partiality, it is the all-embracing sovereign over the animate and inanimate world, existence and quiescence. This mind as such is the ground of everything, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. <sup>(12)</sup>

Ignorance, the stains of the mind, are purified away by self-awareness itself. Through the primordial inseparability of the Generation and Completion [stages], the path is likewise mind as such pure and simple. <sup>(13)</sup>

The sixty-four qualities have been primordially ever-present in mind. Since that is precisely *dharmakāya*, the fruition is likewise already present in [and as] mind. <sup>(14)</sup>

Mind as such, when seen, is the view. Not being distracted from it is meditation. Dealing with whatever arises is the supreme conduct. This mind as such is [thus] view, meditation, and conduct. <sup>(15)</sup>

Hence, apart from mind, there is not a single trace of dharma. Nevertheless, becoming solidified in error, one clings to subject and object as something real. <sup>(16)</sup>

The meaning of the nonduality of the apprehended and the apprehender, the ultimate mystery of mind has been conveyed so that certainty may arise in [my] disciple, the faithful one who is dedicated to meditation. <sup>(17)</sup>

Keep it in mind, my heart son! Mingle it in your mind-stream and have diligence. Through the virtue of having said these words, May all beings see the nature of mind. <sup>(18)</sup>

This advice was given on the twenty-third day of the second month of the bird year to Chos rgyal mtshan in Gdam pa tsal dbus gling.

### 3b. Critical Edition of the *Rdo rje mgur*

na ma citta vajra<sup>238</sup> ya ||  
 dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad kyi || sku gsung thugs dang yon tan dang || phrin las  
 ma lus gcig gyur pa || rang sems karma<sup>239</sup> pa la 'dud || <sup>(1)</sup>  
 'das dang ma 'ongs da ltar gyi || rgyal ba sras dang bcas pa yang || sems nyid dag pa'i  
 snang ba ste || rang sems 'di brgyud pa'i bla ma yin || <sup>(2)</sup>  
 sna tshogs gzung dang 'dzin pa kun || 'ja' lus snang stong sgyu ma'i sku || dran pas  
 dngos grub mchog bstsol ba || yi dam kyang sems las gzhan na med || <sup>(3)</sup>  
 sdang dang log par gzhol ba dang || mi mthun rkyen dang bar gcod rnam || skad cig  
 nyid la zhi mdzad pa'i || sems nyid 'di mkha' 'gro chos skyong lags || <sup>(4)</sup>  
 las dang nyon mongs bag chags dang || chos brgyad tshe 'di'i zhen pa rnam || sems la  
 bltas pa tsam gyis dag || nyams len kyang sems las gud na med || <sup>(5)</sup>  
 chos dang chos min so sor gsal || lta sgom spyod pa'i blang dor dang || gzhi lam 'bras  
 bu'i gnas tshul ston || dpe cha yang rang sems 'di ka rang || <sup>(6)</sup>  
 lus ngag yid kyi sdig sgrib 'khru || skyed rdzogs thabs kyi lam la dbang || sku dang ye  
 shes mngon gyur ba'i || dbang bskur kyang sems nyid kho na'o || <sup>(7)</sup>  
 rang lus rgyal ba'i dkyil 'khor yang || sems kyi 'char sgo dag pa yin || snang sems gnyis  
 med sgyu ma'i dngos || skyed rim kyang 'gag med sems kyi rtsal || <sup>(8)</sup>  
 dangs ma'i sems ni ye shes rlung || las rlung nga dang bdag 'dzin te || dbyer med lhan  
 cig skyes pas na || srog rtsol kyang sems la zer bar gda' || <sup>(9)</sup>  
 'bar 'dzag sems kyi rang 'od yin || zhu bde sems kyi 'gag med gdangs || sems ngo  
 mthong sa lhan skyes bde || thabs lam kyang sems nyid kho na'o || <sup>(10)</sup>  
 gsal ba sems kyi 'char sgo dang || stong pa sems kyi ngo bo yin || zung 'jug sems kyi  
 rang bzhin te || sems nyid 'di phyag rgya chen po yin || <sup>(11)</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Ms.: *shitsitta badzrā*

<sup>239</sup> Ms.: *karmā*

thog mtha' med cing spros dang bral || rgya chad phyogs lhung ma mchis kyang || brtan  
 g.yo srid zhi'i khyab bdag che || sems nyid 'di 'khor 'das kun gyi gzhi || (12)  
 ma rig sems kyi dri ma rnams || rang rig nyid kyis dag par byed || ye nas skyed rdzogs  
 dbyer med pas || lam yang sems nyid 'di ka rang || (13)  
 yon tan drug bcu rtsa bzhi po || gdod nas sems la rtag bzhugs pa || de nyid chos kyi sku  
 yin pas || 'bras bu'ang sems la bzhugs pa yin || (14)  
 sems nyid blta na lta ba yin || de la ma yengs sgom pa ste || gang shar spyod na spyod  
 pa'i mchog || sems nyid 'di lta sgom spyod pa'o || (15)  
 de phyir sems las ma gtogs pa'i || chos gzhan logs na rdul tsam med || 'on kyang 'khrul  
 par a 'thas pas || gzung 'dzin la bden par zhen pa yin || (16)  
 gzung 'dzin gnyis su med pa'i don || sems kyi gsang ba dam pa 'di || dad ldan sgom la  
 gzhol ba yin || slob bu la nges shes skye phyir smras || (17)  
 sems la chongs shig snying gi bu || rgyud dang bsres shig brtson 'grus can || de skad  
 smras ba'i dge ba yis || 'gro kun gyis sems ngo mthong bar shog ||

ces pa byi ba lo hor zla gnyis pa'i nyi shu gsum gyi nyin **chos rgyal mtshan** la gdams pa tshal  
 dbus gling du smras pa'o || (18)

MI BSKYOD RDO RJE

SELECTED MATERIALS

ON MAHĀMUDRĀ

English Translations and

Critical Editions

## CRITIQUE OF ‘GOS LO TSĀ BA’S SEPARATION OF BUDDHAHOOD AND BUDDHA NATURE

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following passage from Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* is part of a lengthy criticism of the buddha nature theory presented in ‘Gos Lo tsā ba’s currently unavailable commentary on the *Kālacakra* entitled *Secrets of the Three Continua* (*Rgyud gsum gsang ba*). At issue in this particular excerpt is the view that “when the *buddhagarbha* [is said to] be present in all sentient beings, it is not buddha[hood] that is present” but “rather something typologically similar to the buddha.”<sup>240</sup> The Eighth Karma pa responds that it is wrong here to introduce a dichotomy between buddhahood and its quintessence (\**sugatagarbha*). In particular, he objects to ‘Gos lo’s use of Rang byung rdo rje’s statement in his *Hevajra* commentary that “the spiritual potential (*rigs*) consists in aspects of sentient beings’ body, speech and mind (*lus ngag yid*) that are similar to (‘*dra ba’i cha*) tathāgatas’ body, speech and mind (*sku gsung thugs*)”. Mi bskyod rdo rje counters, with support from Kaṇha’s *Hevajra* commentary, that a buddha’s and sentient being’s body, speech and mind are only similar in number and formal aspects. Otherwise, they should be understood to be completely different since the former are innate and the latter are adventitious. Yet, as Kaṇha had observed, when the latent tendencies of ordinary embodiment are relinquished, the latent tendencies of the undefiled aggregates are strengthened. Thus, to the extent that the body, speech and mind of sentient being are purified away, those of buddha(hood) are able to fully manifest. Against the claim that only something similar to the uncorrupted exists in sentient beings, the Karma pa will elsewhere contend that it is the actual uncorrupted *buddha-jñāna* which is latently present in beings, and not a mere facsimile of it.

The following editions of the *Rgan po’i rlung sman* (using the standard ornamental title *Bdud rtsi’i dri mchog*) were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

TL<sub>MK</sub>: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung ’bum*. 26 vols. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 15, 975–1024<sub>5</sub>.

TL<sub>VV</sub>: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung ’bum*. 14 vols. Sarnath: n.d., vol. 6, 1a–22b<sub>2</sub>.

TL<sub>NB</sub>: *Rnal ’byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad sogs*. 4 vols. Thimphu: 1979, vol. 3, 249–335<sub>6</sub>.

### 1a. English Translation of *Rgan po’i rlung sman* (excerpt)

In general I see what is relevant [to the topic of the alleged similarity between the body, speech and mind of sentient beings and buddhas] to be precisely the explanation in terms of [1] the ground of the clearing process, [2] the objects to be cleared, [3] the clearing process and [4] the result of the clearing process. <sup>[1006]</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> See Mathes 2008, 321.

In this regard, there are [A] explanations of correspondence in terms of homologous phenomena, and [B] explanations of correspondence in terms of purification. [A] In general, this comprises [1] what is called the “ground” that remains when what [is to be cleared] has been cleared away, [2] the full enumeration of its stains that are cleared away, [3] the full range of antidotes that clear these [stains], and [4] the result of that clearing process which is not other than the ground of the clearing process itself.

However, from the perspective of consciousness, things apprehended separately, being of the nature of interdependence, are thus interconnected as homologous phenomena<sup>241</sup> insofar as they are mutually dependent as factors to be relinquished and their antidotes—this is the profound vital point of the Unsurpassed Vajrayāna. So in the case of such similarities, having first discussed them in language [emphasizing] connections according to homologous instances, they are ultimately ascertained as being heterologous instances. By directly recognizing (*ngo sprod pa*) the factors to be relinquished and antidotes separately, one eliminates the factors to be relinquished and completes the activation of the antidotes. The purpose of the Vajra path is thereby fulfilled.

The category of impure psychophysical aggregates and elements and the rest are the body, speech and mind of sentient beings, but these are only numerically similar to the [adamantine] body, speech and mind of buddhas. Consequently, when you meditate on the imagined deities (*kun btags kyi lha*), there arise cognitions (*rnam rig*) of many things such as the four impure birth places, heads and limbs and so forth. Also, among the assembly of deities belonging to the clearing process, there may be similarities [with humans] in terms of numbers and aspects. As for their difference, however, the aspects to be relinquished are the ordinary

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<sup>241</sup> Seeking to clarify Rang byung rdo rje’s view that, from the standpoint of buddha nature, a sentient being’s body speech and mind of a sentient being similar to a buddha’s, Mi bskyod rdo rje proposes a perspectival account that recognizes how two phenomena can be considered similar from one level of description (or mode of cognition), yet entirely dissimilar from another. From the Vajrayāna viewpoint of interdependence, a sentient being’s body, speech and mind can be considered similar or homologous to a buddha’s just to the extent that the two are mutually dependent as factors to be relinquished and antidotes respectively. In this context, they may be regarded as *internal dyads* in the sense that each requires the other for its definition, like “up and down” or “light and dark”. But, from the standpoint of goal-realization, they are eventually seen to be dissimilar or heterologous insofar as the former (which is superfluous) need to be relinquished for the latter (which is essential) to fully manifest. They may here be regarded as *external dyads* in the sense that the factors to be relinquished (conditioning phenomena) turn out to be superfluous and adventitious whereas the antidotes (buddha qualities) are essential and ever-abiding. The idea of internal and external dyads is borrowed from Charles Taylor 2011 where they are used in an entirely unrelated context.

latent tendencies<sup>242</sup> while, conversely, what does not form a continuous chain of latent tendencies<sup>243</sup> is the essence of supreme wisdom. [1007]

[2] As for explanations of correspondence in terms of purification: When the triad of body, speech and mind of sentient beings is purified, the [adamantine] body, speech and mind of buddhas that have been obscured by these [former], become apparent from the perspective of consciousness. Hence, insofar as impure aspects become pure ones, they are metaphorically designated as “similar to those”. For example, it is said that “the triad of body, speech and mind, once purified, is the three *kāyas*.”<sup>244</sup> And [by way of commentary to *Hevajra* II.iv.64b]:

When what has adhered to the womb of a sentient being for ten months together with its negative hindrances has been purified, it becomes lord of the ten levels.

This is the main point (*don po*) of the Mantra scriptures of Vajrayāna. However, [you talk about] something “similar to buddha” and sometimes talk about sentient beings as if they were real and other times as if they were not—[such] ideas are not well-founded. Therefore, the meaning [of the tantric scriptures] is not that sentient beings possess a thing that is totally unreliable that [you] called “similar”.<sup>245</sup>

In short, according to this teacher who propounds the rival position, “what is attained via the nature of things” (*dharmatā*)—viz., an aspect similar to a buddha within sentient beings—is the naturally present spiritual potential. That aspect which becomes increasingly similar to a buddha—being typologically similar (*rigs ’dra ba*) to it—by producing the roots of virtue such as study and so on, is the unfolded spiritual potential. So finally, when it becomes very similar to it, it turns into this very buddha. Also, the means of turning into [a buddha] are the qualities for cleansing the spiritual element (*kham*s) such as faith.

In short, [you have] declared that “the quintessence that exists in sentient beings is not the quintessence of buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi snying po*) but rather a quintessence of sentient being (*sems can snying po*).” Regarding the untenability of this, [1008] [1] it is shown that it was a mistake to have not correctly identified the naturally present spiritual potential and the unfolded spiritual potential: they are not the actual [buddhahood], so however similar to it

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<sup>242</sup> This follows Kāṇha’s interpretation of the relevant *Hevajra* passage, on which see discussion in Volume I, 267–68 and translation in n. 752.

<sup>243</sup> Literally, “is not linked in series of latent tendencies”, i.e., the uninterrupted succession of actions and reactions that constitutes *samsāra*.

<sup>244</sup> The author may be simply be paraphrasing a view expressed in many tantras. In any event, we were unable to not locate a source for this specific quotation.

<sup>245</sup> In other words, if beings do not have actual buddha nature but only a pseudo or ersatz buddha nature, there is no possibility of attaining buddhahood but only an ever-increasing likeness or approximation to buddhahood. To take a contemporary example, tofu lobster can be made to resemble real lobster in taste and texture but will never become real lobster. To put it simply, sentient beings’ luminosity is identical to buddhas’ luminosity. It manifests precisely to the extent that the adventitious stains that conceal it are removed.

they may be, they do not [actually] become that.<sup>246</sup> [2] Therefore, it is shown that in the system of this master and disciple, their claims have been adulterated by the views and tenets of Rje Tsong kha pa and his disciples—for some people, this does not count as being valid.<sup>247</sup>

In that regard, the naturally present potential is that wherein all flaws are exhausted and [all] qualities fully actualized (*yongs rdzogs*). It is buddhahood since the beginning. It is the state of complete spiritual awakening. Even when, from the perspective of consciousness, the potential later becomes the buddha in which stains are purified away, it has not become better than before.<sup>248</sup> Since this [potential] has always and already been inseparable from buddha nature that is free from stains, it is able to fully display all the activities (*mdzad*) of a buddha. However, there are some who say that suchness possessing stains is unable to display these buddha-activities because it is like a knife that cannot be taken from its scabbard and so forth. But this is just a system of those who speak incorrectly.

Having unerringly identified the naturally present potential, when it comes to the unfolded potential, it may seem from the perspective of ordinary consciousness as if certain aspects of buddha nature manifests due to adventitious stains having been purified away. Moreover, the naturally present potential is present as the abiding condition for those under the influence of wisdom itself, but when it comes to the unfolded potential, it seems from the perspective of conventional consciousness as if something not previously awakened [1009] had awakened. Therefore, this [unfolded potential] is of provisional meaning because something already awakened (*gdod 'tshang*) cannot [actually] blossom (*rgya*) [into awakening].<sup>249</sup>

Moreover, in taking what is not the real thing as a basis for [understanding] that real thing, however absolutely similar to that it may become it will never be that because the nature

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<sup>246</sup> See RGV I.149 f. where the idea of the development of the potential is suggested.

<sup>247</sup> *kha cig la* can also mean according to some people.

<sup>248</sup> The author implicitly rejects the early Buddhist ‘replacement model’ of spiritual transformation which considers awakening to consist in the replacement of a ‘bad’ mode of being with a ‘good’ one. Sakuma has shown that the idea of fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*) was employed within two contrasting models: replacement and elimination. Within the replacement model, as presented in the Śrāvakabhūmi, an old basis of badness or malaise (*daṣṭulya*) is replaced by a new basis of ease (*praśrabdhi*). In the elimination model, as presented in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the basis of badness is eliminated without replacement. It is clear that an elimination model underlies the Tathāgatagarbha view that goal-realization depends not on modifying a defiled state of being (e.g. *ālayavijñāna*) from ‘worse’ to ‘better’ but rather of clearing it away entirely—on the assumption that it is not constitutive anyhow but thoroughly adventitious and derivative—so that a primordial mode of being (*tathatā*) that it has temporarily obscured can reveal itself. In rejecting the idea that buddhahood is simply an ‘altered state of consciousness,’ the elimination model, of the kind presented and defended by the eighth Karmapa, may be regarded as a challenge to a psychologistic account of what happens when a sentient being becomes a buddha. See Sakuma 1990 and Franco 1997, 84 f.

<sup>249</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje here argues that the idea that buddhahood consists in the blossoming or unfoldment of qualities is provisional (i.e., in need of further interpretation) because such qualities are in fact fully present, although obscured to varying degrees, within sentient beings, like the sun obscured by clouds.



[of a real thing] is undifferentiated. It is similar to identical twins [among] donkeys and cattle.<sup>250</sup> From a classical text on reasoning:

Because it is similar, it is not the actual one.<sup>251</sup>

In short, [you] claim that buddha nature exists in sentient beings. That quintessence of buddha that exists is not the quintessence of buddha (*\*buddhagarbha*), it is the quintessence of sentient being (*sattvagarbha*). This is absent in buddhas. Since all these claims are strikingly similar to the system of Rje [Tsong kha pa] Blo bzang grags pa, it stands to reason that those who revere this master should also arouse fervent devotion to this doctrinal system [of yours]!

### 1b. Critical Edition of *Rgan po'i rlung sman* (excerpt)

MKsb, vol. 15, 1005<sub>6</sub>–1009<sub>4</sub>: spyir sbyang gzhi sbyang bya sbyong byed sbyangs 'bras kyi sgo<sub>[1006]</sub> nas bshad pa nyid skabs su bab par mthong ste | de yang | chos mtshungs dang sbyar te bshad | rnam dag dang sbyar te bshad pa'o || de la spyir gang sbyangs nas lhag mar lus pa'i gzhi bsnyad pa de dang | de la sgrib byed dri ma'i grangs de snyed dang | de sbyong byed kyi gnyen po de snyed dang | des de sbyangs pa'i 'bras bu sbyang gzhi nyid<sup>252</sup> las gzhan min yang | rnam shes kyi ngor so sor bzung ba rnam rten 'brel gyi chos nyid du<sup>253</sup> | spang gnyen gnyis ltos mtshungs kyi chos mthun du sbyor ba ni | rdo rje theg pa bla na med pa dag gi zab gnad yin te | de ltar gyi chos mthun de yang dang<sup>254</sup> por mthun dpe ltar sbyor ba skad du gsungs nas | mthar thug mi mthun dper gtan la phab pas | spang gnyen so sor ngo sprod pas spang bya

<sup>250</sup> That is to say, twins may be and appear identical in every respect but never be the same being.

<sup>251</sup> The attribution of this passage to a “text on reasoning” (*rigs pa'i gzhung*) is problematic. This could plausibly be a shorthand for Chos grags rgya mtsho's celebrated *Tshad ma legs par bshad pa thams cad kyi chu bo yongs su 'du ba Riggs pa'i gzhung lugs kyi rgya mtsho* but the passage does not occur there. The passage is located in the Derge Tangyur version of *Mudrācatuṛāṭīkāratnahr̥daya* (Tib. *Phyag rgya bzhi'i rgya cher 'grel pa rin po che'i snying po*), D 2259, 571<sub>6</sub>. This is a commentary on Maitripa's *Caturmudrānvaya* (authorship remains uncertain) by Bhitakarma (aka. Karopa) who was a disciple of Vajrapāṇi and one of Maitripa's heart disciples. For a translation of the root text with selected explanations from the commentary, see Mathes 2008, a final version of which will appear in his forthcoming translation and critical edition of *Advayavajrasaṃgraha*. For references to Sanskrit versions of root text and paracanonical versions of Tibetan translations of the commentary, see *ibid.* 128. On the life of Karopa, see Roerich, tr., 1979, 842–43. The line quoted by Mi bskyod rdo rje is part of Karopa's explanation of why the coemergence (*sahaja*) realized through the four joys and four moments that are experienced with a female consort (*karmamudrā*) is not the real one that is realized through experiencing the four moments and four joys in the context of *dharmamudrā*. “...just as the four moments and four joys are counted on the level of *dharmamudrā*, so are they also on the level of *karmamudrā*. For this reason and because it [*viz.*, the coemergence experienced with a *karmamudrā*] is similar, it is not the real one. This is because [the goal] to be shown (*mtshon bya : lakṣya*) can be shown insofar as one directly experiences the shower [symbol].” See Mathes 2008, 94–95. Translation altered slightly.

<sup>252</sup> TL<sub>LS</sub>: *nyi*

<sup>253</sup> TL<sub>PN</sub>, TL<sub>LS</sub>: *tu*

<sup>254</sup> TL<sub>LS</sub>: *dag*

spangs | gnyen po'i byed pa rdzogs pa ni rdo rje'i lam gyi dgos don grub pa'i phyir | ma dag pa'i phung po dang kham sogs kyi rigs ni | sems can gyi lus ngag yid gsum yin la | de dag yang sangs rgyas kyi sku gsung thugs dang grangs tsam cha mthun pa yin la | de'i don gyis kun btags kyi lha sgom pa'i tshe | ma dag pa'i skye gnas bzhi la mgo lag sogs du ma'i rnam rig 'byung ba de | sbyong byed kyi lha tshogs la'ang grangs dang rnam pa de lta bu dang chos mthun par yod kyang | khyad par ni spang bya rnam pa bag chag phal pa dang | gcig shos bag chags kyis mtshams sbyar ba min par ye shes mchog gi <sup>[1007]</sup> ngo bo yin no || rnam dag dang sbyar te bshad na | sems can gyi lus ngag yid gsum ni rnam par dag na des bsgribs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi sku gsung thugs rnam shes kyi ngo bor snang bas | des na ma dag pa'i cha dag na<sup>255</sup> de dang 'dra bar btags pa ste | dper na |

lus ngag yid gsum dag pa sku gsum |

zhes pa dang ||

sems can gyi mngal 'dzin pa zla bcu gnas ngan len dang bcas pa rnam par dag na | sa bcu'i dbang phyug du 'gyur |

zhes pa rdo rje theg pa'i sngags gzhung gi don po yin gyi sangs rgyas dang 'dra zhing sems can dngos res 'ga' yin pa ltar 'chad | res 'ga' min pa ltar 'chad pa'i rnam rtog gting ma tshugs pas 'dra ba'i ming can blo rtse gtad pa gang yang med pa zhig sems can la ldan pa'i don min no || mdor na phyogs snga smra ba 'di dpon slob kyis sems can la sangs rgyas dang 'dra ba'i cha chos nyid kyis thob pa de rang bzhin gnas rigs yin | de thos sogs kyi dge rtse byas pas rigs 'dra ba de sangs rgyas su je 'drar 'gyur ba'i cha de rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs yin pas | mthar shin tu 'dra bar gyur pa sangs rgyas nyid du 'gyur te | 'gyur ba'i thabs kyang | kham sbyong byed kyi chos dad sogs yin la | mdor na sems can la yod pa'i snying po de sems can snying po yin gyi sangs rgyas kyi snying po ma yin no zhes zer ro || 'di mi 'thad pa la | rang bzhin gnas <sup>[1008]</sup> rigs dang rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ngo ma zin pas 'khrul <sup>[256]</sup> dngos ma yin pa ji ltar 'dra yang de mi 'gyur bar bstan | des ni 'di dpon slob kyi lugs la rje tsong kha pa dpon slob kyi lta grub kyi 'dres yod pas 'dod pa ni kha cig la tshad mar mi 'gro bar bstan pa'o || de yang rang bzhin du gnas pa'i rigs pa skyon kun zad yon tan yongs rdzogs de nyid yin la | de gdod ma nas sangs rgyas pa | mngon par byang chub pa nyid yin pa la | rnam shes kyi ngor glo bur rnam dag gi sangs rgyas su phyis grub pa'i dus kyang sngar las bzang du song ba med cing | gdod ma nyid

<sup>255</sup> TL<sub>LS</sub>: nang

<sup>256</sup> TL<sub>NB</sub>: addit. |

nas de<sup>257</sup> dri bral gyi sangs rgyas kyi snying po dang dbyer med pas sangs rgyas kyi mdzad<sup>258</sup>  
 pa thams cad yongs su ston par nus pa yin gyi kha cig dri bcas kyi de bzhin nyid las sangs  
 rgyas kyi mdzad pa ston mi nus te | shubs nas ma bton pa'i ral gri bzhin zer ba sogs kyang ma  
 dag par smra ba'i lugs 'ba' zhig go || de nas rang bzhin gnas rigs 'khrul med du ngos bzung  
 nas | rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ni | rnam shes kyi ngo bor glo bur dri ma dag stobs kyis | sangs rgyas  
 kyi snying po'i cha re gsal ba ltar snang ba de yin la | de yang rang bzhin gnas rigs ni gnas  
 lugs su zhugs pa'i ye shes nyid dbang btsan pa'i ngo nas yin gyi | rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ni kun  
 rdzob rnam shes kyi ngor<sup>259</sup> sngar sangs ma rgyas pa zhig sangs rgyas pa ltar [1009] snang ba  
 yin pas drang ba'i don yin pa zhig gdod 'tshang gang gis kyang rgya mi nus pa'i phyir ro ||  
 gzhan yang dngos po de dngos ma yin gzahir byas pa la | de ci ltar 'dra ba rab kyi mthar thug  
 kyang der mi 'gyur te rang gi ngo bo tha mi dad pa'i phyir | mtshe ma ba glang dang mgrin  
 bzang bzhin no || rigs pa'i gzhung las |

'dra ba'i phyir na dngos ma yin |<sup>260</sup>

zhes 'byung bas so || mdor na sems can la sangs rgyas kyi snying po yod | yod pa'i sangs rgyas  
 kyi snying po de sangs rgyas kyi snying po ma yin | sems can gyi snying po yin | 'di sangs  
 rgyas la med ces zer ba de thams cad rje blo bzang grags pa'i lugs dang ches<sup>261</sup> nye bas rje de  
 la gus pa rnams chos tshul 'di la mchog tu gus pa skyed rigs so ||

## SOME CRITICISMS OF SHĀKYA MCHOG LDAN'S BUDDHA NATURE EPISTEMOLOGY

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The opening section of the second part of Mi bskyod rdo rje's two part *Nerve Tonic for the Elderly* (*Rgan po'i rlung sman*) takes aim at the epistemological foundations of the tantric buddha nature theory outlined in Shākya mchog ldan's *Commentary on the Cakrasaṃvara* (*bde mchog rnam bshad*). Here the Karma pa takes issue with Sa skya scholar's tendency to blur the lines between consciousness (*rnam bshad*) and wisdom (*ye shes*). This alone is considered sufficient to undermine the entire edifice of the Sa skya master's tantric buddha nature theory. On closer investigation, Shākya mchog ldan identifies the clear and knowing cognition—the subjective, inward-looking part of consciousness—with nondual wisdom, and proceeds to align the outward-looking (objective) and inward-looking (subjective) poles of consciousness with the two truths, the conventional and ultimate respectively. In Mi bskyod rdo rje's estimation, this equation reflects Shākya mchog ldan's

<sup>257</sup> TL<sub>LS</sub>: addit. *di* [sic!]

<sup>258</sup> TL<sub>PN</sub>: *mdo* [? text is unclear]

<sup>259</sup> TL<sub>LS</sub>: *ngo bor*

<sup>260</sup> TL<sub>PN</sub>, TL<sub>LS</sub> corroborated by D 2259, 571<sub>6</sub>.

<sup>261</sup> TL<sub>PN</sub>, TL<sub>LS</sub>: *chos*; ammended as per TL<sub>NB</sub>

endorsement of an Alīkāṅkaravāda [false aspectarian] Cittamātra view that equates the apprehending aspect of cognition with nondual wisdom. Now, as Mi bskyod rdo rje and much of the Indian Buddhist tradition maintain, ordinary consciousness (*viññāna* : *nam shes*) considered dualistic precisely on account of its subjectivizing and objectivizing activities, whereas wisdom (*jñāna* : *ye shes*) is characterized precisely by the absence of such dualistic activities. Consequently, both the sense and explanatory power of this crucial distinction, which is a cornerstone in Shākya mchog ldan's own doctrinal system as well, are irretrievably lost when one links the subject pole of consciousness with wisdom and erects an entire soteriology on this unstable foundation.

The following editions of the *Rgan po'i rlung sman* (using the standard ornamental title *Bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*) were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

TL<sub>MK</sub>: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. 26 vols. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 15, 1010<sub>2</sub>–1013<sub>4</sub>.

TL<sub>VV</sub>: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. 14 vols. Varanasi: n.d., vol. 6, 31<sub>5</sub>–34<sub>4</sub>.

TL<sub>NB</sub>: *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyī nam bshad sogs*. 4 vols. Thimpu: 1979, vol. 3, 310<sub>2</sub>–316<sub>1</sub>.

## 2a. English Translation of *Rgan po'i rlung sman* (excerpt)

Now the buddha nature theory of the illustrious Shākya mchog ldan will be critically examined. In his *Commentary on the Cakrasaṃvara*, he states<sup>262</sup>:

Hence, it is determined that saṃsāric phenomena are mere appearances before consciousness and that nirvāṇic phenomena are the experienced objects of wisdom. Among these, the latter do not need to be analyzed at this stage. Among the two factors of consciousness—i.e., [1] the factor of dual appearances [of] looking outward through the sense-gates at substances or characteristics and [2] the factor of the clear and knowing [cognition] (*gsal rig*) looking inward, [1] the first is [defined as] conventional *saṃsāra*, the factor consisting in the stains that are posited as *saṃsāra* and the apprehended aspects of consciousness, the knowable objects. [2] The latter is defined as the ultimate *saṃsāra*, natural *nirvāṇa*, the apprehending aspect, and that which designated as ‘wisdom’. Since the abiding nature of all conventional phenomena does not exist apart from just these, it is impossible for them not to be pervaded by buddha nature that is called continuum (*tantra*) and is the ultimate [Guhyā]samāja *maṇḍala* (*don dam pa'i 'dus dkyil*) of all phenomena. As has been stated [*Hevajratantra* I.viii.41cd]: [1011]

<sup>262</sup> For the annotated version and discussion of this passage, see Volume I, 288 f.

By me is this all pervaded.  
Another nature of the world [of beings] is not seen.

And, as noted by the venerable Ghaṇṭapāda:

All these beings are the naturally accomplished *maṇḍala*  
That is nondual.

This is how it is written, [but] as for its tenability, it is not tenable that the abiding condition of *saṃsāra* is buddha nature. Nor is it tenable that the factor of the [mundane] clear and knowing [cognition], which is the inward looking consciousness, is wisdom. Neither is it admissible that this clear and knowing consciousness is *nirvāṇa*. It is a mistake to identify “ultimate *saṃsāra*” with the *saṃsāra* appearing before conventional consciousness. Given that both the apprehended aspect—i.e., the outward orientation of consciousness—and the inward-looking self-awareness are adventitious stains, it is untenable to distinguish them in line with the two truths. It is also a mistake to explain that which is called the “subjective aspect” (*’dzin rnam*) as being the nondual wisdom that is accepted by the Mādhyamikas. When you link the meaning of the [above] scriptural citations with [ordinary] consciousness, you misrepresent the vital point of the Vajrayāna.

Let me add that to the extent that there is something already present as the abiding nature, it cannot be anything but the ultimate buddha nature.<sup>263</sup> Be that as it may, the abiding mode of *saṃsāra* is not empty in the sense of nonexistence (*med stong*)<sup>264</sup>: this is your basic premise (*rtsa sgrub*) and we accept it as well. So, in that case, if buddha nature were emptiness *qua* nonexistence, then it would transcend neither the extreme of annihilation nor conceptual elaborations. So all the refutations you have made in your own scriptures to repudiate claims that buddha nature is emptiness *qua* nonexistence would end up undermining yourself, the “great one”.<sup>265</sup> [1012] [Now,] you don’t maintain, as some people do, that there is no abiding condition but [only] an imputed abiding condition. Consequently, if you accept in conventional terms the abiding mode of all conventional phenomena or the whole of *saṃsāra*, then

<sup>263</sup> TL<sub>NB</sub> has “buddha nature as ultimate truth” (*don dam pa’i bden pa bde gshegs snying po*) rather than “ultimate truth” (*don dam pa’i bden pa*) as it occurs in TL<sub>VV</sub> and TL<sub>MK</sub>.

<sup>264</sup> This is identified by Candrakīrti in his *bhāṣya* on MA 6.3 as one of two fundamental misinterpretations (*log par zhugs pa’i bsam pa*) of emptiness, the other consisting in the rejection of emptiness as a valid Buddhist doctrine. See Williams 1983, 127 and n. 11.

<sup>265</sup> *Chen po ba* may here allude to the author’s claim to be both a follower of Mahāmudrā (*phyag rgya chen po*) and of the Great Middle Way (*dbu ma chen po*).

this abiding mode does not transcend the [truths of] suffering and its source. It follows that the abiding mode of *saṃsāra* is not established as [buddha] nature.<sup>266</sup>

The same holds for that which [you call] the inward-looking and outward-looking [factors] of consciousness. Since there is no difference between them insofar as they are the clear and knowing factor that is [just] a hallmark (*ngo bo*) of [mundane] consciousness, even these two streams of this clear and knowing factor stem from the element (*kham*s) of mental formations (*saṃskāra*). And because it is [just] a hallmark of other-dependent cognition (*gzhan dbang rnam rig* = *viññapti*), and because such knowing also consists in the knower (*shes pa can*) that arises from the all-ground consciousness (*ālayaviññāna*) like waves from water, it does not transcend the adventitious stains that are to be relinquished. So, how could that [clear and knowing cognition] possibly be wisdom?

Likewise, it could not possibly be *nirvāṇa* because being the inward-looking [factor] among the two basic factors stemming from the saṃsāric consciousness, it is [identified by you as] self-aware cognition. This self-aware direct perception (*rang rig mngon sum* : *svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa*) is *not* *nirvāṇa* because in the context of classifying types of mentation (*blo ris 'du ba*), this is said to exist in all ordinary individuals and is therefore sharply separated from yogic direct perception (*rnal 'byor mngon sum* : *yogipratyakṣa*).<sup>267</sup> So it is not at all correct [to call it] *nirvāṇa*. Having asserted more than once that “ultimate *saṃsāra*” is buddha nature, you nonetheless assert that this has no connection at all with [mundane] consciousness. So by claiming that the inward-looking consciousness is ultimate *saṃsāra*, you contradict your own words! [1013]

That is not all: the inward-looking factor of a sentient being’s cognition circles around in *saṃsāra* and all the aspects (*ākāra* : *rnam pa*) that constitute the three realms appear before it. But this would mean that buddha nature which is [your] so-called “ultimate *saṃsāra*” would circle in *saṃsāra* and would have the representational cognition<sup>268</sup> that knows the

<sup>266</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje does not accept Shākyā mchog ldan’s distinction between conventional and ultimate buddha nature as elaborated in his major treatises on buddha nature, on which see Komarovski 2006 and 2010. It may be noted that the apparently parallel distinction between ultimate and relative *bodhicitta* differs in one crucial respect: conventional *bodhicitta* is simply the virtuous application of ordinary conditioned mind (*sems*) whereas ultimate *bodhicitta* is the naturally pure nature of mind (*sems nyid*). There is no corresponding conditioned type of buddha nature described in the Tathāgatarbha texts. There is only one unconditioned buddha nature that is obscured to varying degrees by adventitious stains.

<sup>267</sup> On this critical distinction between *svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa* and *yogipratyakṣa*, see Volume 1, 291.

<sup>268</sup> Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasamgraha* 2.2 lists eleven phenomenal or representational cognitions (*viññapti* : *rnam rig*) characteristic of the relative nature (*paratantralakṣaṇa*) that all stem from the substratum consciousness (*ālayaviññāna*) and are associated with unreal imagining (*abhūtaparikalpa*). They are 1. cognitions of the body (*deha*): the five sensory elements (*dhatū*), 2. cognitions of the embodied (*dehi*): the afflicted ego-mind (*kliṣṭamanas*), 3. cognitions of the enjoyer (*bhoktr*): the element of ego-mind (*manodhātu*), support of the five sensory consciousnesses, 4. cognitions of what is enjoyed up by those (*tadupabhukta*): the six sense objects, 5. cognitions that enjoy those (*tadupabhoktr*): the six consciousnesses, 6. cognitions of time (*kāla*): the

appearances of all these aspects that constitute the three realms. This same consciousness engenders two modes of seeing—seeing its own self-nature and [seeing] its external objects. But these two remain cognitions of subject and object—they do not last for a moment, are fictitious and deceptive. Since you have thereby introduced a dichotomy within conventional truth between the ultimate truth as the inward-looking and conventional truth as the outward-looking, you declare what is [generally] recognized as conventional truth to be the ultimate truth. As a result, your philosophy is fundamentally mistaken.

## 2b. Critical Edition of *Rgan po'i rlung sman* (excerpt)

MKsb, vol. 15, 1010<sub>2</sub>–1013<sub>4</sub>: da ni **dpal shākya mchog ldan** gyi snying po'i rnam gzhaḡ la dpyad par bya ste | de yang de nyid kyi bde mchog rnam bshad du |

de la 'khor ba'i chos rnam shes la snang tsam dang | mya ngan las 'das pa'i chos ye shes kyi myong bya nyid du nges pa las<sup>269</sup> phyi ma la re zhig dpyad mi dgos shing | rnam shes la<sup>270</sup> rdzas sam mtshan nyid kyi sgo nas phyi blta<sup>271</sup> gnyis snang gi cha dang | nang blta<sup>272</sup> gsal rig gi cha gnyis las | dang po la ni |<sup>273</sup> kun rdzob pa'i 'khor ba dang | 'khor bar 'jog byed kyi<sup>274</sup> dri ma'i cha dang | rnam shes kyi gzung rnam shes bya la | phyi ma la ni don dam pa'i 'khor ba dang | rang bzhin myang 'das dang | 'dzin rnam dang ye shes kyi ming can dag tu nges la | kun rdzob pa'i chos thams cad kyi gnas tshul ni |<sup>275</sup> 'di kho na las gzhan du yod pa ma yin pas na | chos thams cad kyi don dam pa'i 'dus dkyil dang | rgyud

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uninterrupted continuity of *saṃsāra*, 7. cognitions of enumeration (*saṃkhyā*): calculation (*gaṇana*) according to numbers, 8. cognitions of place (*deśa*): the receptacle world (*bhājanaloka*), 9. cognitions of conventions (*vyavahāra*): the four conventions based on language-use—the seen (*drṣṭa*), the heard (*śruta*), thought (*mata*) and known (*viññāta*), 10. cognitions that distinguishes self and other (*svaparaviśeṣa*): perceptions based on belief in 'me' and 'mine', 11. [a] cognitions of good (*sugati*) transmigrations: humans and gods, [b] bad (*durgati*) transmigrations: animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings, [c] death (*cyuti*), and [d] birth (*upapatti*). The first nine have latent tendencies of language-use (*abhiāpavāsanā*) as seed. The tenth has tendencies of the view of self (*ātmadrṣṭivāsanā*) as seed. The eleventh (a-d) has tendencies of the causal branches of existence (*bhavāṅgavāsanā*) as seed. See Étienne Lamotte, *La Somme du grand véhicule d'Asaṅga*, reprint, 2 vols., Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 8 (Louvain: Université de Louvain, 1973), vol. 1, 24–25, and vol. 2, 87–89.

<sup>269</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad* addit. |

<sup>270</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad* addit. *la*

<sup>271</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *lta*; ammended as per *Bde mchog rnam bshad*

<sup>272</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *lta*; ammended as per *Bde mchog rnam bshad*

<sup>273</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad* addit. |

<sup>274</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad* om. *kyi*

<sup>275</sup> *Bde mchog rnam bshad* addit. |

kyi ming can du gyur pa'i de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying pos ma khyab pa mi srid do || de  
skad du yang |

nga yis<sup>276</sup> 'di<sub>[1011]</sub> kun khyab pa ste ||  
'gro ba'i rang bzhin gzhan ma mthong ||

zhes dang | **dril bu zhabs** kyi |

'gro ba 'di dag rang bzhin gyi ||  
grub pa'i dkyil 'khor gnyis med pa'o ||

zhes gsungs so || zhes bris snang ba | 'di mi<sup>277</sup> 'thad pa 'khor ba'i gnas lugs bder gshegs snying  
po yin pa mi 'thad | \*rnam shes kyi nang lta gsal rig gi cha ye shes su mi 'thad | \*<sup>278</sup> rnam shes  
kyi gsal rig myang 'das su mi rung | don dam pa'i 'khor ba kun rdzob rnam shes la snang ba'i  
'khor ba ngos bzung bas nongs | rnam shes kyi kha phyir la bzung rnam dang nang lta rang  
rig gnyis ka glo bur gyi dri ma yin pas de la bden gnyis kyi dbye 'byed byed pa mi 'thad |  
'dzin rnam gi ming can de dbu ma pa 'dod pa'i gnyis med kyi ye shes la 'chad pas nor | lung  
don de gnyis rnam shes dang sbyar na rdo rje theg pa'i gnad bcos par song tshul lo || de yang  
spyir gnas tshul du zhugs pa zhig<sup>279</sup> yin phyin chad | don dam pa'i<sup>280</sup> bde gshegs snying po las  
'os med mod | 'khor ba'i gnas lugs ni med stong min par 'khyod rang gi 'ang | rtsa sgrub yin  
la | kho bo cag kyang 'dod pas | de ltar gyi tshe med stong bder gshegs snying po yin na | chad  
mtha' dang spros pa las ma 'das pa dang | khyod rang gi gsung rab rnam su bder gshegs  
snying po med stong du 'dod pa la dgag pa byas so cog chen bo ba<sup>281</sup> rang la gnod byed du  
'bab |<sub>[1012]</sub> 'ga' zhig gnas lugs med pa gnas lugs su btags pa ltar yang khyod mi 'dod pas | kun  
rdzob pa'i chos sam 'khor ba thams cad kyi gnas tshul tha snyad du khas len yang | de'i gnas  
tshul sdug kun las mi 'da' ba'i phyir | 'khor ba'i gnas tshul snying por mi 'grub po || rnam  
shes kyi nang lta dang phyi lta gang yin yang 'dra | rnam shes kyi ngo bo gsal rig gi cha yin  
pa la khyad par med pas | gsal rig gi cha'i rgyun de gnyis kyang 'du byed kyi kham las byung  
ba dang | gzhan dbang rnam rig gi ngo bo yin pa'i phyir dang | de'i shes pa'ang kun gzhi'i  
rnam par shes pa las chu las rlabs 'byung ba lta bu'i shes pa can yin pa'i phyir | spang bya

<sup>276</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: yi; ammended as per *Hevajratantra* in Snellgrove pt. 2, 30–31 and *Bde mchog rnam bshad*

<sup>277</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: yi; ammended as per TL<sub>NB</sub>

<sup>278</sup> TL<sub>NB</sub> om. passage between asterisks

<sup>279</sup> All versions of TL have *zhigs*

<sup>280</sup> TL<sub>NB</sub>: addit. *bden pa*

<sup>281</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>VV</sub>: *chen po ba*; ammended to *chen bo ba* as per TL<sub>NB</sub>



glo<sup>282</sup> bur gyi dri ma las mi 'da' bas | de ye shes su ci ltar rung | de bzhin du myang 'das su mi rung ste | de 'khor ba'i rnam shes las rdzas kyi cha gnyis yod pa'i nang bltar<sup>283</sup> rang rig gi shes pa yin pa'i phyir | rang rig mngon sum 'di myang 'das min te | blo ris 'du ba'i skabs su 'di so so skye bo thams cad la yod par bshad pas | rnal 'byor mngon sum las kyang zur du phye ba'i phyir | rnam pa thams cad du myang 'das su mi 'ong ngo || don dam pa'i 'khor ba<sup>284</sup> bde gshegs snying por khyod rang gis lan cig min par khas blangs nas | de rnam shes dang gtan 'brel med du khas blangs te | yang rnam shes nang blta<sup>285</sup> don dam pa'i 'khor bar khas blangs pas rang tshig [11013] dang 'gal | der ma zad sems can gyi nang lta shes pa'i cha ni 'khor ba na 'khor zhing de la khams gsum pa'i rnam pa thams cad snang la | de ltar na don dam pa'i 'khor ba'i ming can bde gshegs snying po 'khor ba na 'khor zhing | de la khams gsum pa'i rnam pa thams cad snang ba de rig pa'i rnam rig can du 'gyur ro || rnam par shes pa gcig nyid kho rang gi ngo bo la lta ba dang | de phyi don la lta tshul gnyis 'byung yang | gnyis ka yul dang yul can gyi shes par gnas pa dang | de nyid skad gcig tu mi rtag pa rdzun zhing bslu ba'i phyir | kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin pa la nang lta don dam bden pa dang phyi lta kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i dbye 'byed byas pas | kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin ngo shes de | don dam bden par khas blangs pas grub mtha' rtsa ba nas 'khrul... |

## *TWO MINDS IN ONE PERSON? A REPLY TO THE QUERIES OF BLA MA KHAM PA*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: This short text entitled *Two Minds in One Person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma kham pa* (*Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*) which is found in the collection of *Question and Answer* (*dris lan*) texts of Mi bskyod rdo rje's Collected Works addresses the question of whether a single person has two distinct minds or modes of consciousness. The Karma pa answers affirmatively that indeed a single person does possesses two concurrent yet nonconvergent mind-streams: a innate mind (*gnyug ma'i sems*) that is "innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded" and identified with the ever-present buddha nature, and an adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*) that is identified with adventitious stains. He adds, however, that the difference between them obtains only so long as the innate mind remains shrouded by adventitious mind. In reality, adventitious mind has no autonomous existence apart from *dharmakāya*, its nature being nothing else, and it dissolves into the latter at the time of realization. This point of clarification enables the author to maintain a strong conventional distinction between innate and adventitious minds while at the same time upholding Sgam po pa's precept that thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*. It also makes room for the Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna principle that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* (and the kinds of

<sup>282</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *blo*

<sup>283</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *ltar*; TL<sub>NB</sub>: *lta*; ammended as per *Bde mchog rnam bshad*

<sup>284</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *om. 'khor ba*; ammended as per TL<sub>NB</sub>

<sup>285</sup> TL<sub>VV</sub>, TL<sub>MK</sub>: *lta*; TL<sub>NB</sub>: *mtha'*; ammended as per *Bde mchog rnam bshad*

minds constitutive of each) are ultimately inseparable, both being beyond discursive elaboration (*spros bral*).

The only extant edition of the *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis* was used in preparing the following translation and critical text:

MKsb: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3: 219–23.

### 3a. English Translation of *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*

*Two Minds in One Person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma kham pa*<sup>286</sup>

I prostrate to Śrī Mahāmudrā for the sake of conveying this heart-lancet treatise on the unmingled coexistence of two minds in the continuum of all sentient beings.

Now if one thinks about a certain person's assertion that two minds exist separately and nonconvergently within every sentient being, this assertion is identical with the intent of all the buddhas of the three times. This was declared with the same voice by the 'Bri khung pa 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po, and it was also asserted by the Great Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. According to [his] commentary on the root text of the *Zab mo nang don*, the pure is described as mind and the impure is [also] described as mind.<sup>287</sup> As for explaining the first of these two, [the *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.47] states:

According to the phases of being impure,  
Partly pure and partly impure, and completely pure,  
One speaks of a sentient being, a bodhisattva  
And a Tathāgata [Thus-gone].

As for explaining the second, [the *Zab mo nang don* 1.1] states:

As for the cause, it is the beginningless nature of mind,  
Although uncurtailed in scope and not falling into bias,

<sup>286</sup> *Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 219–23. Rheingas 2008 contains a short discussion of this text (220–21). The identity of the *Bla ma kham pa* is unknown, the colophon mentioning only that the text was composed in reply to a question by *Bla ru bla ma*, uncle and nephew (*bla ru bla ma khu dbon*) (Rheingas 2008, 219 n. 9).

<sup>287</sup> This is a paraphrase of a passage in *Zab mo nang don rang 'grel*, RBSb vol. 7, 382<sub>2-3</sub>: “[Mind] is explained in many ways among the tantras and treatises. It is described as that possessing purity. In describing the impure as ‘mind’, it what is called *ālayavijñāna*.” ...*rgyud dang bstan bcos rnam las kyang mang du gsungs pa ni dag pa dang bcas pa brjod pa yin no || ma dag pa la sems su brjod pa ni kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa zhes gsung pa gang yin pa ste |*

From [the perspective of] its unimpeded play,  
It is empty in essence, luminous in nature and  
Unimpeded in aspects, manifesting as anything.  
[Thus,] it does not recognize itself by itself.<sup>288</sup> [221]

In terms of this explanation, the first mind is self-aware wisdom free from obscurations. The second is consciousness that is delusional ignorance possessing obscurations.

[Now,] from these being conventionally [taken as] different ‘entities’, the former is the substantially existing entity (*rdzas yod kyi dngos po : dravyasat vastu*)<sup>289</sup> whereas the latter is a nominally existing entity (*btags yod kyi dngos po : prajñaptisat vastu*). This is because the former is buddha nature—innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded, whereas the latter is the chaff [i.e., superfluous] part—adventitious defilement, innately deluded, and saṃsāric. Now, in terms of linguistic convention, when the sun of undeluded substantially existing wisdom dawns, the dark shroud of deluded nominally existing consciousness is dispelled. When those who want to awaken to unsurpassed, complete and perfect buddhahood engage in accepting and rejecting these two ‘minds’ [respectively] without mixing them up, it is by these trainings that they may be fully awakened. This is so because the result of complete purification is not attained by any path apart from that and because when one takes as a cause what is not a cause,<sup>290</sup> despite one’s exertions, there is only exhaustion that is fruitless [i.e., has no result].

Now, the mind that is buddha nature in the mind-streams of sentient beings is a limitless and immeasurable whole that is indivisible into categories of ‘consciousness’ and ‘wisdom’. However, the adventitious mind may have been arbitrarily described using the terms “wisdom” or “consciousness”: if [described] extensively, it is the eightfold ensemble [of Yogācāra traditions]; if more concisely, it is the sixfold ensemble [of non-Yogācāra traditions], and if most succinctly, it is nothing more than a single constellation because it is a partial cognition that sees a partial object of knowledge.

[Query:] Well then, if the innate and adventitious minds exist separately and non-convergent in the continuum of a single individual, doesn’t this contradict [Sgam po pa’s] precept that “thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*”? [Reply:] There is no contradiction

<sup>288</sup> *Zab mo nang gi don*, RBSb vol. 7, 311<sub>1-2</sub>.

<sup>289</sup> In *Abhidharma*, the substantially existing entity is any ultimate *simple*, anything that cannot be reduced either physically or conceptually into smaller units, whereas the nominally existing entity is anything physically or conceptually constructed that is therefore superfluous and reducible to smaller units. The former are *dharmas* and possess intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The latter are not *dharmas*, being without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*). See AK 6.4. On this view, only momentary entities are substantially real, whereas the temporal series formed by them (*santāna*) has only nominal existence. See A. Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness*, 97.

<sup>290</sup> That is, “if one takes the adventitious mind as the cause or basis of awakening...”

because the thoughts of adventitious mind do not exist as substantially other than the *dharmakāya* of innate mind, but that mind which exists only as conceptual imputations therefore has no independent existence, even conventionally, apart from *dharmakāya*. Thus “thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*.”

[*Query:*] What, then, is the innate mind? [*Reply:*] It is simply this natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in one’s own mind-stream in the present moment.

[*Query:*] How is it now made manifest given that it has gone into the cover of adventitious mind that is deluded and contrived? [*Reply:*] Having put in place the set of relationships (*rten ’brel*) that separate the pure essence from the dregs so that all the contrived phenomena stemming from the contrived, deluded mind resolve into their source, this set of relationships falls into place naturally on its own.<sup>291</sup> Then that innate mind that is uncontrived and free from delusion manifests.

[*Query:*] Well then, if the two minds exist separately and nonconvergently, isn’t it a problem to explain *saṃsāra* and as being inseparable or equal? [*Reply:*] This is not a problem because both being phenomena of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds are conventionally alike in being separate and nonconvergent. But as for their inseparability, the very nature of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds is ultimately present as a great openness and equality, inseparable in their freedom from discursive elaborations.

These words were [conveyed] in answer to questions relating to [the issue of] two minds [223] posed by Bla ru Bla ma uncle and nephew (*khu dbon*). By the virtue of the composition of [this response] by Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje in Zul phud<sup>292</sup>, I pray that innate mind may emerge from the sheath of adventitious defilements. One [question] asked. Ask another one!

### 3b. Critical Text of *Bla ma kham pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*

*Bla ma kham pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis gzhuks so ||* [220]

sems can thams cad kyi rgyud la sems gnyis ma ’dres par yod pa’i bstan bcos snying gi thur ma ’di brjod pa’i ched du dpal phyag rgya chen po la phyag ’tshal lo || ’o na sems can thams

<sup>291</sup> Here, the Karma pa seems to be saying that by arranging or putting in place (*bsgrigs*; the *tha dad pa* verb form) the set of interdependent processes (*rten ’brel*) that enable one to separate the pure essence of innate mind from the dregs of adventitious mind, then this set of processes falls into place (*’grig pa*; the *tha mi dad pa* verb form) or unfolds naturally on its own. In other words, the voluntary gives way to the involuntary.

<sup>292</sup> This may refer to Zul phu, the seat of a monastic college (*bshad grwa*) mentioned in ’Gos lo tsā ba’s *Deb ther sngon po* (Roerich 1949, 80) which is said to have been founded by the early Vinaya master Bya ’dul ’dzin Brtson ’grus ’bar (1091–1166).

cad la sems gnyis ma 'dres par so sor yod pa de su zhig gis bzhed snyam na bzhed pa de ni  
 dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dgongs pa gcig tu gnas pa de 'jig rten gsum gyi  
**mgon po 'bri gung pas** dbyangs gcig gis gsung la | de nyid **karma pa chen po rang byung**  
**rdo rjes** kyang bzhed de | *zab mo nang don rtsa 'grel* las | dag pa la sems su bshad pa dang ma  
 dag pa la sems su bshad pa gnyis las | dang po 'chad pa na |

ma dag ma dag dag pa dang ||  
 shin tu rnam dag go rim bzhin ||  
 sems can byang chub sems dpa' dang ||  
 de bzhin gshegs pa zhes brjod do ||

zhes dang || gnyis pa 'chad pa na |

rgyu ni sems can thog med pa ||  
 rgya chad phyogs lhung ma mchis kyang ||  
 de nyid ma 'gags rol pa las ||  
 ngo bo stong la rang bzhin gsal ||  
 rnam pa 'gag<sup>293</sup> med cir yang 'char ||  
 de nyid rang gis rang ma rig ||

ces <sup>[221]</sup> 'byung ba'i phyir | sems dang po ni sgrib bral rang rig pa'i ye shes dang | gnyis pa ni  
 sgrib bcas rmongs la ma rig pa'i rnam par shes pa'o ||

'di nyid kyang tha snyad du dngos po tha dad pa las | snga ma ni rdzas yod kyi dngos po dang  
 | phyi ma ni btags yod kyi dngos po yin te | snga ma ni gnyug ma rang byung lhan cig skyes  
 pa ma 'khrul pa bde gshegs snying po dang | phyi ma ni glo bur gyi dri ma lhan cig skyes pa  
 'khrul pa 'khor ba shun pa'i cha yin pa'i phyir ro |

'o na tha snyad du rdzas yod ma 'khrul pa'i ye shes kyi nyi ma shar ba na btags yod 'khrul pa  
 rnam shes kyi mun pa drungs nas 'byin pa'i phyir | bla na med par yang dag par rdzogs par  
 'tshang rgya bar 'dod pa dag gis sems gnyis po 'di ma 'dres par blang dor du byas nas bslab  
 pa de dag gis mngon par byang chub ste | de las gzhan pa'i lam gang gis kyang 'bras bu rnam  
 par dag pa thob par mi 'gyur ba'i phyir te | rgyu min la rgyur bzung nas 'bad kyang ngal ba  
 'bras bu med pa nyhid kyi phyir | des na sems can gyi rgyud kyi bdeg gshegs snying po'i sems  
 ni rnam shes dang ye shes kyi ris su dbye ba med pa tswhogs mtha' yas pa dang gzhal du med  
 pa yin la | glo bur dri ma'i sems ni ye shes sam rnam shes ming gang rung du brjod kyang

<sup>293</sup> Ms.: 'gal; *Zab mo nang don*: 'gag

rung | mang na tshogs brgyad dang nyung na tshogs drug dang | ches bsdus na tshogs gcig las  
'da' pa med de | shes <sup>[222]</sup> bya nyi tshe ba mthong ba'i shes pa nyi tshe ba yin pa'i phyir |

'o na gang zag gcig gi rgyud la gnyug ma dang glo bur gyi sems gnyis ma 'dres pa so sor yod  
na rnam rtog nyid chos skur smra ba dang 'gal<sup>294</sup> lo zhes na mi 'gal te | glo bur gyi sems rnam  
rtog de gnyug ma'i sems chos sku las rdzas gzhan du med cing rtog pas btags pa tsam du yod  
pa'i sems de ni chos sku las gzhan tha snyad du'ang rang dbang du grub pa min pa'i phyir |  
rnam rtog nyid chos skur gyur to ||

'o na gnyug ma'i sems ni gang zhe na de ni da ltar rang rgyud kyi tha mal gyi shes pa 'di'o |  
'di la 'khrul bcas bcas ma glo bur gyi sems kyi klubs su chud pas da ji ltar mngon du bya  
snyam na | 'khrul bcas bcas ma'i sems 'di'i bcas chos 'di kun ma bcas ar drungs su bcug pa'i  
dvangs snyigs<sup>295</sup> phyed ba'i rten 'brel bsgrigs nas rten 'brel de rang babs su 'grig pa na 'khrul  
bral ma bcas gnyug ma'i sems de 'char ba yin no ||

'o na sems gnyis so sor ma 'dres par yod na 'khor 'das dbyer med dam mnyam nyid du bshad  
pas skyon no zhe na mi skyon te | 'khor 'das kyi<sup>296</sup> sems kyi chos can gnyis ka kun rdzob du<sup>297</sup>  
so sor ma 'dres pa mnyam zhing | dbyer med kyang 'khor 'das kyi sems kyi chos nyid don  
dam par spros bral du dbyer med mnyam pa nyid gdal ba chen por grub pa'i phyir | zhes bya  
ba 'di bla ru bla ma khu dbon gyis <sup>[223]</sup> sems gnyis la brten pa'i dri lan du | **karma pa mi bskyod  
rdo rjes** zul phud du sbyar ba'i dge bas 'gro ba thams cad kyi gnyug ma'i sems glo bur dri  
ma'i spun nas thon pa'i phyir bsngo'o || gcig gzhus so | yang gcig zhus ||

### *A TROVE CONTAINING MYRIAD TREASURES OF PROFOUND MAHĀMUDRĀ*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: This short treatise entitled *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter* examines the philosophical foundations of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā in relation to a number of long-standing Buddhist soteriological problems such as the nature of the grounds of delusion (*'khrul pa*) and freedom (*grol ba*), the ontological status of the Yogācāra substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), and whether or not knowledge, perception, and intentional activities exist on the level of buddhahood. Although Mi bskyod rdo rje acknowledges his predilection for \*Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka views in responding to such questions, he enjoins his reader to think carefully about the absurd consequences for Buddhist theory

<sup>294</sup> Ms.: 'ga'

<sup>295</sup> Ms.: *snyings*

<sup>296</sup> Ms.: *kyis*

<sup>297</sup> addit. as per *don dam par* on next line

and praxis that would follow from the theory that a buddha has no cognition or perception at all. Not least of all, such a theory implies that the goal awaiting a Buddhist aspirant is not the full-fledged buddha-wisdom (*buddhajñāna*) replete with all the capacities for altruistic activities, as one would expect from accounts of ever-increasing capacities (*śakti*) or powers (*indriya*) in a bodhisattva's progression through the spiritual levels, but rather a kind of unconscious (or zombie-like) state characterized by autonomic functioning that is driven solely by past aspirations. As Mi bskyod rdo rje argues, this theory ironically makes the buddha's activities entirely dependent on past aspirations, and thus makes buddhahood a state of debilitation that leaves no room for agency and autonomy. It becomes clear that he regards the wisdom of emptiness that characterizes buddhahood as a matter of direct perception of how things are, which is something quite different from the speculative idea of how things are, the intellectually-fabricated emptiness that is arrived at through inferential reasoning.

The following editions of the *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition. Editorial note: ZPng contains many variant readings from both ZPmk and ZPnp which vary little from one another.

ZPmk: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 15, 1025–1038.

ZPng: *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad sogs*. Thimphu: 1979, vol. 3, 437–460.

ZPnp: *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i khrid mdzod*. New Delhi: 1997, vol. 11, 457–474.

#### 4a. English Translation of *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*

*A Trove Replete with Sundry Treasure Chests of Profound Mahāmudrā* [1026]

Here in the Snowy Country [of Tibet], I continually and devotedly take refuge in Sa skya uncles and nephews and the emanations of the Lord Karmapa—the Venerable Mañju-ghoṣa, and Venerable Lord of the World [Lokeśvara] who accepted birth in a human existence. This mirror of the mind of Śrī Candraprabhakumāra [Sgam po pa], the one in Tibet who was prophesied by the buddha himself—an authority on the teachings of the Buddha who purely upheld the exegetical traditions of the Indians—was clearly seen by all who have appeared in the unbroken lineage. In this [present] situation, however, among theories about the triad of ground, path and fruition pertaining to all the teachings, there are Tibetan meditators of other [traditions] who make a distinction between three grounds: [1] the ground of the [enlightened] intent of a buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi dgongs gzhi*) who has realization, [2] the ground of delusion of sentient beings who do not have realization, and [3] the common ground comprising both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. From the standpoint of definitive meaning, this is not at all felicitous because to superimpose this threefold subdivision onto the expanse of reality (*yang dag pa'i dbyings*) would be a case of illegitimate imputation. This terminology

contradicts the claim that there are two common grounds of delusion and freedom, <sup>[1027]</sup> i.e., of sentient beings and buddhas, and also the precept that thoughts are *dharmakāya*.

[Now,] is the common ground of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* [something] indeterminate that is different from the *dharmadhātu*? This theory of three categories (*phung po*) is nowhere found among the authoritative traditions of India or Tibet. In general, moreover, everything that originally assembles as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and eventually [undergoes] the natural dissolution of its formation<sup>298</sup> is [thus] similar in manner, being of the same flavour. As the Noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] states [in MMK :

*Saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—there does not exist  
The slightest difference between these two.<sup>299</sup>

As for the method of ascertaining [this] for oneself: the expanse of reality is a state of equality (*mnyam pa nyid*) wherein the whole complex of entailing and entailed [factors] of *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa* and the path does not exist.<sup>300</sup> Nonetheless, it appears that [some scholars] proclaim that this way of abiding (*gnas tshul*), the nature of reality (*chos nyid : dharmatā*), transcends the *dharmadhātu* and they take this as the profound vital point of their view. But this does not make sense because another nature of reality apart from the *dharmadhātu* is not observed.

As for the theory that when self-awareness [emerges] from *dharmadhātu*, there is wisdom and when [awareness] does not recognize itself for what it is, there is delusion, some claim that when this stirring of ignorance [non-recognition] is found to be without foundation or source (*gzhi med rtsa bral*), this ignorance is fundamentally transformed into wisdom. This is not attractive in the least because once the undercurrent of ignorance comes to an end, ignorance [itself] comes to an end within the expanse of unimpeded wisdom. Therefore, it is not ‘transformed’. This point is explained at length by the Noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] <sup>[1028]</sup> in his *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> This is a tentative rendering of *spyir 'khor 'das kyi thog ma'i 'du bya ba dang | tha ma'i 'du 'phrod rang sar zhi ba thams cad*

<sup>299</sup> This is a slightly abbreviated version of MMK XXV.20: *nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsāraṇasya ca | na tayor antaraṃ kiṃcit susūkṣmam api vidyate* || “Whatever is the limit of *nirvāṇa*, that is the limit of *saṃsāra*. There is not the slightest difference between the two.”

<sup>300</sup> In other words, *dharmadhātu* is indivisible, lacking all relations of hierarchical entailment or pervasion—or what in phenomenology are called relations of founding and founded—that constitute conditioned existence.

<sup>301</sup> In his *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad*: 24ba f, Mi bskyod rdo rje argues from a \*Prāsaṅgika based standpoint that there can be no transformation strictly speaking because the eightfold ensemble of consciousness are only adventitious stains. This diverges from the Yogācāra account which grants these groupings enough reality in their dependent (*paratantra*) aspect to allow for a genuine change of state. As the author explains, “in this tradition [of ours], if we investigate according to Prāsaṅgika Madhyamka, since all the groupings of consciousness are of the nature of adventitious stains, it is impossible for them to be fundamentally transformed into wisdom



[Query:] Then what is the meaning of the “wisdom of fundamental transformation” according to the Regent Maitreya and others?

[Reply:] Among those who are fixated on the intellectual stages of persons<sup>302</sup>, the buddha level (*rgyal ba'i sa*) and the methods of the perfections are explained in detail in terms of the paths and levels. Hence, when that knowledge based on ignorance stops functioning, then innate wisdom which is not adulterated with that [ignorance]—precisely the personally realized wisdom (*so so rang rig gi ye shes*) that apprehends ultimate characteristics, free from concepts—arises out of that expanse. In that regard, the personally realized wisdom is at present characterized by other Tibetan meditators as “recognizing itself by itself” (*rang ngo rang gis shes pa*). [But] if analyzed authoritatively, this locution “self-recognition” (*rang ngo shes*) [means that] when subject and object are purified away [in] an ordinary individual for whom self-recognition and non-recognition are possible, then personally realized wisdom dawns. It is not otherwise. As for the locution “recognizing itself by itself” (*rang ngo rang gis shes*), which is the object of an *idée fixe* for [some] other Tibetan meditators, it appears that it has been explained as self-awareness in the sense of an introspective experience. But in that case, it would absurdly follow that personally realized wisdom is present in all ordinary individuals. Therefore, that [definition] is not tenable.

In this regard, some Indian Ācāryas stated that “a yogin who is established in a state without appearances sees the Mahāyāna.”<sup>303</sup> The intended meaning was that all conventional

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that is beyond stains. This is because, were it possible, then since the effect [wisdom] must be in conformity with the cause [consciousness], it would have to be something deluded. As for not maintaining that consciousness does not transform into wisdom on the level of buddhahood: although mind that is empty of subject-object duality is not claimed to be truly established by all Mādhyamikas, some Svātantrikas explain that, conventionally, luminous mind empty of duality and wisdom [can be said] to exist in the equipoise of noble bodhisattvas and perfectly awakened buddhas. But the Prāsaṅgikas do not accept that the functioning of mind and wisdom ever exists, even conventionally.” The author goes on to argue that the cognition (*shes pa*) or mind (*sems*) at issue here, even when its objectivizing and subjectivizing functions are temporarily latent or suspended, “cannot be the same as buddha nature as cause, path and fruition as described in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* or as the nondual wisdom of the three [phases] of ground, path and fruition of Mantra[yāna]” which are nothing other than buddhahood itself, the goal of both sūtras and tantras. *lugs 'dir dbu ma thal 'gyur bas dpyad pa na rnam shes kyi tshogs thams cad glo bur dri ma'i bdag nyid can yin pas de nyid dri bral ye shes kyi ngo bor gnas 'gyur du mi rung ste | rung na 'bras bu rgyu'i rjes su 'gro bas 'khrul bcas su 'gyur ba'i phyir | sangs rgyas kyi sar rnam shes gnas gyur gyi ye shes kyang mi 'dod la | des na gzung 'dzin gnyis kyi stong pa'i sems bden grub pa dbu ma thams cad kyi mi bzhed kyang | tha snyad du rang rgyud pa kha cig | gnyis stong gi sems 'od gsal ba dang | ye shes byang 'phags dang rdzogs sangs kyi mnyam gzhag na yod par 'chad cing | thal 'gyur bas ni tha snyad du'ang der sems dang ye shes kyi rgyu ba gtan yod par mi bzhed la |...*

<sup>302</sup> This likely refers to the Indo-Tibetan traditions of distinguishing paths and levels in line with different types of person, the most influential paradigm being the threefold characterology presented in Atīsa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* and expanded by Tsong kha pa into a comprehensive path structure.

<sup>303</sup> LAS 298<sub>15</sub>–299<sub>1</sub>: “Having relied upon Mind Only, | External objects should not be imagined. | Having based oneself on the apprehension of suchness, | One should pass beyond [even] mind only. || (LAS X.256) Having passed beyond mind only, | One should pass beyond a state that is without appearances. | A yogin who is established in a state without appearances | Sees the Mahāyāna. || (LAS X.257) *cittamātraṃ samāruhya bāhyam*

phenomena and the represented ultimate<sup>304</sup> was not seen, is not seen, and will never be seen by buddhas<sup>[1029]</sup> from the perspective of selflessness. The actual meaning of such [statements] is that in the spheres of operation of buddhas whose discriminating wisdom (*pratyavekṣanā-jñāna*) of selflessness and whose wisdom that accomplishes tasks (*kṛtyānuṣṭānājñāna*) by the power of aspirations are uninterrupted, the expanse functions on its own in a self-sustaining way, while at the same time there is the clarity aspect of the self-luminosity of adamant awareness that is indivisible [with the expanse]. With this in mind, some great Indian Ācāryas claimed that the sense of “no appearances” is untenable. This was also extolled by the illustrious Rang byung [rdo rje] who followed this later tradition.<sup>305</sup>

[Now,] when the *Bodhicittavivarāṇa* and [*Madhyamak*] *āvatāra* and other texts explain that the *ālayavijñāna* is untenable, they proceed to explain that mere appearance (*snang tsam*) is [due to] latent tendencies alone. As for the exegesis of both the noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] and Candrakīrti, the reason they did not accept the *ālayavijñāna* is that all phenomena are entirely devoid of any factor that is self-sufficient in terms of function and essence. That being so, since [the *ālayavijñāna*] would have to be an independently existing consciousness capable of serving as an established basis of all phenomena, [and viewed as] an obscuration that shrouds the *dharmadhātu* [yet is itself] indeterminate, [this *ālayavijñāna*] was rightly rejected. Nonetheless, according to some other Ācāryas, the Victorious [Buddha] taught the classifications of *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas* in order to invalidate non-Buddhists’ beliefs in a self, a creator and a consumer. In particular, in the case of explanations placing special emphasis on the *ālaya*[*vi*] *jñāna* as discussed<sup>[1030]</sup> in [texts] such as the *Laṅkāvatāra*, it is evident that [these texts] explained very eloquently the criteria of cause and effect in the context of establishing appearance as mind. [This account] was also extolled by the illustrious Rang byung who followed this later tradition. But for me, in the context of deeply investigating the ultimate, the former tradition appears to be [more] intellectually refined.

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*arthaṃ na kalpayet | tathatālabane sthivā cittamātram atikramet || cittamātram atikramya nirābhāsam atikramet | nirābhāsasthito yogī mahāyānaṃ sa<sup>a</sup> paśyati ||* <sup>a</sup>According to Tibetan in Nanjio 1923:299, fn. 1. Nanjio proposes to read *na* instead of *sa*. Both Nanjio and Vaidya edition have *sa*. Tib. D 107,168b: *sems tsam la ni gnas nas ni || phyi rol don la mi brtag go || yang dag dmigs la gnas nas ni || sems tsam las ni 'da' bar bya || sems tsam las ni 'das nas ni || snang ba med las 'da' bar bya || rnal 'byor snang ba med gnas na || theg pa chen po mi<sup>a</sup> mthong ngo ||* <sup>a</sup>D, P mi A precise comparison of the different LAS manuscripts would be necessary to decide whether the correct reading should be with *na* or *sa*.

<sup>304</sup> On the meaning of the term *paryāya* (Tib. *rnam grangs*) as it occurs in the distinction between a represented ultimate (*rnam grangs* [*dang bcas*] *pa'i don dam* : [*\*sa*] *paryāyaparamārtha*), see Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 98, 229–30, Tauscher 2003, and Volume I, 102, n. 263.

<sup>305</sup> This reflects a basic Bka' brgyud viewpoint: the inseparability of appearance and emptiness (*snang stong*) and of clarity and emptiness (*gsal stong*).

In short, it is understood that whenever there emerges interdependent self-identification<sup>306</sup> within the inexhaustible expanse of reality (*dharmadhātu*), there emerges the state of being sentient beings (*sems can gyi khams*). So having in mind that there is nothing to add to the expanse of reality, it was declared that “sentient beings have nothing to add but something to remove.”<sup>307</sup> The point [here] is that whenever there occurs the stirring that serves as the dominant condition of grasping the expanse as “I”, it appears that sentient beings are individually established. Hence, consider that it also makes sense [to say] that for sentient beings there is something to add *and* remove.<sup>308</sup>

Now, as for the way of [realizing the] appearance aspect of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as being emptiness by means of the power of yoga, the stages of engaging [in this process] are as follows. In most of the Madhyamaka *Stages of Meditation* [instructions], it is explained that one first takes as one’s object of ascertainment what is validly proven through logical reasoning based on object universals [i.e., abstractions] and proceeds to meditate on it. But some [Mahā]mudrā instructions maintain that meditation which is based on drawing logical conclusions by taking as a mental object [emptiness] as an object universal [arrived at through conceptual] exclusion<sup>309</sup> is an impediment that obscures the abiding nature.

Moreover, in the case of analysis of the ultimate within our own Madhyamaka tradition, is not an analysis by means of engaging in linguistic-conceptual exclusion [i.e., an abstraction arrived at by process of elimination].<sup>310</sup> Rather, it is presented as the valid ascertainment arrived at through correct evidential reasoning [1031] by means of direct perception and rational inference. However, some Tibetan meditators state that [1] “even though it is the mistaken conventional, it is the mistaken conventional *truth*.” Additionally, these Tibetan meditators extensively explained that [2] if a *definiens* [property] is not in the actual

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<sup>306</sup> The term *rang snyems* which is used twice in this work literally means self-arrogance, self-inflation. According to the relevant contexts, it seems to refer to the most fundamental process of self-arrogation (and self-identification) that leads to the fictive “sense of self” as a base of operations that enables the individual to function as the centre of his or her own world.

<sup>307</sup> See for example *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.157ab (J 1.154ab): “There is nothing to be removed from it and nothing to be added. The real should be seen as real, and seeing the real, one is liberated. The [buddha] element is empty of adventitious [stains], which have the defining characteristic of being separable; but it is not empty of unsurpassable qualities, which have the defining characteristic of not being separable.” RGVV, 76.1–4: *nāpaneyam ataḥ kiṃcid upaneyam na kiṃcana | draṣṭavyaṃ bhūtato bhūtaṃ bhūtadarśī vimucyate || śūnya āgantukair dhātuḥ savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ | aśūnyo ’nuttarair dharmair avinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ ||*

<sup>308</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje here seems to suggest that so long as a sentient being remain oblivious to *dharmadhātu* on account of *mis*-taking it for oneself, there will be a sense that *dharmadhātu* is something added, where in reality there is only something to remove, namely, the mistaken self-identification.

<sup>309</sup> This refers to the understanding of emptiness arrived at through a process of elimination or exclusion (*sel ba : apoha*) of what appears as non-empty, i.e., real entities. It is described as exalted knowledge that understands emptiness in the manner of an object universal (*stong nyid don spyi’i tshul du rtogs pa’i mkhyen pa*).

<sup>310</sup> This would simply be a refinement of the abstract conceptualizing that characterizes all thought.

*definiendum* [object], then assuming<sup>311</sup> [it is] will not make it so, as in the example of falling through an open skylight by having walked above it.<sup>312</sup> From that also follow [3] the stages of establishing appearance is mind. With these three [points], boasting that they have understood the definitive meaning, and proclaiming it in a way that does not accord with anyone else, it appears that they evaluate it as something truly fabulous.

Therefore, in general, for the Sugatas, everything in its modes of abiding and appearing [i.e., ultimate and conventional] is ascertained only via direct perception because [their] unobscured gates [of perception] go beyond limits, whereas the cognition of ordinary beings is [only] valid from the framework of what appears to them. Moreover, among the five aggregates, priority is given to the aggregate of form (*rūpaskandha*) because the entities of external reality do not exist as different substances that are truly established. But also the [ontological] categories, functions and qualities do not exist externally as distinct categories that subsume independently existing externals; [rather these all] come from mental arrangements [that impute] qualities of different substances. In that case, the external actual entities and [their] specific functions are not different because they are closely interconnected by way of causes and conditions. Yet they are also not the same because the mere appearances and the aspects of [their] functional capacities are obviously distinct.

In short, it is not the case that the coarse external objects exist to one side [viz., independently of mind], but neither, on the other hand, [1032] are they grasped as components (*cha shas*) of one's own mind. It is the clinging to characteristics that manifests as [so-called] real entities. Hence, the manifold functioning of objects was declared to be captivating only so long as one has not investigated it. In the *Mother of the Victors* [*Prajñāpāramitā*] there are some explanations that all phenomena are based on mere names. Then, when it comes to evaluating the conventional characteristics of all phenomena by a relentless intellect, one is lucidly led to the ultimate characteristic of all phenomena. Thus, the nature of all phenomena is primordial wisdom itself. That is free from all limits and elaborations. That which is the nature of the conventional is without nature. And that which is without nature is the quintessence<sup>313</sup> which is the wisdom of the Tathāgatas. Therefore, it is said to be nondual, and [this nonduality] is what is explained extensively in the *Mother of Victors*.

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<sup>311</sup> Literally, “by seeing”.

<sup>312</sup> To explain: just as a person who walks around the roof of a Tibetan home in poor lighting may inadvertently fall through the open skylight thinking he is stepping on solid roof, so a person who assumes that an object has a property it doesn't have (e.g., he assumes that a baseball will hold water) will be surprised if he tries to make it perform that function.

<sup>313</sup> We have followed ZPng: which has *snying po*. ZPmk: has *nyid* which would give the reading “is precisely the wisdom of the Tathāgatas”.

In that regard, when this present knowing is bound up with apprehended [objects] and apprehending [subject], then it is conceptual (*rnam par rtog pa*) and imagined (*kun tu brtags pa*), and thus remains totally [enmeshed in] worldly existence. But [when the present knowing] does not give rise to aspects of subject and object, then having not followed the trails of objects and circumstances, [there is] the open unimpeded clarity of mere appearance and a knowledge of all the means [of dealing with] the distractions of the obscuring self-identifications. Even the buddha's omniscience is not perceived as [something more] profound than this. It is the unmistakable profound meaning.

Hence, when it comes to putting into practice such knowledge, the mind's knowing does not try to grasp phenomena, <sup>[1033]</sup> but neither does it suppress mere appearance. The extremes of acceptance and rejection are thereby annulled. Concept-free direct perception is the key point<sup>314</sup> of practice. Nonconceptual mistaken knowledge is subject-object contrivance gone wild because even nonconceptual mistaken knowledge is not without its object.<sup>315</sup> Hence, according to the key point that all knowing objects have not originated from any intrinsic essence, when what is unoriginated nonetheless appears as if it has originated, then apart from simply directly perceiving the mere originating<sup>316</sup>, there is no multitude of levels [or layers] behind this [direct perception]. Deeply understanding the nature of one's own knowing so it is a matter of direct perception—[this] is the knowledge of the Āryas.

When you conceptualize and engage with the referential objects, [this] is the knowing of an ordinary person. In the moment of directly perceiving the object before [you], this undeceived knowing is the reality of mere appearance.<sup>317</sup> When that occurs as self-awareness in the manner of remaining free from thoughts, there is the opportunity to enter the non-deceptive door to the way things are (*gnas tshul*). Since the entities of ordinary beings draw upon capacities for interdependent factors of objects and knowledge, they do not meet the requirements of being non-deceptive. However, when self-luminous knowing is subject to analysis,

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<sup>314</sup> We have followed ZPng: gnad. ZPmk: has gnas which would give the reading “Concept-free direct perception is the foundation of practice.”

<sup>315</sup> Even when conceptualizing is in abeyance, as in the deep sleep of a sentient being, the subject-object structure of consciousness remains in play. This is emphasized in Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud works which distinguish the nonconceptual but still object-bound states of the *ālayavijñāna* from the nonconceptual wisdom (*ye shes*), awareness (*rig pa*) or *dharmakāya*.

<sup>316</sup> *skyes pa tsam* has the sense of origination *simpliciter*, self-manifestation just as it originally presents itself before it is channeled through the categories of representational thought.

<sup>317</sup> The difficult syntax of this passage allows for various readings. Another possible rendering is: “Directly perceiving the object right before [your eyes] is the knowing which is not deceived for a moment; [this] is the truth of mere appearing.” We settled on a rendering that is best suited to the context. The author's characterization of direct perception of objects as the “truth of mere appearing” seems to validate a disclosive and testimonial sense of truth, the originary opening onto presence that prefigures all propositional truth.

and it has become clear that it is not established as either an entity or non-entity, that knowing is non-deceptive.

In this way, in the case of those who straightforwardly<sup>318</sup> put the key points of direct perception into practice, mental activities may be undertaken at will but they are nothing more than fruitful [and meaningful] doubts.<sup>319</sup> But in the case of entertaining the thought that “this mere appearance is just illusion,” if it is not ascertained in direct perception, then the meditation on the appearance aspect that is not ascertained will be fruitless. [1034] In the case of direct knowledge (*mngon sum gyi shes pa*) manifesting momentarily, when you elaborate on the mental objects, retain them in memory, and meditate on them, this does not become direct knowledge. Rather by virtue of the key point that [all knowledge] is primordially unoriginated, [this mediated knowledge] comes and goes moment by moment.

Moreover, when two things to be ascertained are taken as determinate objects—the conventional which is [taken] as deceptive and as unreal, and the ultimate which is [taken as] real and as something non-deceptive that is unchanging—this belief in permanence will lay the foundation for doubts. The profound meaning of this matter is a subject of exceptional subtlety. According to the great master Kambala<sup>320</sup>:

Thus, because self-awareness is so subtle,  
It constitutes the most subtle vision of buddhas.  
So how can it be seen by the coarse minds  
Of wretched beings like ourselves?<sup>321</sup>

<sup>318</sup> In the expression *phra tig gi nyams len du btab pa rnams*, *phra tig* is used in colloquial Tibetan (among Kham pas, for example) to indicate some thing or state of affairs that is clear or obvious, nothing being hidden. It is here used adjectivally to characterize the direct, unmediated way people do practices on the basis of direct perception.

<sup>319</sup> In other words, for the person who practices direct perception, whatever mental activities they entertain are fruitful and meaningful. Doubts only serve to enhance the direct perception. We thank Mkhon po Dkon mchog Bstan 'phel of the Songtsen Library in Dehradun, India for explaining this passage.

<sup>320</sup> Text has *Ka ma la śrī* [sic] *la*. This seems to be a mistaken transcription of Śrī Kambala, the actual author of this passage.

<sup>321</sup> Because many variants of this verse appear in Tibetan translations, we have retained the version given in the present text. The source of the verse is Kambala's *Ālokaṃālāprakaraṇa* stanza 13 (D 3895, 102<sub>5-6</sub>): *rang rig de yang phra ba'i phyir | sangs rgyas rnams kyi phra ba gzigs | rang la gnas kyang bdag 'dra bas | rtsing ba'i phyir ni mthong ba med*||. “Because that self-awareness is subtle, it is the subtle vision of buddhas. Although it dwells within ourselves, it is not seen by the likes of me because [our own vision is so] coarse.” Kambala/Kambala (Sanskrit: *Kambalapāda/pa/pā*), is often referred to in Tibetan sources as *La/Lwa ba/wa pa/pā* is counted among the eighty-four Mahasiddhas and a number of *dohās* and texts are ascribed to him. Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* identifies this master and Saroruha as two important transmitters of the *Hevajratantra*. Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad (ed.) (1970). *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study: Simla, 245–246.D 3854. Yet another version of the above quotation is found in Atisa's *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* (D 3854) which its author ascribes to “Śrī Kambala”: *dpal kam pa las kyang | 'di ni rang rig ba ste | phra ba rnams kyi spyod yul yin | bdag cag lta bur gyur pa yi | blo gros rtsing bas mi shes so* ||

Here, concerning the resultant wisdom that is the nonerroneous realization of emptiness by a subtle intelligence, there have been many theories in India and Tibet about whether or not a buddha has wisdom. As for the statement that “wisdom does not exist on the level of buddhahood,” some great Ācāryas in India explained that there is no intrinsic difference in the wisdom specific to the equipoise meditations of those on the tenth spiritual level. Nevertheless, they explained that there *are* [differences] in the continuity of equipoise meditation, whether or not it is profound, or whether it is vast or narrow in scope. On that basis, [they maintained that] once [wisdom] definitively removes the obscurations of wayfarer’s wisdom in the post-meditation, [the obscurations and wisdom both] assume the character of nonorigination.<sup>322</sup> And as long as there is wisdom generated in the post-meditation and the wayfarer’s wisdom<sup>323</sup> that relinquishes objects to relinquish, [wisdom] is claimed to exist<sup>[1035]</sup> like a flame that lasts only as long as there is a wick and oil.

When they further explain that buddha[hood] (*bde bar gshegs pa* : *\*sugata*) is a denomination of “emptiness,” they say that wisdom and the [buddha] powers are [only] of provisional meaning. But in clinging [to the view] that these depend solely on great compassion and former aspirations, they have lost the proficiency [needed] to understand<sup>324</sup> the definitive meaning. For in that case, it would be impossible that emptiness is inseparable from skillful means and the capacities enabling skillful means [as traditionally maintained], and also that [these two] are therefore interdependent in nature.<sup>325</sup> On the other hand, all the extraordinary special qualities of the Tathāgatas according to the Unsurpassed Mantra[yāna],

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“This is self-awareness,| being the domain of those of subtle [intelligence].| It is not known by the coarse intelligence| of people like us.” Yet another version of the passage is included as stanza 61 of Atiśa’s *Dharmadhātudarśanaḡīti* (D 2314; P 3153/5388), a structured compendium of aphoristic pith instructions from classical Indian Buddhist scriptures.

<sup>322</sup> The expression *mi skye ba’i chos can du byed pa* can be interpreted in the sense that equipoise wisdom assumes the nature of nonarising, and also that it makes obscurations assume their nature of nonarising. Judging from the discussion that follows, the author appears to have both senses in mind. To put it simply, while the function of (wisdom in) meditative equipoise is to definitively remove obscurations so they do not reassert themselves, wisdom is itself also extinguished in the process. We are grateful to Mkhan po Dkon mchog bstan ’phel of the Songtsen Library in Dehradun, India for calling our attention to the second of these plausible interpretations. The point here seems to be that the wisdom of a buddha is unoriginated or nonexistent in the specific sense that it no longer possesses identifiable properties.

<sup>323</sup> ZPng alone has the unlikely *lam sa’i* instead of *lam pa’i* which would give the reading: “...and the wisdom of the paths and levels which relinquishes objects to relinquish.”

<sup>324</sup> Literally, “the capacity/skill of intelligence (*blo gros kyi rtsal*) regarding the definitive meaning has been lost”.

<sup>325</sup> In other words, the view of emptiness as being of definitive meaning but wisdom and powers as being of merely provisional meaning precludes a central viewpoint of Mahāyāna and Mantrayāna—the inseparability of insight- emptiness (*prajñā/sūnyatā*) and skillful means-compassion (*upāya/kāruna*),.

[ranging] from one [buddha] family up to hundreds of [buddha] families, would have to be explained as being of provisional meaning.

Moreover, the claim that *buddhajñāna* manifests, and the manner in which it knows all aspects by knowing one aspect, constitutes the purport of the great ācāryas of India. However, regarding the wisdom that naturally knows and sees in the manner of non-appearance only the selflessness that is the pure peace [*nirvāṇa*], when [that is] revealed by the profound wisdom, then [with] great compassion for the world, [buddhas] know things correctly (*yang dag par mkhyen*) and know things by way of [wisdom] that discriminates [among all] it sees and accomplishes [all that] must be done. Thus they know and see all the subtlest of subtle topics of knowledge, like fresh *āmalaka* berries placed in the palm of one's hand.<sup>326</sup>

Therefore, when the wisdom of non-appearance is explained in this way, it seems quite elegant. Whereas, the expression “knowing all aspects through knowing one” has been explained as wisdom that encompasses the entire tableau (*dkyil 'khor kun khyab*)<sup>[1036]</sup> of objects of knowledge by virtue of knowing the single aspect of unorigination. If we think carefully about this, although within the expanse of phenomena, there exist no phenomena that are not of the nature of phenomena, when it comes to the variety of objects of consciousness, even the buddha's wisdom (*buddhajñāna*) has to make intelligible the various aspects when it works to train whoever [requires training]. Should one ask “doesn't this invalidate the feature of nonorigination?” the answer is that this nonorigination is revealed as the variety of what originates. Consequently, the question of whether or not qualities of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* exist autonomously (*rang babs su mi 'dug*) is eloquently answered [negatively] in this way.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *skyu ru ru* (Skt. *āmalaka/āmalakī*) refers to the Indian gooseberry (Latin name: *emblic myrobalan*), a translucent pale green berry that has long been used in Ayurvedic medicine (usually prepared from the seeds) to cure diseases of phlegm, bile and blood and to promote general physical health and calmness of mind (*sattva*). The term *āmalaka* was at one time used to refer to a rock-crystal (as attested by an alternative Tibetan translation of *shel sgong*, ‘rock crystal’), possibly named because of its having a similar translucent property. The example of *āmalakī* placed in the palm of one's hand has traditionally been used to illustrate either yogic perception where the clarity aspect (compared to a crystal) is emphasized (cf. Dharmottara's *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* 1.11) or omniscience, where seeing all aspects (presumably on analogy of seeing into the interior structure of the translucent berry) is emphasized (cf. \**Śaṅgāyogapañjikā*, D 1373, 244b). For these two references, we are indebted, respectively, to contributions by Birgit Kellner (Austrian Academy of Sciences) and Peter Szanto (University of Liverpool) to an informative discussion thread entitled “An *āmalakī* in the palm of one's hand”: [http://list.indology.info/piper-mail/indology\\_list.indology.info/2011-May/035546.html](http://list.indology.info/piper-mail/indology_list.indology.info/2011-May/035546.html) (accessed 17/04/2015). Mi bskyod rdo rje uses the example to illustrate a buddha's omniscience, his knowledge of all the subtle topics of knowledge by virtue of understanding their single unborn nature. The sense of being able to see subjects of knowledge thoroughly, inside and out, is suggested also by the author's use of the adjective fresh (*rlan pa*)—i.e., as opposed to dried, cooked etc.—for this is the state in which the *āmablī* possess the property of translucency. The significance of the berries being placed in the palm of one's hand seems to simply reinforce the idea that such knowledge is, for a buddha, directly at hand. It may be worth noting that the expression “in the palm of one's hand” is widely used in Mahāmudrā works to refer to knowledge that is right at hand (and need not be sought elsewhere).

<sup>327</sup> If qualia of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* had autonomous existence, they would not be unoriginated.



Moreover, there have appeared many claims—[1] that a buddha’s nonconceptual wisdom sees the nature of phenomena, [2] that, while remaining nonconceptual, he nonetheless sees the phenomena in all their complexity; [3] that [wisdom that] knows things in all their complexity does not [actually] see, even nonconceptually; and [4] that the aims of beings depend exclusively on former aspirations. Despite [such claims,] the buddha’s knowledge is not as it has been imagined by the minds of ordinary beings in terms of any essences and aspects such as [being] conceptual or nonconceptual, or [knowing things] as they are or in all their complexity. This is because all phenomena have a single flavour.

Therefore, the buddha’s wisdom that knows things in their complexity is not deluded in the same way that an illusionist is not deceived when illusions are conjured up by the illusionist himself. In this context, the Ācārya Śāntarakṣita, father and sons, said that when a buddha [has wisdom that] knows things in all their complexity for himself, what he sees is a configuration of pure wisdom. But he also sees according to the deluded ways ordinary beings [see them], <sup>[1037]</sup> but in seeing [this way], he is not adversely influenced by the delusions of ordinary beings. Others, however, argue that it does not make any sense at all that delusion is seen by a buddha because a buddha has dispelled (*sangs pa*) [all] habitual tendencies for delusion. You are right if this delusion of a buddha is grasped externally as delusion consisting in wisdom’s engaging or disengaging in correspondence with error. But the profound wisdom of a buddha is like a mirror in which there arise myriad reflections of beings since there are no extraneous obscurations interposed between the two worlds of buddhas and sentient beings.

Moreover, since the Tathāgata is the [buddha’s] body, speech and mind (*sku gsung thugs*) that is equal to the *dharmadhātu*, all sentient beings and that single wisdom prevail as the completely perfect wisdom, the *dharmadhātu*. As for the assertion by some people that [altruistic wisdom and deeds are] due solely to the power of compassion and [former] aspirations, that is not admissible at all. Because if even those [bodhisattvas] on the tenth level have ten powers, then buddhas would have attained limitless powers. So the [idea that such altruism] has to depend solely on former aspirations means that [a buddha’s] skillful means would be of diminished scope.

Furthermore, “since that nature of buddhahood is empty of intrinsic essence, it is not established as one. And since it is not established as even one, it is unwarranted to establish it as many.” [This] is a vital point of the instructions of the [Mahā]mudrā followers. As for explaining the stages of meditation in the context of being free from the hopes and fears of being a buddha and sentient being<sup>328</sup>, one should not cling to any one aspect but should <sup>[1038]</sup> train in the nonsectarian canonical scriptures of the Victorious [Buddha].

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<sup>328</sup> This refers, in other words, to instructions on stages of meditation that enable an aspirant to become free from hoping for buddhahood or fearing being a sentient being.

The hidden meaning of the sublime  
 Vehicle of the Perfections was  
 Directly taught in the Vajrayāna.  
 Since even the profound key points of Vajrayāna  
 Depend upon the key point of enthusiastic devotion  
 [We] supplicate those in the lineage.  
 So by the virtue of writing these trifling instructions,  
 From the transmission of the blessings of the lineage,  
 May all beings become Vajra holders.

This *Trove Replete with Sundry Treasures of Profound Mahāmudrā* was written in Phrag yul by the illustrious *Mi bskyod dga' ba'i dbyangs*.

#### 4b. Critical Edition of *Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter*

*Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter* zhes bya ba bzhugs ||<sup>[1026]</sup>

gangs can gyi ljongs 'dir | rje btsun 'jam dpal dbyangs dang | **rje btsun 'jig rten dbang po** mi'i  
 srid par skye ba bzhes pa |<sup>329</sup> **rje sa skya pa kho dbon** dang | **rje karma pa'i** sprul pa'i sku  
 rnams la<sup>330</sup> dus dang rnam pa kun tu dad pas skyabs su mchi'o || sangs rgyas bstan pa'i<sup>331</sup> bdag  
 po 'phags yul ba rnams kyi gzhung lugs gsal bar 'dzin pa gangs can khrod 'dir rgyal ba nyid  
 kyi lung bstan pa'i<sup>332</sup> **dpal zla 'od gzhon nu**'i thugs kyi me long 'di nyid | brgyud<sup>333</sup> bar na  
 chad pa'i byon pa thams cad kyi gsal bar gzigs lags mod | skabs 'dir chos thams cad kyi gzhi  
 lam 'bras gsum gyi rnam par bzhag pa las<sup>334</sup> | bod sgom gzhan pa dag gis<sup>335</sup> rtogs pa sangs  
 rgyas kyi dgongs gzhi<sup>336</sup> ma rtogs pa sems can gyi 'khrul gzhi | 'khor 'das gnyis kyi spyi gzhi  
 zhes gzhi la gsum du dbye bar 'dug kyang | nges don gyi skabs su 'di ni cung mi mdzes pa ste  
 | yang dag pa'i dbyings la sde tshan gsum du spyad de sgro btags pa ni sgro 'dogs kyi gnas

<sup>329</sup> ZPng, ZPnp: om. |

<sup>330</sup> ZPng: om. *la*

<sup>331</sup> ZPng: *ston pa'i*

<sup>332</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>333</sup> ZPng: *rgyud*

<sup>334</sup> ZPng: *las*

<sup>335</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>336</sup> ZPng: addit. |

su'ang 'gyur la | sangs rgyas dang sems can gyi 'khrul grol<sup>337</sup> spyi<sup>338</sup> gzhi<sup>[1027]</sup> gnyis su khas  
len pa dang | rnam par rtog pa chos skur smra ba yang 'gal ba'i tshig go |

'khor 'das kyi spyi gzhi chos dbyings las gzhan pa'i lung ma bstan nam | phung po gsum pa'i  
rnam gzhas 'di ni 'phags yul dang | bod kyi lugs tshad ldan gang la'ang med cing | spyir 'khor  
'das kyi thog ma'i 'du ba dang | tha ma'i 'du 'phrod rang sar zhi ba thams cad tshul mtshungs  
par ro mnyam par gcig ste | **slob dpon 'phags pas** |

'khor ba dang ni mya ngan 'das ||  
'di gnyis khyad par cung zad ni ||  
shin tu phra ba'ang yod ma yin ||

zhes so || des na rang la nges pa'i tshul ni | chos kyi dbyings mnyam pa nyid 'khor 'das lam  
gsum gyi khyab bya khyab byed thams cad med la | 'di nyid gnas tshul chos nyid de chos kyi  
dbyings las 'das par sgrog<sup>339</sup> pa lta ba'i zab gnad byed par snang yang | de ni mi rigs<sup>340</sup> te | chos  
kyi dbyings las chos nyid gzhan mi dmigs pas so ||

chos kyi dbyings las rang rig pa'i tshe ye shes dang | rang sar rang ma rig pa'i tshe gti mug gi  
rnam par bzhag pa yin pa la | la la dag ma rig pa'i 'gyu ba de gzhi med rtsa bral du song tshe  
ma rig pa de rang rig gi ye shes su gnas gyur par 'dod pa ni cung mi mdzes te | ma rig pa'i 'og  
'gyu rgyun chad nas ye shes zang thal gyi dbyings la ma rig pa rgyun chad pas gnas 'gyur ba  
ma yin te | des na **slob dpon**<sup>[1028]</sup> **'phags pas** | don 'di dag byang chub sems 'grel las rgyas par  
gsungs so ||

**rgyal tshab byams pa** la sogs pas gnas gyur gyi ye shes kyi don ji lta bu zhe na | so so'i skye  
bo'i blo'i rim pa 'dzin stangs can rnam la | rgyal ba'i sa dang pha rol tu<sup>341</sup> phyin pa'i tshul la  
sa lam gyi bye brag tu bshad pas so || de nas ma rig pa'i shes pa de rgyun chad pa'i tshe | de  
dang lhan cig tu skyes pa'i ye shes ma 'dres pa rtog<sup>342</sup> bral don dam pa'i mtshan nyid 'dzin  
pa'i so so rang rig gi ye shes de nyid dbyings las ldang ba'o<sup>343</sup> || des na so so rang rig pa'i ye

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<sup>337</sup> Ms.: 'grol

<sup>338</sup> ZPng: ci

<sup>339</sup> ZPng: sgrogs

<sup>340</sup> ZPng: rig

<sup>341</sup> ZPmk: du

<sup>342</sup> ZPmk: rtogs; ZPng, ZPnp: rtog

<sup>343</sup> ZPng: pa'o

shes ni | da lta bod sgom gzhan rnams kyis<sup>344</sup> rang ngo rang gis shes pa la zer te | tshad ldan  
du dpyad na | rang ngo shes zhes pa 'di la | rang ngo shes rung ma shes rung<sup>345</sup> so so skye bo  
yul yul can rnam par dag pa'i tshe so so rang rig pa'i ye shes skye la | gzhan du min te | rang  
ngo rang gis shes zhes pa bod sgom gzhan pa'i blo rtse gtod yul ni | kha nang bltas kyī myong  
ba rang rig la 'chad par mngon la | de ltar na | so so skye bo thams cad la so sor rang rig gi ye  
shes yod par thal bas de ltar mi rung ngo ||

'di la 'phags yul gyi slob dpon la las |

snang med gnas pa'i rnal 'byor pas ||  
de<sup>346</sup> yis theg pa chen po mthong ||

zhes gsungs nas | kun rdzob pa'i chos dang | rnam grags pa'i don dam pa thams cad | sangs  
rgyas kyis bdag med pa'i cha nas ma gzigs | mi gzigs<sup>[1029]</sup> gzigs par mi 'gyur ba la dgongs so |  
| de lta bu'i don de nyid la bdag med du so sor rtogs pa'i ye shes dang | smon lam gyi mthus  
bya ba grub pa'i ye shes rgyun chad med par | sangs rgyas kyī spyod yul rnams ni dbyings  
rang sar tsho thub pa'i ngang nas yang dag pa'i gnas lugs mi phyed pa'i rdo rje shes pa'i rang  
'od kyī gsal cha yod pa la dgongs nas snang med kyī don mi 'thad ces rgya gar gyi slob dpon  
chen po la las gsungs | lugs phyi ma 'di'i rjes su **dpal rang byung** gis kyang bsngags par  
mdzad do ||

*byang chub sems 'grel* dang |<sup>347</sup> '*jug pa* sogs las kun gzhi rnam shes mi 'thad par bshad nas |  
snang tsam nyid bag chags yin par bshad pa ni | **slob dpon 'phags pa** nyid dang | **zla ba grags**  
**pa** gnyis ka'i bzhed la kun gzhi mi bzhed pa'i rgyu mtshan ni | chos thams cad byed pa<sup>348</sup> dang  
ngo bo nyid rang tsho thub pa'i chos 'ga' yang med na | chos nyid kyī dbyings sgrib byed kyī  
sgrib pa lung ma bstan<sup>349</sup> chos thams cad kyī gnas 'cha'<sup>350</sup> thub pa'i shes par rang dbang can  
du 'gyur dgos nas legs par bkag pa yin la | slob dpon gzhan dag gis<sup>351</sup> ni | rgyal bas phyi rol pa  
rnams bdag dang byed pa dang za bar 'dzin pa bzlog pa'i phyir | phung khams skye mched  
rnam shes kyī rnam gzhas bstan la | lhag par *lang gshegs* sogs las gsung pa'i kun gzhi shes pa

<sup>344</sup> ZPng: *kyi*

<sup>345</sup> ZPmk: om. *ma shes rung* | which is attested in ZPng, ZPnp

<sup>346</sup> ZPng: '*di*; ZPmk, ZPnp: *de*

<sup>347</sup> ZPng: om. |

<sup>348</sup> ZPng: addit. *po*

<sup>349</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>350</sup> ZPng: *cha*; '*cha*' attested in ZPmk, ZPnp

<sup>351</sup> ZPng: *gyi*

khyad par <sup>[1030]</sup> du rtsal bton nas bshad na |<sup>352</sup> snang ba sems su bsgrub pa'i skabs su rgyu 'bras  
kyi 'jog mtshams shin tu legs par 'chad par<sup>353</sup> mngon la | lugs phyi ma 'di'i rjes su **dpal rang  
byung** gis ni bstod par mdzad kyang | bdag gis ni don dam par rnam par dpyad pa'i skabs su  
ni lugs gong ma 'di blo gros zhib par mngon no ||

mdor na chos kyi<sup>354</sup> dbyings zad pa med pa la rten 'brel gyi rang bsnyems re ldang tshe sems  
can gyi khams re<sup>355</sup> byung bar go bas chos dbyings la snon pa med pa la dgongs nas | sems can  
la snon pa med cing bri ba dang bcas pa zhes gsungs la | don du dbyings la ngar 'dzin gyi bdag  
rkyen byed pa'i 'gyu ba re byung tshe sems can re grub snang bas | sems can la snon pa dang  
bri ba gnyis ka 'thad par sems so ||

da ni rnal 'byor gyi stobs kyis 'khor 'das kyi snang cha stong nyid kyi tshul la 'jug pa'i rim  
pa la | dbu ma'i sgom rim phal che ba nas | thog mar don spyi<sup>356</sup> rtags gtan tshigs kyi 'thad  
bsgrub bya nges yul du byas nas bsgom pa nyid du bshad cing | phyag rgya pa'i man ngag la  
las ni | don dpyi sel ba yid yul du byas nas 'thad pa bkod nas bsgom pa ni gnas lugs sgrib byed  
kyi gegs su 'dod do ||

de yang dbu ma pa rang lugs kyi don dam dpyod pa'i skabs su'ang | sgra rtog gi sel 'jug gis<sup>357</sup>  
dpyad pa ma yin la | mngon sum dang rjes dpag gis rtags yang dag pa'i gtan <sup>[1031]</sup> tshigs kyis  
drangs pa'i nges shes tshad mar bzahag mod | de yang bod sgom la las | log pa'i kun rdzob kyi<sup>358</sup>  
kyang log pa'i kun rdzob kyi bden par 'gyur zhes dang | yang bod sgom de dag gis | dngos po  
mtshan gzhi mtshan nyid mi gnas na bltas pas mi 'gyur te | rgya mthongs<sup>359</sup> kyi thog tu song  
bas lhung<sup>360</sup> ba'i dpe rgya cher bshad nas | yang snang ba sems su sgrub pa'i rim pa 'di gsum  
ni | nges pa'i don rtogs par rlom<sup>361</sup> nas<sup>362</sup> gzhan gang dang yang mi mthun par sgrog pa la ya  
mtshan du rtsi bar snang ngo ||

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<sup>352</sup> ZPng: om. |

<sup>353</sup> ZPmk: *pa; par* attested in ZPmk, ZPnp

<sup>354</sup> ZPng: om. *kyi*

<sup>355</sup> ZPnp: *der*

<sup>356</sup> ZPmk: *gyi*; ZPng, ZPnp: *spyi*

<sup>357</sup> ZPnp: *gi*

<sup>358</sup> ZPmk: *kyis*

<sup>359</sup> ZPnp: *mthongs*

<sup>360</sup> ZPng: *ltung*

<sup>361</sup> ZPng: *rloms*

<sup>362</sup> ZPng: addit. |

des na spyir bde bar gshegs pa rnams ni gnas tshul dang snang tshul thams cad sgrib pa med par<sup>363</sup> sgo mtha' yas pas na mgnon sum kho nar nges la | so so'i skye bo'i shes pa yang der snang gi cha nas tshad ma yin no || de yang phung po lnga las gzugs phung gtso cher byas te<sup>364</sup> phyi don gyi dngos po la rdzas tha dad pa rang bzhin grub pa med la | rigs dang bya ba yon tan yang phyi rol rang dbang du 'dus pa'i dbye bsal phyi rol du med kyang | rdzad tha dad pa'i yon tan gyi<sup>365</sup> blo'i nyer bsdogs las so || de ltar na<sup>366</sup> phyi don gyi dngos gzhi dang khyad par gyi bya ba tha dad pa yang ma yin te | nye bar rgyu rkyen gyi tshul du 'brel zhing gcig pa yang ma yin te | snang tsam dang nus pa'i cha so sor gsal bas so ||

mdor na phyi don rags pa phyogs gcig tu gnas pa la<sup>367</sup> de nyid kyi ldog pa'i chas rang blo cha [1032] shas<sup>368</sup> su bzung ste gnas pa min<sup>369</sup> no || mtshan mar zhen pa nyid dngos por snang ste | yul gyi bya ba sna tshogs pa ma brtags gcig pur nyams dga' bar bstan te<sup>370</sup> *rgyal ba'i yum* las | mdor na chos thams cad<sup>371</sup> ming tsam gyi rjes su 'gro ba 'ga' zhig bshad do || des na chos thams cad kun rdzob pa'i mtshan nyid sogs blo thug med kyis gzhal ba ni chos thams cad kyi don dam pa'i mtshan nyid gsal bar 'dren pa'o || des na chos thams cad kyi rang bzhin ni gdod ma'i ye shes nyid yin no || de ni mtha'<sup>372</sup> \*dang spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'o ||<sup>373</sup> kun rdzob pa'i rang bzhin gang yin pa de ni rang bzhin med pa nyid las<sup>374</sup> | rang bzhin med pa nyid gang yin pa ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes snying po<sup>375</sup> yin pas | gnyis med du smra ba ni rgyal ba'i yum las rgya cher bshad do ||

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<sup>363</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>364</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>365</sup> ZPng: *gyis*

<sup>366</sup> ZPmk: om. *na*

<sup>367</sup> ZPmk: ||

<sup>368</sup> ZPng: *chas*

<sup>369</sup> ZPnp: *min*

<sup>370</sup> ZPmk: *to* ||

<sup>371</sup> ZPng: om. *thams cad*

<sup>372</sup> ZPnp missing page 467 (missing content marked with asterisks\*); page 468 is duplicated.

<sup>373</sup> ZPng: missing section: *thams cad kun rdzob pa'i mtshan nyid sogs... dang bral ba'o* ||

<sup>374</sup> ZPng: *pas*; om. |

<sup>375</sup> ZPng: *snying po*; ZPmk: *nyid*

de la da ltar gyi shes pa 'di nyid gzung ba<sup>376</sup> dang 'dzin par bcas na rnam par rtog cing kun tu brtags nas yongs su srid pa 'dzin la | gzung 'dzin gyi rnam par ma langs te<sup>377</sup> | yul rkyen gyi lam du ma<sup>378</sup> zhugs par | snang tsam gsal ba'i go ma 'gags shing | sgrib byed kyi rang<sup>379</sup> snyems yengs thabs su ma lus pa'i shes pa 'di las khyad par du sangs rgyas kyi mkhyen pa'ang zab par ma dmigs pa ni zab don phyin ci ma log pa'o ||

des<sup>380</sup> na de lta bu'i shes pa sgrub par byed pa ni | yid kyi shes pas chos 'dzin par mi bya zhing | snang tsam mi<sup>[1033]</sup> 'gog pa ni blang dor gyi mtha' sel lo || rtog bral mngon sum pa ni<sup>381</sup> nyams len gyi gnad<sup>382</sup> yin te | rtog med log shes ni gzung 'dzin bcos ma rgya cher song ba yin te | rtog med log shes kyang yul med pa\* ni ma yin no || des na shes bya<sup>383</sup> kun rang gi ngo bo la ma skyes pa'i gnad kas ma skyes pa nyid skyes pa ltar snang tshe | skyes pa tsam gyis mngon sum pa de ka las gzhan pa'i phag na rim pa mang po med do || rang gi shes pa'i ngo bo la rab tu rtogs te mngon sum du gyur pa ni 'phags pa'i shes pa yin no ||

zhen yul la rab tu rtog<sup>384</sup> ste<sup>385</sup> 'jug pa na so so'i skye bo'i shes pa'o || yul<sup>386</sup> thad du mngon sum skad cig gis mi bslu ba'i shes pa snang tsam gyi bden la | de rtog pa dang bral ba'i tshul gyi rang rig na<sup>387</sup> gnas tshul gyi mi bslu ba'i sgo la 'jug pa'i skabs mchis so || so so'i skye bo'i dngos po yul shes kyi rten 'brel gyi nus pa 'byin pas mi bslu ba'i go mi chod kyang | rang gsal gyi shes pa dpyad pa'i tshe dngos dang dngos med gang du'ang ma grub gsal bar gyur ba'i shes pa ni bslu ba med pa'o |

de ltar mngon sum gyi gnad<sup>388</sup> la phra tig gi nyams len du btab pa rnams ni | rang gar yid kyi spyod pa ji ltar 'bad kyang don 'gyur gyi the tshom las ma 'das par 'gyur ba dang | snang tsam nyid sgyur ma'o snyam du 'dzin pa yang mngon sum gyi ma nges na | ma nges pa'i snang cha

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<sup>376</sup> ZPmk: *bzung ba*; ZPng: *gzung*

<sup>377</sup> ZPng: *lang ste*

<sup>378</sup> ZPmk: *om. ma*

<sup>379</sup> ZPng: *yang*

<sup>380</sup> ZPng: *dper*

<sup>381</sup> ZPng: *addit. |*

<sup>382</sup> ZPmk: *gnas*

<sup>383</sup> ZPmk, ZPnp: *pa*

<sup>384</sup> ZPng: *rtag*; ZPnp: *rtogs*

<sup>385</sup> ZPnp: *te*

<sup>386</sup> ZPng, ZPnp: *addit. gyi*

<sup>387</sup> ZPng: *nas*

<sup>388</sup> ZPmk: *gnas*; ZPng, ZPnp: *gnad*

sgom pa don med du 'gyur ba <sup>[1034]</sup> dang |<sup>389</sup> mngon sum gyi shes pa skad cig tu 'char te | yid  
yul du bkram nas dran pas gsos<sup>390</sup> 'debs shing<sup>391</sup> bsgoms kyang mngon sum gyi shes par mi  
'gyur ba dang<sup>392</sup> gdod ma nas ma skyes pa'i gnad kas skad cig gis 'gro ldog byed pa dang |

gzhan yang kun rdzob ni bslu ba | mi bden pa | don dam pa ni bden pa | mi 'gyur ba'i bslu med  
du nges pa'i chos gnyis nges yul du byas nas rtag par zhen pa ni the tshom gyi gnas la<sup>393</sup> 'khod  
par 'gyur ro || de lta bu'i zab don ni shin tu phra ba'i gnas te | **bdag nyid chen po ka ma la**  
**shī**<sup>394</sup> las |

des na rang rig phra bas na ||  
sangs rgyas phra rab gzigs pa yin ||  
bdag cag lta bu'i ngan rnams kyis<sup>395</sup> ||  
blo gros rtsing 'dis ga la mthong || zhes so ||

de ltar blo gros zhib mos stong nyid ci ma log par rtogs pa'i<sup>396</sup> 'bras bu'i ye shes ni | rgya bod  
'dir sangs rgyas la<sup>397</sup> ye shes yod med kyī rnam gzhag mang du byung yang | rgya gar gyi slob  
dpon chen po la las | sangs rgyas kyī sar ye shes med ces pa ni | sa bcu pa'i<sup>398</sup> mnyam gzhag  
ngo skal gyi ye shes rang ngo la khyad par med par bshad cing 'on kyang mnyam gzhag gi  
rgyun dang | zab mi zab dang | gya che chung yod par bshad nas lam pa'i rjes thob kyī ye shes  
kyī sgrib pa mngon du spangs nas mi skye ba'i chos can du byed pa dang | rjes kyī ye shes  
bskyed cing spang bya spang bar<sup>399</sup> bya ba'i lam pa'i<sup>400</sup> ye shes de ji ltar sdong bu dang snum  
yod kyī bar la <sup>[1035]</sup> 'bar ba yod pa lta bur bzhed do ||

<sup>389</sup> ZPng: missing passage: *snang tsam nyid sgyur ma'o... 'gyur ba dang* |

<sup>390</sup> ZPng, ZPnp: *sos*

<sup>391</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>392</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>393</sup> ZPng: *las*

<sup>394</sup> ZPmk: *shrī*; ZPnp: *shī* The texts have *ka ma la shī/shrī la* which may be mistaken transcriptions of Śrī Kambala, the actual author of this passage.

<sup>395</sup> ZPnp: *kyī*

<sup>396</sup> ZPng: *pa'i*

<sup>397</sup> ZPmk: om. *sangs rgyas la*; ZPnp: *sangs rgyas la*; ZPng: *sangs rgyas*

<sup>398</sup> ZPmk: *bcu'i*; ZPng, ZPnp: *bcu pa'i*

<sup>399</sup> ZPmk: *pa*

<sup>400</sup> ZPng: *sa'i*; ZPmk, ZPnp: *pa'i*



gzhan yang bde bar gshegs pa ni stong pa nyid kyi bla dags su bshad nas | ye shes dang stobs drang ba'i don du bshad cing | thugs rje chen po dang sngon gyi smon lam kho na la rag las par 'dzin pa ni nges pa'i don la blo gros kyi rtsal nyams pa yin te | de ltar na stong nyid de thabs dang thabs byung gi nus pa dang ya ma bral bas rten 'brel gyi bdag nyid du'ang mi rung la | sngags bla na med pa ltar rigs gcig nas rigs brgya'i bar de bzhin gshegs pa'i khyad chos thun mong min pa thams cad drang ba'i don du 'chad dgos pas so ||

gzhan yang sangs rgyas kyi ye shes snang du 'dod pa dang | rnam pa gcig gis rnam pa thams cad mkhyen tshul | 'phags yul gyi slob dpon chen po rnams kyi dgongs pa yin yang | ye shes zhi ba dam pa<sup>401</sup> bdag med pa de nyid snang ba med pa'i tshul gyis<sup>402</sup> rang bzhin du mkhyen zhing gzigs la | ye shes zab mo des mtshon nas srid par thugs rje chen po yang dag par mkhyen zhing gzigs pa'i so sor rtogs pa dang bya ba grub pa'i sgo nas mkhyen pas shes bya'i gnas phra ba'i phra ba<sup>403</sup> thams cad sku ru ra rlon pa lag mthil du bzhag pa ltar mkhyen ching gzigs so ||

des na snang med kyi ye shes<sup>404</sup> | de ltar 'chad na mdzes par mngon la | rnam pa gcig gis rnam pa thams cad mkhyen zhes pa yang skye ba med pa'i rnam pa gcig gis shes<sup>[1036]</sup> bya'i dkyil 'khor kun khyab pa'i ye shes su bshad la | de dag kyang<sup>405</sup> zhib tu bsam na | chos kyi dbyings la chos nyid ma yin pa'i chos med kyang | rnam pa shes bya sna tshogs pa dag la sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyang rnam pa sna tshogs gang la gang 'dul 'byung bar rigs par bya ste | de nyid skye med kyi rnam pa la gnod dam zhe na skye med de skye ba<sup>406</sup> sna tshogs su ston pa yin pas<sup>407</sup> 'khor 'das<sup>408</sup> kyi yon tan rang babs su mi 'dug gam zhes bya ba 'di nyid ltar 'chad pa<sup>409</sup> legs so ||

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<sup>401</sup> ZPng: *dmangs*

<sup>402</sup> ZPng: *gyi*; ZPmk, ZPnp: *gyis*

<sup>403</sup> ZPmk: *phra ba*; ZPng, ZPnp: *phra ba'i phra ba*

<sup>404</sup> ZPnp: addit. *kyang*

<sup>405</sup> ZPng: *la yang*; ZPnp: *yang*

<sup>406</sup> ZPmk: om. *skye ba*

<sup>407</sup> ZPng: om. |

<sup>408</sup> ZPnp: addit. *thams cad*

<sup>409</sup> ZPnp: om. *'chad pa*

gzhan yang sangs rgyas kyi rtog med ye shes kyi<sup>410</sup> chos nyid gzigs la | rtog pa med bzhin du ji snyed pa'i chos kyang gzigs par 'dod pa dang |<sup>411</sup> rtog med kyi kyang<sup>412</sup> ji snyed pa'i mkhyen pa mi gzigs la | 'gro ba'i don ni sngon gyi smon lam kho na la rag las par 'dod pa mang du snang yang sangs rgyas kyi mkhyen pa'i rtog bcas rtog med ji lta ji snyed thams cad ngo bo dang rnam pa gang du'ang | so so skye bo'i blos kun btags pa 'di<sup>413</sup> ltar min pas chos thams cad ro gcig pas so ||

de ltar na sangs rgyas kyi ji snyed mkhyen pa'i ye shes ni 'khrul pa min la<sup>414</sup> ji ltar sgyu ma mkhan rang nyid kyi sgyu ma mngon<sup>415</sup> du snang tshe sgyu mkhan 'khrul par mi 'gyur ba dang 'dra la | 'di'i skabs su **slob dpon zhi ba 'tsho yab sras** kyi<sup>416</sup> sangs rgyas kyi rang ngo la ji snyed mkhyen pa'i tshe na dag pa ye shes kyi 'khor lor<sup>417</sup> gzigs shing | so so'i skye bo'i 'khrul tshul ltar yang<sup>[1037]</sup> gzigs la | gzigs na'ang<sup>418</sup> so so'i skye bo'i 'khrul pas mi gnod ces pa la | gzhan dag gis<sup>419</sup> sangs rgyas kyi<sup>420</sup> 'khrul pa gzigs pa ye mi 'thad de | 'khrul pa'i bag chags sangs pa'i phyir zhes zer ba la | sangs rgyas kyi 'khrul pa'ang 'khrul pa bzhin du<sup>421</sup> ye shes kyi 'jug ldog gi<sup>422</sup> 'khrul pa la phyir 'dzin pa yin na<sup>423</sup> khyed cag bden te | sangs rgyas kyi zab mo ye shes me long lta bu la | sangs rgyas dang sems can gyi kham gnyis kyi bar du sgrib byed gzhan med pas<sup>424</sup> 'gro ba'i gzugs brnyan sna tshogs<sup>425</sup> 'char ro ||

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<sup>410</sup> ZPmk: *kyi*

<sup>411</sup> ZPmk: om. *dang* |

<sup>412</sup> ZPng: *rtog pa med kyang*

<sup>413</sup> ZPng: *'od*

<sup>414</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>415</sup> ZPng: *sngon*; ZPmg, ZPnp: *mngon*

<sup>416</sup> ZPmk: om. |

<sup>417</sup> ZPng: *lo*

<sup>418</sup> ZPmk: *na*; ZPng, ZPnp: *na'ang*

<sup>419</sup> ZPng: om. *gyis*

<sup>420</sup> ZPng, ZPnp: *kyi*

<sup>421</sup> ZPmk: om. *du*

<sup>422</sup> ZPmk, ZPnp: *gi*; ZPng: *gam*

<sup>423</sup> ZPmk: addit. |

<sup>424</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>425</sup> ZPng, ZPnp: addit. *par*

de yang de bzhin gshegs pa ni chos kyi dbyings dang mnyam pa'i sku gsung thugs yin pas  
sems can thams cad dang ye shes gcig pa nyid de chos kyi<sup>426</sup> dbyings yongs su rdzogs pa'i ye  
shes mnga' ba'i phyir ro || 'ga' zhig gis thugs rje dang smon lam kho na'i mthu yin par sgrog  
pa ni me yi 'thad de | sa bcu pa rnams la'ang dbang bcu mnga' na | sangs rgyas dbang mtha'  
yas pa thob pa la<sup>427</sup> sngon gyi smon lam kho na la rag dgos pa ni thabs rgya chung bas so ||

gzhan yang sangs rgyas kyi chos nyid de ngo bo nyid kyis<sup>428</sup> stong pas gcig tu'ang ma grub la  
| gcig tu'ang<sup>429</sup> ma grub pas du mar grub pa mi 'thad ces phyag rgya pa'i gdams ngag gi gnad  
| sangs rgyas dang sems can la re dogs dang bral ba'i skabs kyi sgom rim du bshad la<sup>430</sup> yang  
rnam pa gcig tu ni zhen par mi bya zhing<sup>431</sup> rgyal ba'i<sup>[1038]</sup> gsung rab ris med pa la bslab par  
bya'o ||

theg mchog pha rol phyin pa yi<sup>432</sup> ||  
sbas don gang yin gsang chen gyi ||  
rdo rje theg par mngon du bstan ||  
rdo rje theg pa'i gzab gnad kyang ||  
mos gus gnad la rag las pas ||  
brgyud pa rnams la gsol ba 'debs ||  
brgyud pa'i byin rlabs 'phos pa las ||  
man ngag cung zad bris pa'i dges ||  
kun kyang rdo rje 'dzin par shog ||

zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter zhes bya ba<sup>433</sup> **dpal mi bskyod dga'**  
**ba'i dbyangs** kyis phrag yul du bris pa'o ||||

## MENTAL NONENGAGEMENT AS UNCONDITIONED MENTAL ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following is a short excerpt from Mi bskyod rdo rje's  
monumental *Commentary on the Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* in which he

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<sup>426</sup> ZPng: om. *kyi*

<sup>427</sup> ZPng: om. |

<sup>428</sup> ZPmk: *kyi*; ZPng, ZPnp: *kyis*

<sup>429</sup> ZPmk: *tu yang*

<sup>430</sup> ZPmk: om. |

<sup>431</sup> ZPng: addit. |

<sup>432</sup> ZPng: *vis*

<sup>433</sup> ZPng: addit. |

distinguishes the Bka' brgyud meditation of mental nonengagement from the type of self-induced blank-mindedness that Tibetans generally associated with Heshang's system of Chan meditation and that had also been criticized as a form of deluded meditation in Indrabhūti's *Jñānasiddhi*. The Dwags po Mahāmudrā teaching on “naturally letting be without any clinging to thoughts and objects” bears no similarity to “the restrictive suppression of thoughts of the Chinese Heshang.” To further specify that this mental nonengagement does not involve the cessation of *all* thinking, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains, with supporting quotations from classical Indian sources and his own tradition, that mental nonengagement constitutes nondual mental engagement, in other words, a mental activity free from those mental activities involving superimpositions of apprehending subject and apprehended object.

The following editions of the *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

KSmk: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 21, 208<sub>6</sub>–210<sub>6</sub>.

KSks: *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa*. Rumtek: 1978 vol. 1, 260<sub>6</sub> –264<sub>5</sub>.

### 5a. English Translation of *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (excerpt)

[*Query*:] Isn't the meditation that involves stopping thinking, as [criticized in] the *Jñānasiddhi* by the King Indrabhūti and in other [texts], [209] invariably explained as the path of Mahāmudrā? [*Reply*:] In this [tradition,] we do not engage at all in accepting or rejecting, projecting or withdrawing, thoughts, yet it is not the case that we try to block thoughts either. This is so because this [Mahāmudrā method of] relaxing in one's natural way of being without any clinging to thoughts and objects is not like the restrictive suppression of thoughts of the Chinese Heshang. It is also not the case that this way of settling [the mind] does not become the Mahāmudrā path because [Saraha's] *People's Dohā* [*Dohākoṣa* 57a] states:

Having relinquished thought and no thought,  
One must let be in the manner of a small child.

In letting be in this way, the seeing, awareness, and mentation that focuses on all phenomena, and all [other] mental engagements come to a standstill. As Saraha states in his commentary on the *Buddhakaṇḍala* [tantra]:

If you ask what is ultimately seen, one does not see any phenomena.<sup>434</sup>

In that case, however, when one has not realized the ways of abiding and appearing<sup>435</sup> of those objects, it is not the case that one does not see [at all] as if one's eyes were closed. Rather, there is the deception of the delusive imputed phenomena that are superimpositions of these things of the phenomenal existence. Since the vision of perceptible objects just as they are reverses [these superimpositions], one is free from mental engagements and therefore does not see *anything* and that is seeing the ultimate. When it comes to practicing Mahāmudrā calm abiding (*zhi gnas*) by way of dwelling one-pointedly on the imputed objects and letting the mind settle on them in an uncontrived state, this is the Dwags po bka' brgyud tradition's supreme means of practicing calm abiding. When practiced in this way, [210] one does not find anything to see or touch in terms of object (*yul*) and subject (*yul can*) and is able to sustain this [realization] one-pointedly throughout the cycle of day and night. This has been described with the name "the yoga of one-pointedness in the Dwags po bka' brgyud tradition of the physician [Sgam po pa]".

[Query:] As for the ultimate meaning (*de kho na'i don*) of this one-pointedness, if it is something like mental engagement that preserves innate natural way of being (*gnyug ma'i rang babs*), then isn't there a contradiction between the yogas of mental engagement and nonengagement given the mental nonengagement of the lineage stemming from the great siddhas Tilopa and Nāro, the Mahāmudrā Mental nonengagement doctrinal cycle in Śrī Saraha[']s tradition] received by Mar pa, and, in particular, the teachings of the Mental nonengagement doctrinal cycle of Master Maitrīpa? [Reply:] As stated by the Fourth Crown Holder of the Zhwa dmar [Ye shes dpal bzang po (1453–1526)], "interpreting the term *amanasikāra*, it is the cessation of conditioned, transient mental engagements of *saṃsāra* and, at the same time, the one-pointed equipoise in unconditioned mental engagement of *nirvāṇa* wherein one does not remain [in either *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*]. These two yogas are not incompatible." According to the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇi* [NPDh]:

Son of a noble family, why has the nonconceptual sphere (*nirvikalpadhātu*) been described as *amanasikāra*? It is so called due to having properly transcended the discursive signs of all conceptual thinking. Thereby, the meditation that properly transcends all conceptual thinking is [denoted] by the term *amanasikāra*.

[Maitrīpa comments as follows in *Amanasikārādhāra*:]

<sup>434</sup> This is the *Śrībuddhakapālatantrapañjikājñānavatī* (Tib. *Dpal sangs rgyas thod pa'i rgyud kyi dka' 'grel ye shes ldan pa*; D 1652, P 2524) which is ascribed to Saraha. It was translated into Tibetan by Gayadhara and Jo Zla ba'i 'od zer.

<sup>435</sup> We here take *gnas snang* as an abbreviation for *gnas tshul/lugs dang snang tshul/lugs*.

Even [when *amanasikāra* is taken] in the sense of an affirming negation, there is no fault. When [someone] says “Bring a non-Brahmin,”<sup>[211]</sup> the bringing of somebody similar to a Brahmin, a Kṣatriya or the like [is intended], but not a low-caste person of base origin, such as a wagon-maker. Here, too, [where *amanasikāra* is taken as an affirming negation,] an awareness of the lack of inherent nature is maintained. Hence the tenet of Māyopamādvaya is established. From what, then, does the consequence of the view of nihilism follow?<sup>436</sup>

And [that text] states:

[*Amanasikāra*] means the *manasikāra* for which the letter *a-* is the main thing. It is a compound in which the middle word is dropped, as in the case of a *śāka-parthiva*, a “king [for whom] vegetables [are the main thing].” Accordingly, whatever mental engagement (*manasikāra*) there is, all of it is “*a*” which means that it has the nature of nonorigination.<sup>437</sup>

If asked where this was taught by the Bhagavan, [it was taught] by the line *a kā ro* (Skt. *akāro*) and so on [i.e., *Hevajratantra* 1.2.1] that the letter *a* stands for nonorigination?

[The letter *a* is at the beginning because all phenomena have not arisen since the beginning...]<sup>438</sup>

In accordance with this, Rje La yag pa [Byang chub dngos grub] in his commentary on the Four Dharmas of Sgam po pa states:

Mental nonengagement means familiarizing oneself with the true nature of things through relinquishing all mental engagements such as the apprehended [object] and apprehending [subject]. Alternatively, because the *a* is the foremost thing, it is said that everything abides in the state of nonorigination.<sup>439</sup>

<sup>436</sup> See Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>437</sup> See Mathes 2015 (forthcoming) and Volume I, 419 n. 1212 for a discussion of these grammatical points.

<sup>438</sup> The relevant line from the *Hevajratantra* (1.2.1) “The letter *a* is at the beginning because all phenomena have not arisen from the beginning (*ādi*)...” Skt. *akāro mukhaṃ sarvadharmāṇāṃ ādyanutpannatvād*. Maitrīpa quotes this line in his *Amanasikāradhāra*. See Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>439</sup> La yag pa Byang chub dngos grub (b. 12<sup>th</sup> c.) *Mnyam med dwags po chos bzhir grags pa'i gzhung gi 'grel pa snying po gsal ba'i rgyan*. Quote unidentified.

In other words, because of the *a* being primary, all phenomena abide in the state of nonorigination. According to the *Sāgaramatiparipṛcchā* (D 152):

[Buddha] taught the application of mindfulness  
That is without mindfulness and without mental engagement.<sup>440</sup>

This application of mindfulness and nonmindfulness is not contradictory because according to the *Buddhasaṃgīti* (D 228) states:

[Query:] Mañjuśrī, how does one sustain the application of mindfulness? [Reply:]  
without mindfulness and without mental engagement regarding all phenomena.<sup>441</sup>

### 5b. Critical Edition of *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (excerpt)

(MKsb, vol. 21, 208<sub>6</sub>–210<sub>6</sub>). 'o na **rgyal po in dra bhū tis** | ye shes grubs pa la sogs par rnam rtog bkag pa'i sgom pa [209] phyag rgya chen po'i lam du mi 'gyur bar bshad pa ma yin nam snyam na | 'dir rnam rtog spro bsdu'i dgag sgrub gang yang mi byed pa'i phyir rnam rtog bkag pa yang ma yin te | de lta'ang rtog yul gang yang nye bar 'dzin pa med pa nyid kyi rang babs su glod pa 'di **rgya nag ha shang** gi rtog pa nyi tshe ba bkag pa lta bu ma yin pa'i phyir | 'jog lugs 'di phyag rgya chen po'i lam du mi 'gro ba min te | dmangs dor<sup>442</sup> |

bsam dang bsam min<sup>443</sup> rab tu spangs nas su ||  
ji ltar<sup>444</sup> bu chung tshul<sup>445</sup> du bzhag par bya<sup>446</sup> ||<sup>447</sup>

zhes 'byung la | de ltar bzhag pa na chos thams cad la yid byed kyi mthong ba dang | rig pa dang shes pa dang yid byed thams cad log pa yin te | sangs rgyas thod pa'i 'grel par **dpal sa ra ha pas** |

<sup>440</sup> D: 152, 43<sub>4-5</sub>.

<sup>441</sup> D: 228, 415<sub>3-4</sub>.

<sup>442</sup> Swayambhu ed.: *mdor*

<sup>443</sup> KSmk, KSks: *bya* : D, P: *min*

<sup>444</sup> D, P: om. *ji ltar*

<sup>445</sup> D, P: *bzhin*

<sup>446</sup> D: *gyi*; P: *gyi*

<sup>447</sup> NGMPP Reel No. A 932/4, 17b<sub>3</sub>–102b<sub>5</sub> (N): The Nepalese manuscript of Hemraj Shakya (now at the National Archives, Kathmandu): *cittācitta vi pariharahu tima acchahu jima vālu* | Bagchi Sanskrit translation: *cittācittam api parihara tathā-astu yathā bālāḥ* |

don dam par mthong ba ci zhe na | gang chos thams cad mi mthong ba'o ||

zhes 'byung bas | de ltar gyi tshe'ang yul de'i gnas snang<sup>448</sup> ma rtogs nas mig btsum pa ltar ma mthong ba min gyi | gnas snang de dag sgro btags 'khrul pa'i btags chos kyi rdzun pa'i phyir | mthong bya yang dag tu gzigs pa log pas yid byed dang bral bas ci yang ma mthong ba la don dam mthong bar sgro btags pa'i yul de la rtse gcig tu gnas pa de la sems ma bcas par 'jog pa'i sgo nas phyag rgya chen po'i zhi gnas sgrub par byed pa ni | dwags po bka' brgyud kyi zhi gnas sgrub thabs mchog tu gyur pa ste | 'dis bsgrubs<sup>449</sup> nas [210] yul dang yul can gyi mthong reg ci yang ma rnyed pa la nyin mtshan khor yug tu rtse gcig par skyong rung yod pa la | bka' brgyud dwags po **lha rje ba**'i lugs kyi rtse gcig gi rnal 'byor zhes ming du 'dogs<sup>450</sup> so ||

'o na rtse gcig par de kho na'i don la gnyug<sup>451</sup> ma'i rang babs skyong ba'i yid la byed pa de lta na **grub chen tai lo nā ro** nas brgyud pa'i yid la mi byed pa dang | **rje mar pas dpal sa ra ha** la phyag rgya chen po yid la mi byed pa'i chos bskor gsan pa dang | khyad par **jo bo mai tri pa**'i yid la mi byed pa'i chos bskor bstan pas yid la byed mi byed kyi rnal 'byor 'gal lo snyam na | **zhwa dmar cod pan 'dzin pa bzhi pa**'i gsung gis *a ma na si kā*<sup>452</sup> ra zhes pa'i sgra las drangs nas | 'khor ba 'dus byas kyi 'gyur ba'i yid byed 'gog pa dang | de lta na'ang mi gnas mya ngan las 'das pa ma byas pa'i yid byed la rtse gcig par mnyam par gzhas pa rnal 'byor pa gnyis mi 'gal te | rnam par mi rtog pa la 'jug pa'i gzungs las |

rigs kyi bu rgyu<sup>453</sup> gang gis na rnam par mi rtog pa'i dbyings la yid la mi byed pa zhes brjod do<sup>454</sup> | rnam par rtog pa thams cad kyi mtshan ma las yang dag par 'das nas<sup>455</sup> blangs<sup>456</sup> pa'o || de dag gis ni rnam par mi rtog pa thams cad las yang dag par 'das pa<sup>457</sup> bsam gtan par 'gyur te | yid la mi byed pa yi sgra yis so ||<sup>458</sup>

[Maitrīpa:]

<sup>448</sup> KSmk: *snang*; KSks: *nang*

<sup>449</sup> KSmk: *sgrub*; KSks: *bsgrubs*

<sup>450</sup> KSks: *bdogs*

<sup>451</sup> KSmk: *gnyugs*; KSks: *gnyug*

<sup>452</sup> KSmk, KSks: *ka*

<sup>453</sup> addit. *rgyu* as per D, P

<sup>454</sup> addit. *do* as per D, P

<sup>455</sup> KSmk, KSks D, P: *na*

<sup>456</sup> D: *blang*

<sup>457</sup> P: om. *pa*

<sup>458</sup> NPDh: *kena kāraṇena kulaputra-avikalpadhātur amanasikāra ity ucyate | sarvavikalpanimittasamatikrānta-tām upādāyati | etena sarvavikalpasamatikrāmāṭā darśitā bhavaty amanasikāraśabdeneti |*



ma yin par<sup>459</sup> dgag pa'i phyogs kyang skyon med de | bram ze ma yin pa<sup>460</sup> [211]  
 khrid la shog ces pas bram ze dang 'dra ba'i rgyal po la sogs pa khrid shog ces par  
 gsal gyi rigs mi mthun pa'i rigs ngan<sup>461</sup> zhing shing rta mkhan la sogs pa ni ma yin  
 no || 'di la yang rang bzhin med pa'i rig<sup>462</sup> pa la gnas par byas pa ste | de dag gis ni  
 sgyu ma lta bur gnyis su med par smra bar<sup>463</sup> gnas par 'gyur ro || gang las chad  
 par lta bar thal bar<sup>464</sup> 'gyur ||<sup>465</sup>

zhes dang |

a yig<sup>466</sup> gtso bor gyur pa'i yid la byed pa ni yid la mi byed pa ste | lo ma'i rgyal po  
 bzhin tshig dbus ma phyis pa'i bsdus pa'o || de dag gis ni yid la byed pa gang yin  
 pa thams cad ni a ste skye ba med pa'i don to ||

bcom ldan 'das kyis gang bstan ce<sup>467</sup> na a k̄a ro la sogs pas a yig ni ma skyes pa ste | chos  
 thams cad kyi sgo'o zhes 'byung ngo || 'di dang mthun par **rje sgam po pa'i** chos bzhi'i 'grel  
par rje la yag pas |

yid la mi byed pa ni gzung ba dang 'dzin pa la sogs pa'i yid la byed pa thams cad  
 spangs nas | de kho na nyid goms par byed pa'o ||

yang na a gtso bo'i phyir thams cad skye ba med pa'i ngang du gnas pa ste zhes dang | blo  
gros rgya mtshos zhus pa'i mdo las |

dran med yid la byed med pa'i ||  
 dran pa nye bar gzhag pa ston || zhes

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<sup>459</sup> P: pa

<sup>460</sup> D: par

<sup>461</sup> addit. pa'i rigs ngan as per D; P shing

<sup>462</sup> KSkS: rigs

<sup>463</sup> KSmk, KSkS: bar; D: ba

<sup>464</sup> P: om. thal bar

<sup>465</sup> NPdHṭ: paryudāsapakṣe 'pi na doṣaḥ | abrāhmaṇam āṇayety ukte brāhmaṇasadrśasya kṣatriyāder āṇayanam  
 bhavati | na tu vijātīyasya kaṭā deḥ | atrāpi niḥsvabhāvavedanasya saṁsthitīḥ kṛtā | etena māyopamādvayavādāḥ  
 sthito bhavet | kuta ucchedavādaprasaṅga iti | See Mathes 2015 ed. for variants.

<sup>466</sup> Swayambhu ed.: yid

<sup>467</sup> MKsb, P: ce; D: zhe

dran med dang dran pa nyer bzhag mi 'gal ba ste 'phags pa sangs rgyas bgro<sup>468</sup> bar |

'jam dpal<sup>469</sup> dran pa nye bar bzhag pa la gnas pa ji lta bu zhig<sup>470</sup> lags | smras pa |<sup>471</sup>  
chos thams cad dran pa med pa |<sup>472</sup> yid la byed pa med pa'o ||

# AMANASIKĀRA, EMPTINESS, AND THE TRADITION OF HESHANG MOHEYAN

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: In the following selection from the sixth section of Mi bskyod rdo rje's voluminous commentary on the *Single Intent (Dgongs gcig)* system of the 'Bri gung sect, the author specifies the role and significance of *amanasikāra* in the context of Dwags po Bka' brgyud meditation. We are told that Maitrīpa's doctrinal cycle" (*a ma na si'i chos skor*) is an unrivalled tradition that, by emphasizing mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed*), nonorigination (*skye med*), and transcending the intellect (*blo 'das*), distils the essence of sūtras and tantras. The type of *amanasikāra* advocated in the Maitrīpa and Mitrayogi lineages is characterized as a "state of profound emptiness in which all external and internal phenomena, however they may arise, are primordially beyond what can be established." With this "special experiential understanding and realization" (*go rtogs myong ba*) that all phenomena are already pure of the discursive elaborations of agent, act, and object, all superimpositions and denigrations are completely dispelled. Moreover, because such realization discloses deep features of reality, it has nothing in common with the meditation on emptiness which, separated from the awareness of phenomena and their nature, "takes as its mental object a nonaffirming negation" (*med dgag*) and thus remains "inordinately attached to that [object] through the mode of apprehension." The author concludes his overview with a strikingly charitable reconsideration of the purport of Heshang's *amanasikāra* teachings.

The following editions of the *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa VI* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

GCmk: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 6, 98<sub>1</sub>–102<sub>4</sub>.

GCbc: *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*. Lhasa: 2004, vol. 81, 118<sub>2</sub>–123<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>468</sup> KNmk, KNkn: 'gro

<sup>469</sup> D om. |

<sup>470</sup> D addit. *zhig*

<sup>471</sup> D addit. |

<sup>472</sup> D om. |

## 6a. English Translation of *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* VI (excerpt)

[*Query:*] Regarding the view and meditation of profound emptiness according to the method of mental nonengagement, while there may be exalted beings who practice it in that way, are there also ordinary persons who practice like that? [*Reply:*] Yes there are.

[*Query:*] Then, how *do* they practice it? [*Reply:*] When a Guru who has gained realization directly introduces by means of scriptures and esoteric precepts—the enduring heritage of the proper path—a fortunate disciple to the state of profound emptiness wherein all external and internal phenomena, however they may arise, are beyond all that is established in terms of modes of being and [thus] free from the entire [range] of existence and nonexistence, arising and ceasing, permanence and impermanence, substantiality and insubstantiality, and the conditioned and unconditioned, then for such a disciple all the bonds of wayward projections that are the great hidden flaw of delusion regarding all conventional phenomena, external and internal, are destroyed. [The disciple will also be] liberated from the great abyss of deprecation because there arises a special experiential understanding and realization (*go rtogs myong ba*) that all phenomena are already pure of all discursive elaborations of the threefold nexus [of act, object and subject] like dust in the sky, such that they are not existent, not nonexistent, and their being concomitantly both existent and nonexistent, or their being neither, are eliminated. On that occasion, in regard to that [disciple] who is nakedly immersed in the abiding nature, which is not amenable to any mental engagement at all, the illustrious Dwags po bka' brgyud have spoken of “seeing the abiding nature of mind” or “eliciting the perfection of wisdom nature” (*rang bzhin sher phyin mngon du byas*).<sup>[99]</sup> Or they have paraphrased it as “attaining the direct introduction by directly encountering one’s own face that is [one’s] abiding nature, as never met or known before” and as “losing oneself in the vast expanse of uncontrived *mahāmudrā*.”

Nevertheless, when it comes to only that *mahāmudrā* as it is [described here], it is not identified with the *mahāmudrā* of the Completion Stage of Unsurpassed Mantra[yāna]. Regarding this [direct] method of view and meditation, the methods of spiritual praxis that accord with sūtras and tantras are [nonetheless] something unrivalled because those eloquent instructions by the Great Master Maitrīpa which emphasized mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed*), nonorigination (*skye med*), and transcending the intellect (*blo 'das*) are present [in his] so-called “Amanasī[kāra] doctrinal cycle” (*a ma na si'i chos skor*).

To say a few words about the method of instructions in this tradition: all phenomena are only conceptually-imputed appearances and the aspects of appearances that are imputed in whatever fashion are not found as something other than the imputing cognition. And apart from just that phenomena cognition which is the imputer, there is nothing else besides its true nature (*chos nyid*), which is only profound emptiness. The [teaching] which primarily takes as its view and meditation the point where the nature of these two [cognition and emptiness]

have resolved like water poured into water is called “sustaining natural awareness”. It evolved mainly in [1] the extensive traditions which preserve the instruction style (*gdams srol*) renowned among [Mahā]mudrā followers such as the Khro phu Bka brgyud tradition and [2] the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud traditions in Tibet which stem from the *dohā* explanations in the tradition deriving from [Vajra]pāṇi in India, and [from] from Jo bo Mitrayogi.

If a profound emptiness other than that is taken as view and meditation, <sup>[100]</sup> then some nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*) wherein phenomenal awareness and the like is never connected with its abiding nature is posited as a mental object. A view and meditation on emptiness that makes one inordinately attached to that [object] by means of the mode of apprehension is therefore not acknowledged by this [Mahāmudrā] approach as being totally pure. This is because it takes that state of profound emptiness to be a view and meditation that is not free from grasping for [and believing in] a nonexistence which is unreal, unsubstantial and unconditioned. This is entailed because the great vital points of all the Mahāyāna sūtras and tantras and the commentaries on their import are bound together<sup>473</sup> in the teaching that grasping this profound emptiness as existent or nonexistent, or conditioned or unconditioned, is precisely to fall into the great abyss of absolutist belief (*mthar ’dzin*).

With regard to the Dwags po Bka’ brgyud tradition that preserves the view and meditation of Amanasikāra and the sects of [Mahā]mudrā followers known as Amanasikāra [advocates] (*a ma na si ba*), many people such as Gro lung chen po who was beyond rival in the world of masters of knowledge, as well as Sa paṇ and Tsong [kha pa], Bo dong Phyogs rgya ba and others said that the methods of preserving view and meditation characteristic of this tradition do not go beyond the method of accessing the enduring reality (*gnas lugs kyi don*) by means of mental nonengagement [according to the system] of Heshang. However, those like the Supreme Paṇḍit Gro lung pa taught that where there is delusion in certain persons known as [Mahā]mudrā adepts, one should heed the injunction be unbearably [moved] by compassion because this [quality] is found in the likes of worthy persons (*skye bu dam pa*) and because the true great scholars are those who avoid the great abyss of praising oneself and disparaging others. <sup>[101]</sup> As to all the repetitive talk of others renowned as scholars, from teachings that are simply twisted, how could there be [any] straightforward discussion?

What is claimed by Heshang? Apart from merely what is known from old historical documents of former times and ancient chronicles, it is not clear at present to whom the [so-called] treatises of Heshang [can be attributed]. You scholars have fabricated a new doctrine, alleging something to be the philosophy of Heshang which is not in order to find faults with others. Having done so, you proclaim “this [newly fabricated teaching] is comparable to the

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<sup>473</sup> The metaphor of a stake ([g]zer) that binds (*bsdams*) the life-force (*srog pa*) relates to revitalizing Generation Stage (*bskyed rim*) practices that serve to bind one’s ordinary body, speech and mind, and activities to the adamant body, speech, mind and activity of a buddha.

claims of fraudulent [Mahā]mudrā followers such as the Dwags po masters (*dwags po pa*).” Are you not ashamed of yourself or are you [just] shameless?

Now, according to the system of Heshang gleaned from the limited [range of] ancient documents and chronicles from times past, the method of practicing view and meditation is as follows. In the midst of all external and internal phenomena, that factor of apprehending the beginningless mind (*thog med kyi blo*) as coemergent self and reality is not the ascertainment of emptiness by way of scripture, reasoning and instructions. Rather, claiming that merely not grasping any external and internal phenomena by means of conceptual thought constitutes the view and meditation of profound emptiness of mental nonengagement (*yid la mi byed pa*), he advocated this as the path of liberation and specified it as [his] tradition. In this way, in the midst of all external and internal phenomena, the grasping of beginningless mind as coemergent self and reality and, in short, the discursively grasped entities and the factor of grasping, are ascertained as emptiness which is specified as skillful means and discerning insight in the scriptures, [102] reasoning and instructions of sūtras and tantras.

Finally, by virtue of there not being left behind any remainder of discursive elaborations and signs from the perspective of the insight which recognizes that [profound emptiness], despite its mere designations as “selfless”, “unreal”, “empty”, and “free from elaborations”, the abiding nature of all phenomena is described as profound emptiness and the like. When the great fetters of mental engagements thus naturally release themselves, the seeds that engender any concepts in language and thought are decomposed at the root and the emergence of all the sprouts manifesting as signs and concepts ceases. In this state of ineffability and nonconceptuality, when the discriminating insight or mental engagements involved in analysis are stilled, there is the unity of calm abiding and deep insight like a butter lamp unshaken by the wind. Hence, concerning the abiding condition, aren’t these two systems of practicing view and meditation [Chan and Mahāmudrā] alike?

## 6b. Critical Edition of *Dgongs gcig ’grel pa* VI (excerpt)

(MKsb vol. 6, 98<sub>1</sub>–102<sub>4</sub>) ’o na khyod kyi yid la mi byed pa’i tshul gyis zab mo stong pa nyid kyi lta sgom de | ’phags pa la de ’dra’i nyams len byar yod kyang | so skyes de lta’i nyams len byar yod dam zhe na |<sup>474</sup> yod de | ji ltar nyams su len zhe na | bla ma rtogs pa dang ldan pa zhig gis | slob ma skal ldan dbang rnon sbyangs pa sngon song can zhig la phyi nang gi chos thams cad | ji tsam snang ba bzhin sdod lugs kyis<sup>475</sup> grub pa thams cad dang bral ba’i yod med skye ’gag rtag mi rtag dngos po dang dngos med ’dus byas ma byas thams cad las grol ba’i zab mo

<sup>474</sup> GCbc: om. |

<sup>475</sup> GCbc: *kyi*

stong pa nyid kyi ngang tshul lam ring lugs de lung dang man ngag gis<sup>476</sup> brda legs par sprad pa na | slob ma des phyi nang gis bsdus pa'i kun rdzob kyi chos thams cad kyi 'khrul pa'i mtshang chen po 'chor sgro<sup>477</sup> 'dogs kyi mdud pa thams cad zhig | skur 'debs kyi g.yang sa chen po nas thar te | chos thams cad la yod min dang med min | yod med gnyis ka yin pa'i rjes 'gro dang | gnyis ka min pa'i ldog gyur gyi phung gsum gyi spros pa thams cad nam mkha' g.ya' dag pa ltar song ba'i go rtogs myong ba khyad par<sup>478</sup> can skye la | de'i tshe gnas lugs kyi steng du yid kyi byed pa ci yang ma btub par rjen cer gyis 'gro ba de la | dpal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud pa dag sems kyi gnas lugs mthong bya ba'am rang bzhin sher phyin mngon du byas zer ba'am | gnas lugs kyi<sup>[99]</sup> rang zhal sngar 'dris kyi mi phrad<sup>479</sup> pa ltar ngo 'phrod pas ngo sprod thob bo zhes dang | phyag rgya chen po ma bcos rgya 'byams su shor zhes pa'i tha snyad mdzad pa yin la |

de ltar na'ang de lta'i phyag chen de tsam la sngags bla med kyi rdzogs rim gyi phyag chen du ni mi 'jog go | lta sgom gyi tshul 'di ni mdo sngags thun mong ba'i nyams su len tshul zla dang bral ba zhig yin te | **jo bo chen po mai tri pas** yid la mi byed skye med blo 'das a ma na si'i chos skor zhes rtsal du bton te legs par gdams pa de nyid du gnas pa'i phyir |

lugs 'di'i gdams tshul cung zad smos na | chos thams cad rtog pas btags pa'i snang ba tsam dang ji ltar btags pa'i snang cha de'ang btags byed kyi shes pa tsam las rdzas gzhan du grub pa med pa dang | btags byed chos can gyi shes pa nyid las kyang de'i chos nyid zab mo stong pa nyid gzhan du med de | de gnyis rang bzhin chu la chu bzhag tu song ba'i cha de la gtso bor lta sgom du byed pa de la ni | tha mal gyi shes pa skyong ba zhes | rgya gar **phyag na** nas brgyud pa'i do ha 'chad pa dag dang | **jo bo mi tra dzo gi** nas brgyud **khro phu dka'** brgyud dang | **dwags po** bka' brgyud pa sogs bod du phyag rgya par grags pa'i khrid srol skyong ba mtha' dag gi lugs la ches 'byung ba yin te |

de las gzhan du zab mo stong pa nyid lta sgom du byed pa na chos can shes pa<sup>[100]</sup> sogs dang rang bzhin gtan mi 'brel ba'i med dgag cig yid yul du bzhag cing de la 'dzin stangs kyis cher zhen par byed pa ni stong nyid kyi lta sgom rnam par dag par phyogs 'di pas mi bzhed pa'i phyir te | de ni zab mo stong pa nyid kyi gnas tshul de bden med dang dngos med dang 'dus ma byas pa'i med 'dzin dang ma bral ba'i lta sgom du byed pa'i phyir | khyab ste | zab mo stong pa nyid de yod med 'dus byas ma byas gang du bzung yang mthar 'dzin gyi g.yang chen por lhung ba nyid du theg pa chen po'i mdo sngags dgongs 'grel thams cad du srog zer<sup>480</sup> chen po bsdams te gsungs pa nyid kyi phyir |

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<sup>476</sup> GCbc: *gi*

<sup>477</sup> GCmk: *sgra*; GCbc: *sgro*

<sup>478</sup> GCmk: *pa*

<sup>479</sup> GCbc: *'phrad*

<sup>480</sup> GCbc: *gzer*

yid la mi byed pa'i lta sgom skyong ba'i dwags po bka' brgyud pa dang | a ma na si bar grags pa'i phyag rgya pa'i phyogs 'di la | mkhas pa'i dbang po sa steng na 'gran zla dang bral ba **gro lung pa chen po** dang | gzhan yang **sa paṇ** dang | **tsong ga pa** dang | **bo dong phyogs rgyal ba** sogs du ma zhig gis lugs de lta bu'i lta sgom skyong tshul ni rgya nag **ha shang** gi yid la mi byed pa'i sgo nas gnas lugs kyi don nyams su len tshul de nyid las ma 'das so zhes gsung mod | **mkhas mchog gro lung pa** lta bus gsungs pa ni phyag rgya par grags pa 'ga' zhig gi lta sgom la 'khrul pa byung ba thugs rjes ma bzod pa'i bka' stsal du khums te | skyes bu dam pa de lta bu la rnyed dang bkur bsti bdag bstod gzhan smod kyi g.yang<sup>[101]</sup> sa chen po la 'dzem pa'i don gyi mkhas pa chen po yin pa'i phyir | gzhan mkhas par grags pa'i brjod<sup>481</sup> zlos de thams cad ni khyog pa nyid du gsungs pa las gzu bor gleng ba ga la yin te |

**ha shang** gis ji ltar 'dod sngar gyi chos 'byung gi yi ge rnying pa dang | gna' gtam du grags pa tsam las ma gtogs pa'i ha shang gi bstan bcos ni da lta su la yang mi gsal la | mkhas pa khyed cag gzhan la skyon 'dogs kyi ched du **ha shang** gi grub mtha' min pa zhig gi yin pa skad du gsar rtsam byas nas 'di ni khyed dwags po pa sogs phyag rgya pa rdzun can dag gi 'dod pa dang mtshungs so zhes zer ba ni | rang nyid ngo tsha zhing khrel bor ba ma yin nam |

'o na sngar yig rnying dang gtam tsam du grags pa'i **ha shang** gi gnas lugs la lta sgom du byed tshul ni phyi nang gi chos thams cad kyi steng du thog med kyi blo lhan skyes kyi bdag dang bden par bzung ba'i cha de lung rigs man ngag gis stong pa nyid du gtan la mi 'bebs par | phyi nang gi chos gang yang blo rtog pas ma bzung ba tsam la yid la mi byed pa zab mo stong pa nyid kyi lta sgom du 'dod nas thar lam du smra ba dang lugs khyad par du gyur pa 'dis phyi nang gi chos thams cad kyi steng du thog med kyi blo lhan skyes kyi bdag dang bden pa dang mdor na dngos spros su bzung zhing 'dzin pa'i cha thams cad mdo sngags kyi lung rigs man ngag gi<sup>[102]</sup> thabs shes khyad par can gyi stong pa nyid du gtan la phab nas |

mthar bdag med dang bden med dang stong nyid dang spros bral lo zhes pa tsam yang de nyid shes pa'i shes rab de'i ngor spros mtshan gyi lhag mar ma las pa'i dbang gis | chos thams cad kyi gnas lugs ni zab mo stong pa nyid do zhes pa la sogs pa yid la byed pa'i sgrog chen po rang sar grol nas smra bsam gyi rtog pa gang yang slong byed kyi sa bon rtsa ba nas rul zhing mtshan rtog mngon gyur gyi myu gu thams cad skye ba'i rgyun chad de | brjod med mi rtog pa'i ngang la so sor rtog pa'i shes rab bam | de nyid dpyod pa'i yid byed kyang nye bar zhi nas mar me rlung gis bskyod pa med pa lta bu'i zhi gnas dang lhag mthong zung du 'jug pas gnas lugs la lta sgom byed pa'i lugs 'di gnyis gcig par 'dug gam<sup>482</sup> | ...

<sup>481</sup> GCbc: *brjed*

<sup>482</sup> GCmk: om. *gam*

PADMA DKAR PO

SELECTED MATERIALS

ON MAHĀMUDRĀ

English Translations and

Critical Editions



DISTINGUISHING *GNAS LUGS PHYAG CHEN* AND '*KHRUL LUGS PHYAG CHEN*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: In his exposition of the Mahāmudrā view in the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, Padma dkar po adopts Yang dgon pa's famous distinction between the *mahāmudrā* in the modes of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*) and error (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*) as an interpretive schema both for [1] clarifying the doctrine of the unity or nonduality of the two truths—which he takes as a central doctrine of the Madhyamaka, Mantrayāna and 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud traditions—and [2] criticizing the rival Jo nang account of reality which posits the conventional and ultimate as two great kingdoms that have nothing in common.

The following editions of the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition. There were few variant readings; PGbc was consulted only in the case of questionable readings.

PGsb: *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: 1974, vol. 21: 173<sub>3</sub>–192<sub>1</sub>

PGvv: *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*. Vajra Vidya, Varanasi, 2005: 197–214<sub>17</sub>

PGbc: '*Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo*. Kathmandu: 200?, vol. 44, 165<sub>4</sub>–183<sub>5</sub>

1a. English Translation of *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* (excerpt)

[*Mahāmudrā* in the modes of abiding and delusion]

3. A precise explanation of the methods of ascertaining how [*mahāmudrā* is present]

3.1. Ascertaining the view via the key points of *dharmakāya* concerning coemergent mind as such

3.2. Practicing meditation via the key points of *dharmakāya* concerning coemergent appearance

3.3. Culminating in fruition through key points concerning the inseparability of the co-emergence of appearance and existence

## 3.1 The first is two-fold:

3.1.1. Explanation of *mahāmudrā* in the mode of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*)

3.1.2. Explanation of *mahāmudrā* in the mode of delusion (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*)

3.1.1. Regarding the first, according to Rgyal dbang rje [Kun dga' dpal 'byor]<sup>483</sup>:

<sup>483</sup> This was the second 'Brug chen, Rgyal dbang Kun dga' dpal 'byor. The *Bod kyi gal che'i lo rgyus yig cha bdams bsgrigs* (289–90) provides the following reincarnation lineage: [1] Gtsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo rje

Hence, all phenomena comprising *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are nothing other than the basic reality (*de kho na nyid*) of mind. [174] And since that has always been pure and not fabricated by anyone, it is spontaneously present. And since it remains indivisible with everything, it is undifferentiated. It is unadulterated by all imputations and deprecations such as existence and nonexistence. It is free from all stains such as subject and object. It is not an object of all that is constructed by the intellect such as verifications and refutations. It is beyond all eternalist and nihilist [extremes] such as [those imputed by] thought and language. It remains the essence of all teachings, the purport of the Buddhas. Although it is called “coemergent wisdom” or “*dharmakāya*,” it is not even obscured by nice labels such as these. It is described as “innate awareness,” “primordial awareness,” “natural awareness,” and “primal awareness”. It is the meaning of the subject matter of all the texts that formerly explained what is known as “*mahāmudrā*”. Precisely that, unceasing[ly present] as mere appearing, is the ground of dependent [arising]. Not found as anything, it is the ground of emptiness. Not dwelling separately, it is the ground of unity. Free from partial aspects, it is the all-inclusive ground.

This explains the category [of the abiding mode] in terms of its described aspects (*ldog cha*).

3.1.2 [Explanation of *mahāmudrā* in the mode of error] This explains the manner in which [*mahāmudrā* in its abiding condition] [175] is separated into *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. On this topic, the Jo nang pas [maintain the following].<sup>484</sup>

[Jo nang position:] Ultimate truth is without origination and destruction and unconditioned because it is beyond dependent [arising]. Conventional truth having the nature of origination and destruction is conditioned insofar as it depends upon causes and conditions. Of the pair *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, *saṃsāra* consisting in the three realms is contaminated insofar as it is thoroughly afflicted and comprised by the three or eight kinds of suffering. Great *nirvāṇa* is well and truly beyond all suffering together with its causes; it is the uninterrupted, uncontaminated bliss supreme. Of the two aspects of consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), consciousness is something to be discarded and is similar to darkness, blackness and poison; it is conventional and self-empty (*kun rdzob rang stong*). Self-originated wisdom is similar to

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(1161–1211), [2] Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor (1428–1476), [3] Rje Chos kyi grags pa (1478–1523), and [4] Kun mkhyen Padma dkar po (1527–1592).

<sup>484</sup> This lengthy section represents a summary of Jo nang views which, as the author informs us, was compiled from various sources. Among these, we have identified Dol po pa's *Ri chos skor gsum* and *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i rang 'grel*, and *Lha rje tshul khrims 'od la gdams*, along with his disciple Gnyag dbon Kun dga' dpal's influential synopsis and defence of the Jo nang system, on which see Volume I, 386 n. 1115.

nectar or facets of radiant splendor; since it is not something to discard, it is ultimate and other-empty (*don dam gzhan stong*).<sup>485</sup>

The self-manifesting<sup>486</sup> of consciousness, being conventional, does not transcend the moments and sufferings of the three realms because [its] projections due to *karman* and afflictive emotions are of the nature of suffering. The self-manifesting of self-occurring wisdom,<sup>[176]</sup> being ultimate, does transcend the moments<sup>487</sup> and sufferings of the three realms because it is not produced by any causes and conditions and is uninterrupted bliss supreme that is devoid of suffering. Consciousness and its self-manifestation are present in [and as] expressions of thought and language and are thus amenable to the sphere of reasoning. They consist of parts and are associated with analogies. Self-occurring wisdom and its self-manifestation are not present in mentalistic-linguistic expression and are therefore truly beyond the sphere of reasoning. They are partless and beyond all use of analogies.

Among the two, buddha nature and adventitious stains, buddha nature is luminous *dharmakāya* because it is genuine coemergent spontaneity, indomitable and imperishable supreme joy, encompassing like the sky. Adventitious stains are mind and mental factors of the three realms, together with the breath movements [that fuel them], which have not eliminated the latent tendencies for transmigration.

In this regard, it is said that there is a very great difference between the two truths, and between the pairs ‘*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*’ and ‘consciousness and wisdom’, together with their respective self-manifestations.<sup>488</sup> And even emptiness is two-fold: [1] there is the conventional emptiness that does not go beyond dependent arising and<sup>[177]</sup> [2] the ultimate emptiness that does go beyond dependent arising. In this regard, [1] the first is phenomenal, adventitious, coreless, fictitious and deceptive because it is empty of its own intrinsic nature (*rang rang ngo bos stong*) [and thus] conventional emptiness. [2] The second is the immutable nature of phenomena and therefore a true nature, real and non-deceptive because it is not self-empty (*rang gis mi stong*) but it is empty of the conventional which is other than itself [and thus] ultimate emptiness.

Moreover, it is stated that there are two [mutually exclusive] alternatives (*mu gnyis*) with regard to *dharmakāya* and emptiness: [1] first, what is emptiness is *not dharmakāya* and [2] second, what is emptiness *is dharmakāya*. [1] The first of these is self-empty (*rang stong*),

<sup>485</sup> This passage synthesizes material found in *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, Peking 1998, 418<sub>4</sub> f. and *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel*, Paro 1984, vol. 1, 658<sub>3</sub> f., and *Lha rje tshul khrims 'od la gdams pa*, in *Dol po pa gsung 'bum*, Delhi: Shedrup Books, 1992, vol. 8, 4a<sub>4</sub> f.

<sup>486</sup> *rang snang* (auto-manifestation) carries the sense of “personal perception” which, in the present context, connotes how consciousness is present to the individual.

<sup>487</sup> On Dol po pa's view that wisdom transcends single and multiple moments, see *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa rang 'grel*, Paro 1984, vol. 1, 602<sub>5-6</sub> et passim.

<sup>488</sup> This point is repeatedly emphasized by Dol po pa, as in *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho* (Pe cing ed.) 333.

phenomenal and conventional because it is never established as a fundamental abiding nature and therefore does not withstand critical assessment. [2] The second is other-empty (*gzhan stong*) as the nature of phenomena and the ultimate because it is not the case that it is never [established as a fundamental abiding nature] and thus it *does* withstand critical assessment.<sup>489</sup>

Among the three natures, the imagined and dependent are adventitious phenomena because they are conventional and self-empty (*rang stong*). The perfect in both aspects<sup>490</sup> is the *dharmadhātu* wisdom because it is ultimate and other-empty (*gzhan stong*).

Among the three [aspects of] the external, internal and other, the external world as the habitation and internal sentient beings as its inhabitants are adventitious and mutable phenomena because they are conventional and self-empty. The other is buddha nature [178] as the genuine nature of phenomena without transformation or transmigration because it is the ultimate and other-empty.

In general, within the triad of ground, path and fruition, the ground is all-ground wisdom, buddha nature, the fundamentally transformed state of all phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* because it is the ground for the cleansing of all the flaw aspects and the ground for the manifesting of all the quality aspects. As for that ground of the path, when it consists in the skillful means for making all the flaw aspects vanish and making all quality aspects manifest, it possesses the retinue of the two accumulations. Through the accumulation of wisdom, it dispels the obscurations that have shrouded the ever-enduring, primordially and spontaneously present qualities of the embodiment of reality (*dharmakāya*). And through the accumulation of virtue, it develops step by step the unprecedented qualities of the form embodiments (*rūpakāya*). As for fruition, the fruition of emancipation (*bral 'bras*) is the embodiment of reality (*dharmakāya*), [i.e.,] the ultimate embodiment of thusness (*don dam de kho na nyid kyi sku*), [while] the fruition of development (*bskyed 'bras*) is the form embodiments (*rūpakāya*), [i.e.,] the conventional embodiment of symbolic ascription (*kun rdzob brda'i sku*) because they are present as the excellence of [fulfilling] the aims of oneself and others.

In this way, *dharmakāya*, the ground that is free from stains, is naturally present potential, the expanse of reality that is thoroughly devoid of having all aspects, like a pre-existent great treasure. The form embodiments [179] consist in the potential that develops the seeds of development; they are newly developed by the roots of virtue. It is like a tree bearing fine fruits that did not exist before [but] gradually developed. Even these [form embodiments] depend on the naturally present potential.

<sup>489</sup> See Padma dkar po's *Kālacakra* commentary *Mchog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas rnam par phye ba gsang ba thams cad bshad pa'i mdzod*, 143 and 208.

<sup>490</sup> This refers to the unchanging and unmistaken (i.e. nonconceptual wisdom) aspects of the perfect nature.

In particular, among the four [aspects of] ground of the clearing process<sup>491</sup>, what is to be cleared away, the clearing process and the fruition of the clearing process: [1] The ground of the clearing process is the quintessence of the all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes kyi snying po*), the suchness possessing stains, which is like the sky shrouded by masses of clouds and like a jewel covered in mud. [2] The stains to be cleared away consist in the all-ground consciousness that clings to the sheath [in which it is ensconced] together with its attendant [factors], which is like clouds and swampy mire. [3] The path as a clearing process consists in the supreme means, together with attendant factors, of instantaneously making transmigration cease, which is like a wind that disperses cloud masses and a stream of water that rinses away the swampy muck. [4] The fruition of the clearing process is the primordially and spontaneously eternally-present, self-occurring wisdom of bliss and emptiness without transmigration that is the ground in which transmigration has instantaneously ceased, which is like the pure sky after cloud formations have dispersed and the fulfilment of desires (*dgo dgu 'tshang ba*) when one has obtained a stainless jewel.

Hence, following [180] the authentic scriptures, reasonings and instructions taught by the Omniscient one [Dol po pa, the Jo nang] do not maintain that the stains to be relinquished and the purification process [that discloses] the ground of the clearing process are indivisibly one [and the same]. Moreover, it is said that ultimate causes and effects other than the conventional consist in emptiness having an objective reference and great compassion lacking an objective reference. And even these are the ultimate emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects (*sarvākāravopetāśūnyatā*) and forms that transcend matter and moments. It is described as an omnipresent undivided whole, as great imperishable bliss pervading the expanse of space, as the bliss of the two potencies [male and female] and as wisdom that transcends moments. These two aspects [of wisdom and bliss] are described as discerning insight (*shes rab*) and skillful means (*thabs*). They are Prajñāpāramitā and Great Vajradhara, and the corresponding female and male Great Seals.<sup>492</sup> They are the Vajra Sun and Vajra Moon. They are the twelve truths and sixteen realities. They are the eighteen kinds of ultimate emptiness and sixteen kinds of compassions. They are the sixteen deities dwelling in these. They are the ultimate letters E and Vaṃ. As for their form, [181] they are the Other (*gzhan*) and the Other-holder (*'dzin pa gzhan*). They are the Other means and insight and the Other wisdom.<sup>493</sup>

In this way, with regard to ultimate causes and effects, although there is actually no difference in essence, because the way they become evident to individuals who have embarked

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<sup>491</sup> On Dol po pa's analysis of the *sbyang gzhi*, *sbyang bya*, *sbyong byed* and *sbyangs 'bras*, see, for example, *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i rang 'grel*, *Dol po pa gsung 'bum*, Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1984, vol. 1, 618<sub>3-6</sub> and Stearns 2010, 235.

<sup>492</sup> *de bzhi du phyag rgya chen mo and phyag rgya chen po*.

<sup>493</sup> The text is here followed by *zhes dang* which is usually used to mark the end of a preceding quotation but the author's initial comment at the start of the section (paragraph) suggests that it is a summary based on various Jo nang works.

on the path differs in terms of [apparent temporal progression of] earlier and later, and because there exist other aspects that resemble causes and effects, [aspirants must] first depend on a causal vehicle of emptiness and thereafter on a resultant vehicle of compassion. [The first] is said to be the conventional, the basis of emptiness that is empty in the sense of being self-empty (*rang stong*) that is described by terminology [referring to] its manifold aspects among the precious sūtra corpus such as ‘emptiness’, ‘signlessness’ and ‘wishlessness’, as well as ‘non-elaboration’, ‘mental nonengagement’, ‘perfection of insight’, ‘beyond acceptance and rejection,’ ‘nature of phenomena’ (*dharmatā*), ‘expanse of phenomena’ (*dharmadhātu*), and ‘true basis of phenomena’, ‘flawlessness of phenomena’, ‘unmistaken suchness’, ‘non-extraneous suchness’, ‘limit of the real’, ‘unborn’, ‘unceasing’, ‘primordial peace’, ‘naturally thoroughly extinguished’ (*prakṛtiparinirvṛta*)<sup>494</sup>, ‘embodiment of reality’ (*dharmakāya*), ‘embodiment of intrinsic essence’ (*svābhāvikakāya*) and so forth. [182] On the other hand, [the second] is described as the ultimate, being other-empty (*gzhan stong*), which endures eternally like space.

Moreover, in the middle wheel of the Buddha’s teachings, the phenomena to be negated were primarily declared to the self-empty (*rang stong*) conventional that does not transcend dependent arising. The basis of negation is the other-empty (*gzhan stong*) ultimate that does transcend dependent arising. It is not the case that the basis of negation was never taught in the middle wheel of the Buddha’s teachings. The precious tantra corpus taught the great supreme and immutable bliss using terminology [referring to its] manifold aspects such as joy, supreme joy, distinctive joy, and coemergent joy, and vajra attachment, fond attachment, and great desire, great anger, great delusion, great pride, great envy, great avarice, great life-force (*mahājīva*), great sentient being, vajra, seminal potency (*bindu*), thatness (*tattva*), gathering, vow, coemergent wisdom, great seal, primal buddha, Vajrasattva, the letters E and Vaṃ, and so forth. [183]

Consequently, it was maintained that when emptiness as cause is emphasized, [we speak of] a cause-oriented vehicle (*hetuyāna*), but when great bliss as goal is emphasized, [we] speak of a goal-oriented vehicle (*phalayāna*). When the intention was to express the meaning of these in terms of their inseparable unity, there were statements such as “one is also not deluded in regard to their single meaning” and so forth. But when the meaning of these [two] was apprehended in terms of difference, [the teachings] described “six root downfalls if one discounts their reciprocal relationship”. In that regard, whereas the final meaning [and aim] (*mthar thug gi don*) was elucidated in Mantra[yāna], it was not elucidated in the Pāramitāyāna. And [thus] the differences between goal-attainment taking a short or long [time] from the standpoint of whether the skillful means for making that [final meaning and aim] manifest are profound or not profound and so on, was clearly described.

<sup>494</sup> This term occurs in Mahāyāna sūtras including MSA and LAS.

Furthermore, in general, when it comes to forging the unity (*yuganaddha*) of appearance and emptiness, there are two aspects: [1] the ultimate unity of appearance and emptiness and [2] the conventional unity of appearance and emptiness. Accordingly, these have many aspects such as the unity of appearance and emptiness of buddha nature versus the unity of appearance and emptiness of adventitious stains, the unity of appearance and emptiness of imagined and relative [natures] versus the unity of appearance and emptiness of the perfect [nature], the unity of appearance and emptiness of the outer and inner versus the unity of appearance and emptiness of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*). Accordingly, there is the unity of appearance and emptiness <sup>[184]</sup> of ground, path and goal, and the unity of appearance and emptiness of the ground of the clearing process, objects to be cleared, the clearing process and goal of the clearing process. In this [Jo nang system], on the one hand, that which constitutes the unity of appearance and emptiness of ultimate buddha nature is the only appearance-emptiness dyad that is *not* an object to relinquish. [On the other hand,] that which constitutes the unity of appearance and emptiness consisting in adventitious stains such as the aggregates and elements that are appropriated is exclusively the appearance and emptiness dyad *is* an object to relinquish.

[*Query:*] If the ground of the clearing process and the stains to be cleared away are not the same, and the objects to be cleared and the clearing process itself are not the same, then what is meant by the statements “inseparability of the two truths” and “inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*”? <sup>495</sup>

[*Reply:*] Here, the matter to be discussed [is as follows]: some people say that since the appearance aspect is conventional and the emptiness aspect is ultimate, the assertion that “this inseparability of appearance and emptiness is the meaning of the inseparability of the two truths” was not the intended meaning of the conqueror for the following reasons <sup>496</sup>:

- [1] It is not true that the emptiness aspect of the conventional is ultimate, nor is it true that the appearance aspect of the ultimate is conventional;
- [2] Conventional self-emptiness which does not transcend dependent arising and the ultimate other-emptiness that does transcend dependent arising are totally different; <sup>[185]</sup>
- [3] That ultimate which transcends dependent arising and has assumed the form of the conventional is precisely the meaning of the inseparability of the two truths;
- [4] Even the appearance aspect of great *nirvāṇa* is not *saṃsāra*;

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<sup>495</sup> This query and the Jo nang-based reply reflect ongoing polemical exchanges between Bka’ brgyud and Jo nang traditions over the meaning and implication of Sgam po pa’s controversial precept that “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”.

<sup>496</sup> For ease of understanding, the following chain of reasons (*ste...phyir*) is presented schematically.

[5] There is a very great dichotomy between self-empty *saṃsāra* that does not transcend dependent arising and other-empty *nirvāṇa* that does transcend dependent arising; and [thus]

[6] That great *nirvāṇa* which assumed the form of *saṃsāra* is said to be the meaning of the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

It follows that merely recognizing the emptiness of these [saṃsāric and nirvāṇic phenomena] is not wisdom, is not *dharmakāya* and is not *mahāmudrā* because, regarding these, the characteristics of this and that [thing] is not sufficient [to qualify as *mahāmudrā* etc.]. Now, let us suppose that when by beholding any afflictive emotions that arise one recognizes them to be without nature, the very objects to be relinquished have become [their own] antidote without having to seek anything on the side of antidotes.<sup>497</sup> Should you think “this is the inseparability of objects to be cleared away and the clearing process,” this only remains captivating so long as one has not closely investigated the matter. If, however, one does investigate it properly, then the understanding that emotions have no nature is included on the side of the antidotes of the emotions, but it is not the case that it is not different from the emotions. [186] The afflictive emotions that had arisen previously and the subsequent insight that understands them to be without nature are different from the standpoint of time, different from the standpoint of essence, and different from the standpoint of function.

Furthermore, all claims such as “when not directly recognized, there is conceptual thought, [but] when directly recognized, there is *dharmakāya*,”<sup>498</sup> “when not directly recognized, there is unawareness (*ma rig pa*), [but] when directly recognized, there is awareness (*rig pa*),” “when not directly recognized, there are five [emotional] poisons, [but] when directly recognized, there are the [five] wisdoms,” “when not directly recognized, there is *saṃsāra*, [but] when directly recognized, there is *nirvāṇa*,” are not in accord with the teachings of the Shākya[muni].<sup>499</sup> Moreover, they are similar to claims such as “when not directly recognized, there is darkness, [but] when directly recognized, there is light,” “when not directly recognized, there are cloud formations, [but] when directly recognized, there is the clear sky,” “when not directly recognized, there is the husk of the kernel, [but] when directly recognized there is the kernel pith,” “when not directly recognized, there is an unclean sheath, [but] when directly recognized, there is a wish-granting jewel,” and “when not directly recognized, there is the vase’s [outer] sheath, [but] when directly recognized, there is the butter lamp inside the vase.” In this way, statements such as “all that appears and exists is *dharmakāya*,” “all and

<sup>497</sup> This is precisely the view expressed by Yang dgon pa. See especially Volume I, 372–74.

<sup>498</sup> Dol po pa criticizes this and similar claims in his *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i rang 'grel*, *Dol po pa gsung 'bum*, Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1984, vol. 1, 657<sub>6</sub>–658<sub>3</sub> and *Lha rje tshul khrims 'od la gdams pa*, in *Dol po pa gsung 'bum* (Delhi: Shedrup Books, 1992), vol. 8, 4a<sub>4</sub>–5.

<sup>499</sup> “Sage of the Shākya clan”, i.e., the historical Buddha.



anything that arises is *mahāmudrā*,” “all conditioned things are self-occurring wisdom,” “since the whole of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are produced by mind, buddha has a thousand names” and so forth, are also not in accord with the teachings of the Shākya[muni]. [187]

[Padma dkar po’s Refutation of the Jo nang view:]

[I have] herein distilled the essence of the [Jo nang] doctrinal system as it was presented in many treatises. If we critically assess this [system], the “emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects” (*sarvākāravopetāśūnyatā*) was [in tantric contexts] posited in terms of conventional truth. This is attested in both the *Kālacakra*<sup>500</sup> and the *Guhyasamāja*. Because it can appear directly to ordinary people, it is merely conventional. This emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects also does not become a foundation of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) because it has been explained as being akin to the manifestations of the eight signs [in the six-limbed yoga practice]. This [emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects] is an analogy for the illusory [character of the manifestations]. Since our Buddha has described [this] illusion as an analogy for essenceless conditioned [phenomena] that are unreal, these scriptural citations and your Buddha are not in agreement.<sup>501</sup>

Also, the so-called “ultimate which transcends moments” is inadmissible because it contradicts what was posited in the first [of those] authentic [sources, i.e., *Kālacakra*]<sup>502</sup>, namely, that “supreme and immutable bliss (*paramācalasukha*) is twenty-one thousand and six hundred moments.”<sup>503</sup> That which “transcends dependent arising” which is described as “supreme and immutable” was [actually] addressed in the context of the twelve limbs [of dependent arising]. According to the commentary that is a *Summary of Yoga* [i.e., the

<sup>500</sup> See *Sekoddeśaṭippaṇī* 29 (In: Gnoli and Lesco 2009, 59–60) where the emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects is specified as an apparition appearing to the yogi in meditation and should not be grasped as a real entity: “This apparition comes to be called elsewhere with the name of the emptiness endowed with all aspects. To this image, it is not necessary to grasp it as a real thing because such [a real thing] it is not...”. (60)

<sup>501</sup> PGsb and PGvv here have *khyed kyī sangs rgyas mthun no*; PGbc has *khyed kyis sangs rgyas ma mthun no*. The genitive (*kyī*) of the first reading is correct (as it is the counterpart of the earlier *nged kyī sangs rgyas*) but PGbc supplies the needed negative particle (*ma*) to make sense of the passage.

<sup>502</sup> See also *Vimalaprabhā* (D 845, 40b<sub>3-5</sub>) where the “absence of moments” is rejected on the grounds that supreme immutable bliss of complete perfect buddhahood spans twenty-one thousand six-hundred moments and also that it contradicts the principle of beyond one and many. On the significance of this number, see the following note.

<sup>503</sup> This refers to the twenty-one thousand unchanging moments of bliss experienced during the *samādhi* that constitutes the sixth limb of the Six-limbed Yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) when these breaths replace the corresponding number of breaths that occur in the course of one day. These are detailed in texts belonging to the *Kālacakra* and *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*. On the correlation between the breaths as they are distributed over the six energy wheels (*cakra*) – three thousand six breaths in each – and twelve spiritual levels (*bhūmis*) in pairs of two, and six male-female pairs of deities, according to the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of Anupamarakṣita and Raviśrījñāna’s commentary, see Sferra 2000, 36.

*Vimalaprabhā* on the *Kālacakra*]<sup>504</sup>, because *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are posited as dependently existent, by establishing them as interdependent, [188] what ultimate truth is there beyond *nirvāṇa*? Since it is explained in the great commentary to the synopsis (*mdor bsdus*) of the *Summary of Yoga* [*Vimalaprabhā*] that even a buddha's wisdom is without intrinsic essence, in what way can an ultimate other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) be established?

This doctrinal position of yours has assumed a nihilist view vis-à-vis all that is [held to be] self-empty (*rang stong*) or conventional (*kun rdzob*) [but] an eternalist view in accepting all that is ultimate to be something real. Because it is thereby incompatible with the impartial explanations concerning the ultimate (*don dam*) found in both the *Synopsis of Views* of the chapter on Inner [*Kālacakra*]<sup>505</sup> and the *Summary of Yoga* [i.e., *Vimalaprabhā*], it is not at all admissible.

Further, by deviating [in this way, you] have also not dispensed with the flaw of contradicting the source [texts] because one to whom there appear these aspects of *saṃsāra* may assume “these are *saṃsāra* and are incompatible with *nirvāṇa*.” Hence, it is necessary to demonstrate, in the case of establishing that there is no flaw of contradiction, that those [two factors you regard as] incompatible from the standpoint of identity (*gcig la ltos nas*) are found to *not* be incompatible from the standpoint of identity. Like the statement from the tantra that “although aspects of smoke appear, it is not smoke”<sup>506</sup>, inasmuch as [it occurs] in separation from the effects of natural fire, in this [position of yours], there is no [basis] to establish that there is no flaw of contradiction.

The explanation of the cause of the form embodiments as newly emergent is a major mistake because according to the illustrious root tantras and commentaries, [189] in the case of settling [the mind] on [*saṃ*]*bhoga*[*kāya*] and *nirmaṇa*[*kāya*], since [*a*] is “the principal [seed] syllable, of great benefit”<sup>507</sup> and various material and immaterial [phenomena] are established

<sup>504</sup> Padma dkar po elsewhere notes that this title refers to the extensive *Kālacakra* commentary entitled *Vimalaprabhāṭika* attributed to Puṇḍarika. This and the next citation of this text appear to be paraphrases as neither quotation appears in the text.

<sup>505</sup> This likely refers to the *Vimalaprabhā*'s detailed subcommentary on the second *patala* (*adhyatmapatala*) of the *Kālacakra* referred to in Tibetan as *dri med 'od kyi nang le'i 'grel bshad*.

<sup>506</sup> This refers to one of the signs of attainment in the Six-limbed Yoga where illusory smoke appears.

<sup>507</sup> As noted previously, this is a passage from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* 5.1bcd–2abc that is often quoted by Padma dkar po: “A is foremost (*agrya*) among all seed-syllables; It is the principal syllable, it is of great benefit; It is the great life-force, [yet] unborn; It is the removal of expression in words; It is the foremost cause of all expressions. It thoroughly elucidates all words.” Skt. *akāraḥ sarvavarṇāgrya mahārthaḥ paramākṣaraḥ || mahāprāṇo hy anutpādo vāgudāhāravarjitaḥ | sarvābhilāpahetvagrāḥ sarvavākṣsuprabhāsvaraḥ ||* Tib. *a ni yig 'bru kun gyi mchog | don chen yi ge dam pa ste | srog chen po ste [khong nas 'byung ba] skye ba med | tshig tu brjod pa spangs pa yin | brjod pa kun gyi rgyu yi mchog | tshig kun rab tu gsal bar byed ||*

by [such] forms, it would be], it would be lovely [if] the *Kālacakra* explained such [causes of form embodiments] as newly emergent.<sup>508</sup>

Moreover, those who talk about “recognizing the nature of emotions” explain that during the very appearing of emotions, one should recognize them to be without nature. Were that not so, then what would be the point of determining whether or not they are [recognized as they are] in and by self-awareness itself?<sup>509</sup> Therefore, [this insight] will never feature in the opponents’ position. [Rather,] thinking that “the Gzhan stong of this tradition is proclaimed within the [tantric] trilogy of [Bodhisattva] commentaries<sup>510</sup>,” they make false accusations, not seeing that it is legitimate to criticize [their position] even by recourse to scriptures of the Vehicle of Characteristics (*Lakṣaṇayāna*).

[*Query:*] What, then, is the ground, the path and the goal in your own tradition? [*Reply:*] The actual abiding condition is subdivided into two: [1] the abiding mode of reality of the body and [2] the abiding mode of reality of the mind. Of these [1] since the abiding mode of reality of the body has been posited in the context of error, it possesses adventitious stains. [2] As for the abiding mode of reality of the mind, it is that purity itself, being primordially pure, which is, from this perspective, “natural purity” (*rang bzhin gyis dag pa*) as it is known in common parlance. [190] Although not established, even as something adventitious, neither in essence nor manifestation, it [nonetheless] appears in essence and manifestation and is accordingly described in these terms. As examples, it is similar to what, in a *thangka* painting, appears to be in relief, with protruding [foreground] and receding [background], or like a [white] conch that appears to be yellow to one afflicted with bile disease [such as jaundice]. This yellowness is not established either in the essence of the conch shell or the manifestation of the conch shell, and yet there are causes for something to appear to one afflicted with bile disease and also reasons why the ailment clears [when] the methods to progressively alleviate it [are applied].

[*Query:*] Then how could there be yellowness in the essence and manifestation of the conch? [*Reply:*] Since it does not exist in the visual cognition (*mtshong rigs pa*) of one who does not have the disease, it is like that [because] it may appear as error if not understood [as

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<sup>508</sup> Judging from the context, this must be intended sarcastically.

<sup>509</sup> See above (164 f.), where the Jo nang are said to maintain that the insight that recognizes emotions to be without nature must be fundamentally different from the emotions: “the understanding that emotions have no nature is included on the side of the antidotes of the emotions, but it is not the case that it is not different from the emotions. The afflictive emotions that had arisen previously and the subsequent insight that understands them to be without nature are different from the standpoint of time, different from the standpoint of essence, and different from the standpoint of function.” Padma dkar po, by contrast, maintains that in recognizing the essenceless nature of emotions, the emotions and the recognition are inseparable or, to borrow Saraha’s analogy, that the waves are not different from the water.

<sup>510</sup> The Bodhisattva commentarial trilogy (*byang chub sems dpa’i ’grel pa bskor gsum*) refers to three important Indian Buddhist tantric commentaries on the *Kālacakra*, *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra* tantras. For their titles and authors, see Volume I, 393 n. 1135.

it is]—as in [the example of] not seeing [the white conch]—and manifests as *dharmakāya* if it is understood. As to the definiendum [i.e., that which exemplifies a definition] (*mtshan gzhir*) of both of these, a conceptual construct is grasped as what that really is. It is like grasping the very conch that is imputed as yellow as the definiendum, both in seeing the conch as yellow and not seeing the conch as yellow. Moreover, at the time the sky has clouds, it has not changed from [when it was] unobscured because, if it was altered, then it would not be able to become cloudless [again]. In that way, just as it is demonstrated that the sky remains unchanging from its own side (*rang ngos nas*), though the ways of seeing it change, so also since there is no error within the adamantine [nature] of mind (*sems kyi rdo rje*) in its own right (*rang ngos la*), error does not exist in the ground. <sup>[191]</sup> If error existed in the nature, one would not be able to clear [what obscures it], just as charcoal cannot be turned white, even when it is cleansed with streams of milk.

According to the Jo nang, with regard to those who propound analogies for awareness and ignorance (*rig ma rig*), since the analogies are flawed, [these flaws] apply to the proponents themselves. Why? Because it would be like [maintaining] that it would be untenable for ice to be liquid when it melts and solid when it does not melt or unreasonable [to say] it is not [considered to be] a religious offering if one does not know what it is about, but it is if one does and the like.<sup>511</sup>

In this regard, one should understand that since it is nothing but an erroneous superimposition on an error-free ground [or basis], it is adventitious, and that *samsāra* [thus] appears while remaining nonexistent. Because this theory has been explained [elsewhere] in many answers [to quandaries]<sup>512</sup>, it will not be discussed beyond what is given in the present context. In terms of this [ground] itself, in the context of [it] being taken like [something] mutable, it is the abiding mode of reality of the body and posited as conventional truth. In the context of seeing is as immutable, it is the abiding mode of reality of the mind and posited as ultimate truth. At the time this ground [seems] to have undergone change, it has not [actually] turned bad. At the time it is understood as changeless, it has not become good. Since it therefore remains just as it is, there is no reason to distinguish between the two truths. <sup>[192]</sup> This is presented as the “inseparability of the two truths”.

### 1b. Critical Edition of *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*

(PKsb vol. 21: 173<sub>3</sub>–192<sub>1</sub>) [3] gsum pa ji ltar gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshul zhib mor bshad pa la | [3.1.] sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku'i gnad kyis lta ba gtan la dbab pa dang | [3.2.] snang

<sup>511</sup> Padma dkar po here suggests that when useful distinctions harden into bogus dichotomies, they erroneously treat differences in degree as differences in kind.

<sup>512</sup> This is the asymmetrical unity of truth thesis elaborated in many Madhyamaka, tantric and Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā works. On its explanation in Padma dkar po's writings, see Volume I, 384 f.

ba lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku'i gnad kyis sgom pa nyams su blang ba dang || [3.3.] snang  
srid lhan cig skyes pa dbyer med kyi gnad kyis 'bras bu mthar phyin par bya ba dang gsum |  
[3.1.] dang po la | [3.1.1.] gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po dang | [3.1.2] 'khrul lugs phyag rgya  
chen po bshad pa gnyis las |

[3.1.1.] dang po ni | bcar te gzung ba **rgyal dbang rjes** ||

'di ltar 'khor 'das kyis bsdus pa'i chos thams cad sems kyi de kho na nyid las gzhan  
med cing | de nyid ye <sup>[174]</sup> gdod ma nas rnam par dag pa dang | sus kyang bzo ma  
byas pas lhun gyis grub pa dang | thams cad dang dbyer med du gnas pas tha dad  
du med pa | yod med la sogs pa'i sgro btags dang skur pa thams cad kyis ma bslad  
pa | gzung 'dzin la sogs pa'i dri ma thams cad dang bral ba | dgag sgrub la sogs pa'i  
blos byas thams cad kyi yul ma yin pa | bsam brjod la sogs pa rtag chad thams cad  
las 'das pa | sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa chos thams kyi ngo bor gnas pa | lhan cig  
skyes pa'i ye shes sam chos sku zhes zer na yang | de lta bu'i ming 'dogs bzang pos  
kyang ma bsgribs pa | gnyug ma'i shes pa | gdod ma'i shes pa | tha mal gyi shes pa |  
dang po'i shes pa zhes gsungs pa nyid de | sngar phyag rgya chen po zhes gang  
bshad pa lung thams cad gyi brjod bya'i don de'o || de ka la snang tsam du mi 'gag  
pa rten 'brel gyi gzhi | gang du yang ma grub pa stong nyid kyi gzhi | tha dad du mi  
gnas pa zung 'jug gi gzhi | phyogs cha dang bral ba khyab gdal gyi gzhi |

zhes ldog cha nas dbye ba bshad do ||

[3.1.2.] gnyis pa ni | de las 'khor 'das <sup>[175]</sup> su gyes pa'i tshul bshad pa yin pas <sup>[513]</sup> 'di la **jo nang**  
**pas** <sup>[514]</sup> don dam pa'i bden pa ni skye 'jig med cing | 'dus ma byas pa ste | rten 'brel las 'das pa'o  
|| kun rdzob kyi bden pa ni skye zhing 'jig pa'i chos can rgyu dang rkyen la rag las pa ste 'dus  
byas so || 'khor 'das gnyis las khams gsum 'khor ba ni | kun nas nyon mongs pa can sdug bsngal  
gsum mam brgyad kyis bsdus pa ste zag pa dang bcas pa'o ||

mya ngan las 'das pa chen po ni | sdug bsngal rgyu dang bcas pa thams cad las yang dag par  
'das pa zag pa med pa'i bde ba chen po rgyun chad med pa'o || rnam shes dang ye shes gnyis  
las | rnam shes ni mun pa mun nag dug lta bu spang bar bya ba ste kun rdzob rang stong | rang  
byung ye shes ni 'od stong pa'i rnam pa'am bdud rtsi lta bu ste | spang bar bya ba ma yin pas  
don dam gzhan stong | rnam shes kyi rang snang ni | kun rdzob kyi khams gsum pa sdug bsngal  
dang skad cig las ma 'das pa ste las dang nyon mongs kyis sprul pa sdug bsngal gyi rang bzhin  
no || rang byung ye shes kyi rang snang ni | don dam <sup>[176]</sup> pa'i khams gsum pa sdug bsngal dang

<sup>513</sup> PGvv om. |

<sup>514</sup> PGvv om. |

skad cig las 'das pa ste | rgyu rkyen gang gis kyang ma bskyed cing sdug bsngal med pa'i bde  
ba chen po rgyun chad med pa'o ||

rnam shes dang de'i rang snang ni smra bsam brjod du yod cing | rtog ge'i spyod yul du rung  
ba ste | cha shas dang bcas shing dpe dang bcas pa'o || rang byung ye shes dang de'i rang snang  
ni smra bsam brjod du med cing rtog ge'i spyod yul las yang dag par 'das pa'o || cha shas med  
cing dper bya kun las 'das pa nyid do ||

bde gshegs snying po dang | glo bur dri ma gnyis las | bde gshegs snying po ni 'od gsal chos  
kyi sku ste | gnyug ma lhan skyes gzhom du med cing 'jig pa med pa'i bde ba chen po mkha'  
ltar khyab pa'o || glo bur dri ma ni | khams gsum pa'i sems dang sems las byung ba dbugs rgyu  
ba dang bcas pa gang 'pho ba'i bag chags ma spangs pa'o ||

de lta bas na | bden pa gnyis dang | 'khor 'das gnyis dang | rnam shes ye shes gnyis so sor rang  
snang dang bcas pa ni khyad shin tu che ste || zhes dang | stong nyid kyang gnyis te | kun rdzob  
rten 'brel las ma 'das pa'i stong nyid dang | don dam <sup>[177]</sup> rten 'brel las 'das pa'i stong nyid do |  
| de yang dang po ni chos can glo bur ba gsog gsob rdzun pa slu ba ste | rang rang ngo bos stong  
| kun rdzob stong nyid do || gnyis pa ni | chos nyid 'gyur ba med pas rang bzhin bden pa yang  
dag pa mi bslu ba ste | rang gis mi stong yang | rang las gzhan kun rdzob kyis stong pa don dam  
stong nyid do ||

de yang chos sku dang | stong pa mu gnyis te stong nyid yin yang chos sku ma yin pa dang |  
stong nyid yin la chos sku yin pa'o || de la dang po ni | chos can kun rdzob rang stong ste | gshis  
kyi gnas lugs la nam yang ma grub cing dpyad mi bzod pa'o || gnyis pa ni | chos nyid don dam  
gzhan stong de nam yang med pa ma yin zhing dpyad bzod pa'o || zhes dang | ngo bo nyid gsum  
las | kun brtags gzhan dbang gnyis ni glo bur ba'i chos te kun rdzob rang stong ngo || yongs  
grub rnam pa gnyis ni | chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes te don dam gzhan stong ngo || phyi nang  
gzhan gsum las | phyi snod kyi 'jig rten dang nang bcud kyi sems can ni 'gyur ba'i chos can  
glo bur ba ste kun rdzob rang stong ngo || gzhan bde gshegs <sup>[178]</sup> snying po ni | chos nyid gnyug  
ma 'pho 'gyur med pa ste | don dam gzhan stong ngo ||

spyir gyis gzhi lam 'bras bu gsum las | gzhi ni 'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad kyi gnas su gyur  
pa bde gshegs snying po kun gzhi'i ye shes te | skyon gyi cha rnams sbyang ba'i gzhi dang |  
yon tan gyi cha rnams mngon du gyur pa'i gzhi'o || lam gyi gzhi de la skyon gyi cha rnams zad  
par byed cing | yon tan gyi cha rnams mngon du byed pa'i thabs su gyur pa tshogs gnyis 'khor  
dang bcas pa ste | ye shes kyi tshogs kyis chos sku'i yon tan gdod nas lhun grub rtag par gnas  
pa'i sgrib g.yogs sel bar byed cing | bsod nams kyi tshogs kyis gzugs sku'i yon tan sngon med  
rim gyis skyed par byed pa'o || 'bras bu ni bral 'bras chos sku don dam de kho na nyid kyi sku  
bskyed 'bras gzugs sku kun rdzob brda'i sku ste | rang gi don dang gzhan gyi don phun sum  
tshogs pa'i gnas so ||

de ltar chos sku dri ma dang bral ba'i gzhi ni<sup>515</sup> rang bzhin gyi rigs chos kyī dbyings rnam pa kun ldan rnam pa med pa ste gter chen po sngar nas yod pa lta bu'o || gzugs sku bskyed<sup>[179]</sup> pa'i sa bon rgyas pa'i rigs ni dge ba'i rtsa bas gsar du bskyed pa | 'bras bu bzang po can gyi ljon shing sngon med rim pas bskyed pa lta bu'o || de yang rang bzhin gyi rigs la brten to ||

khyad par sbyang gzhi<sup>516</sup> sbyang bya | sbyong byed<sup>517</sup> sbyangs 'bras bzhi las | sbyang ba'i gzhi ni | kun gzhi ye shes kyī snying po dri bcas de bzhin nyid de | sprin tshogs 'khrigs pa'i nam mkha' dang | 'dam gyis g.yogs pa'i nor bu lta bu'o || sbyang bya dri ma ni sbubs la zhen pa'i kun gzhi rnam shes 'khor dang bcas pa ste | sprin dang 'dam rdzab lta bu'o || sbyong byed lam ni 'pho ba'i skad cig 'gags par byed pa'i thabs mchog 'khor dang bcas pa ste | sprin tshogs gtor ba'i rlung dang | 'dam rdzab 'khrud pa'i chu rgyun lta bu'o || sbyangs pa'i 'bras bu ni | 'pho ba'i skad cig 'gags pa'i gzhi la 'pho med bde stong rang byung gi ye shes gdod ma nas lhun grub rtag par bzhugs pa ste mngon du gyur cing thob pa ste | sprin tshogs sangs | nam mkha' dag pa dang | dri bral nor bu thob nas dgos dgu tshang ba lta bu'o ||

de bas na thams cad mkhyen<sup>[180]</sup> pas gsungs pa'i lung dang | rigs pa dang | man ngag dam pa'i rjes su 'brangs nas | sbyang bya dri ma dang | sbyang gzhi dag byed dbyer med gcig tu mi bzhed do || gzhan yang | 'dir kun rdzob las | gzhan don dam pa'i rgyu dang 'bras bu ni dmigs pa dang bcas pa'i stong nyid dang dmigs pa med pa'i snying rje chen po la gsungs shing | de dag kyang don dam stong nyid rnam pa thams cad kyī mchog dang ldan zhing rdul dang skad cig las 'das pa'i gzugs so || cha med kun 'gro dang | 'dzag pa med pa'i bde ba chen po mkha' dbyings khyab cing dbang po gnyis kyī bde ba dang | skad cig las 'das pa'i ye shes la gsungs so || de dag nyid shes rab dang thabs gsungs te | shes rab kyī pha rol tu phyin ma dang | rdo rje 'chang chen po dang | de bzhin du phyag rgya chen mo dang phyag rgya chen po'o || rdo rje nyi ma dang | rdo rje zla ba'o || bden pa bcu gnyis dang | de nyid bcu drug go | don dam pa stong pa nyid bco brgyad dang | snying rje bcu drug go | der bzhugs pa'i lha bcu drug go | don dam pa e yig dang waṃ yig go | gzugs ni gzhan<sup>[181]</sup> dang 'dzin pa gzhan no || thabs shes gzhan dang ye shes gzhan no || zhes dang |

de lta bas na | don dam pa'i rgyu dang 'bras bu la ngo bo tha dad don la med kyang gang zag lam du zhugs pa rnam la mngon du gyur tshul snga phyi'i sgo nas tha dad pa'i phyir dang | rgyu 'bras dang 'dra ba'i rnam pa gzhan yang yod pa'i phyir | dang po rgyu stong nyid kyī theg pa dang | de nas 'bras bu snying rje'i theg pa bstan te theg chen mdo sde rin po che rnam su stong pa nyid dang | mtshan ma med pa dang | smon pa med pa dang | spros pa med pa dang | yid la mi byed pa dang shes rab kyī pha rol tu phyin pa dang | mi len mi 'dor ba dang | chos nyid dang | chos kyī gnas dbyings nyid dang | chos kyī gnas nyid dang | chos skyon med pa nyid

<sup>515</sup> PGvv addit. |

<sup>516</sup> PGsb om. |

<sup>517</sup> PGsb om. |

dang | ma nor ba de bzhin nyid dang | gzhan ma yin pa de bzhin nyid dang | yang dag pa'i mtha'  
 dang | ma skyes pa dang | ma 'gags pa dang | gzod ma nas zhi ba dang | rang bzhin gyis yongs  
 su mya ngan las 'das pa dang | chos kyi sku dang | ngo bo nyid kyi sku dang zhes pa la sogs pa  
 rnam pa mang po'i ming gis kun <sup>[182]</sup> rdzob rang stong gis stong pa'i gzhi la | don dam gzhan  
 stong nam mkha' ltar rtag tu bzhugs pa de bstan to ||

de yang bka' 'khor lo bar par dgag bya'i chos | kun rdzob rang stong rten 'brel las ma 'das pa  
 gtso cher grags | dgag pa'i gzhi don dam gzhan stong rten 'brel las 'das pa | bka' 'khor lo bar  
 par dgag pa'i gzhi ye nas ma bstan pa ni ma yin no || rgyud sde rin po che rnams su dga' ba  
 dang | mchog dga' dang | khyad par gyi dga' ba dang | lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba dang | rdo  
 rje'i chags pa dang | rjes su chags pa dang | 'dod chags chen po dang | zhe sdang chen po dang  
 | gti mug chen po dang | nga rgyal chen po dang | phrag dog chen po dang | ser sna chen po dang  
 | srog chen po dang | sems can chen po dang | rdo rje dang | thig le dang | de kho na nyid dang |  
 'dus pa dang | sdom pa dang | lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes dang | phyag rgya chen po dang | dang  
 po'i sangs rgyas dang | rdo rje sems dpa' dang | e waṃ yi ge la sogs rnam pa mang po'i ming  
 gi 'gyur med mchog gi bde ba chen po bstan te |

de'i <sup>[183]</sup> phyir rgyu stong nyid gtso bor bton na rgyu'i theg pa | 'bras bu bde chen gtso bor bstan  
 na 'bras bu'i theg pa zhes gsungs shing | de dag gi don dbyer med gcig tu gsungs pa la dgongs  
 nas | don gcig na'ang ma rmongs dang | zhes pa la sogs dang | de gnyis gyi don tha dad par  
 bzung nas phan tshun smod na rtsa ltung drug par gsungs so || de lta na'ang mthar thug gi don  
 sngags su gsal la | mtshan nyid theg par mi gsal ba dang | de mngon du byed pa'i thabs zab mi  
 zab la sogs pa'i sgo nas 'bras bu thob pa la nye ring gi khyad par ni gsal bar gsungs te | zhes  
 dang |

yang | spyir gyis snang stong zung 'jug bya ba 'di la gnyis | don dam snang stong zung 'jug  
 dang | kun rdzob snang stong zung 'jug go | de bzhin du bde gshegs snying po'i snang stong  
 zung 'jug dang | glo bur dri ma'i snang stong zung 'jug dang | kun brtags gzhan dbang gi snang  
 stong zung 'jug dang | yongs su grub pa'i snang stong zung 'jug go | phyi nang gi snang stong  
 zung 'jug dang | gzhan stong gi snang stong zung 'jug go | de bzhin du gzhi lam 'bras <sup>[184]</sup> bu'i  
 snang stong zung 'jug dang | sbyang gzhi sbyang bya sbyong byed sbyangs 'bras kyi snang  
 stong zung 'jug la sogs pa rnam pa mang du yod pa las | 'dir re zhig don dam bde gshegs snying  
 po'i snang stong zung 'jug gang yin pa de ni don snang stong gnyis ka yang spang bya ma yin  
 pa kho na'o || glo bur dri ma nyer len gyi phung po khams sogs kyi snang stong zung 'jug gang  
 yin pa de ni snang stong gnyis ka spang bya kho na'o ||

gal te sbyang gzhi dang sbyang bya'i dri ma gcig ma yin zhing | sbyang bya dang sbyong byed  
 kyang gcig ma yin na | 'o na bden gnyis dbyer med | 'khor 'das dbyer med du gsungs pa'i don  
 ji lta ba yin zhe na | 'di la brjod par bya ste kha cig snang ba'i cha kun rdzob | stong pa'i cha  
 don dam yin pas snang stong dbyer med pa 'di bden gnyis dbyer med kyi don yin no zhes 'dod



pa ni bcom ldan 'das kyi dgongs pa ma yin te || [1] kun rdzob gyi stong pa'i cha yang don dam  
 ma yin zhing | don dam gyi snang ba'i cha yang kun rdzob ma yin pa'i phyir dang || [2] kun  
 rdzob rang stong rten 'brel las ma 'das pa dang | don dam gzhan stong rten 'brel las 'das pa  
 dag khyad par shin tu che ba'i phyir dang || [3] don dam rten 'brel <sup>[185]</sup> las 'das pa nyid kun rdzob  
 rnam pa can du bzhugs pa la bden gnyis dbyer med kyi don dang || [4] myang 'das chen po'i  
 snang ba'i cha yang 'khor ba ma yin pa'i phyir dang || [5] 'khor ba rang stong rten 'brel las ma  
 'das pa'i phyir dang | myang 'das gzhan stong rten 'brel las 'das pa dag khyad shin tu che ba'i  
 phyir dang || [6] myang 'das chen po nyid 'khor ba'i rnam pa can du bzhugs pa la 'khor 'das  
 dbyer med kyi don du gsungs pa'i phyir ro ||

de bzhin du de dag stong nyid du shes pa tsam yang ye shes ma yin zhing | chos sku ma yin la  
 | phyag rgya chen po yang ma yin te | de la de dang de'i mtshan nyid ma tshang ba'i phyir ro ||  
 gal te nyon mongs gang skye la bltas pas rang bzhin med par rtogs pa'i tshe gnyen po logs nas  
 btsal ma dgos par spang bya de nyid gnyen por song ba'i phyir | sbyang bya sbyong byed dbyer  
 med yin no snyam na | 'di ni legs par yongs su ma brtags pa kho na yin gyi | legs par brtags na  
 nyon mongs rang bzhin med par rtogs pa de nyon mongs kyi gnyen po'i phyogs su gtogs pa  
 yin gyi | nyon mongs dang tha mi dad pa ni ma yin no || <sup>[186]</sup> sngon du skyes pa'i nyon mongs  
 dang | phyis nas de rang bzhin med par rtogs pa'i shes rab ni dus kyi sgo nas tha dad cing ngo  
 bo'i sgo nas kyang tha dad pa las kyi sgo nas kyang tha dad pa'i phyir ro ||<sup>518</sup>

yang ngo ma shes na rnam rtog ngo shes na chos sku | ngo ma shes na ma rig pa | ngo shes na  
 rig pa | ngo ma shes na dug lnga | ngo shes na ye shes | ngo ma shes na 'khor ba | ngo shes na  
 myang 'das | zhes pa la sogs pa'i 'dod pa thams cad grub pa'i gsung dang mi mthun te | de'ang  
 ngo ma shes na mun pa | ngo shes na snang ba | ngo ma shes na sprin tshogs | ngo shes na nam  
 mkha' dwangs pa | ngo ma shes na 'bru'i shun pa | ngo shes na 'bru'i snying po || ngo ma shes  
 na mi gtsang ba'i sbubs | ngo shes na yid bzhin gyi nor bu | ngo ma shes na bum pa'i sbubs | ngo  
 shes na bum nang gi mar me yin zhes pa la sogs pa dang mtshungs pa kho na'o || de bzhin du  
 snang srid thams cad chos sku | gang shar thams cad phyag rgya chen po || 'dus byas thams cad  
 rang byung ye shes | 'khor 'das thams cad sems kyi byas pas sangs rgyas ming stong zhes pa  
 la sogs pa 'dod pa rnams kyang thub pa'i gsung dang mi mthun no ||<sup>[187]</sup>

[Padma dkar po's Refutation of the Jo nang view:]

zhes bstan bcos mang du sbyar ba'i lugs kyi snying po der 'dus so || 'di la dpyad na | rnam kun  
 mchog ldan gyi stong nyid | kun rdzob kyi bden par bzhag pa ni dus kyi 'khor lo dang | gsang  
'dus gnyis kar byung | de so so skye bo la mngon sum du snang nus pa'i phyir | kun rdzob pa  
 kho na'o || rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong nyid gzhan stong gi khungs su'ang mi 'gro ste | de  
 pra brgyad phab pa'i snang ba dang mtshungs par bshad la | de ni sgyu mar ston pa'i dpe | sgyu

<sup>518</sup> PGsb: |

ma ni mi bden pa snying po med pa'i 'dus byas kyi dper nged kyi sangs rgyas gsung pas lung de dang khyed kyi<sup>519</sup> sangs rgyas ma<sup>520</sup> mthun no ||

yang don dam skad cig las 'das pa zhes pa'ang mi 'thad de | dam pa dang por | mchog tu mi 'gyur ba'i bde ba skad cig nyi khri chig stong drug brgyar phye ste bzhag pa dang 'gal ba'i phyir ro | rten 'brel las 'das pa zhes mchog mi 'gyur du gsungs pa ni yan lag bcu gnyis kyi dbang du mdzad la | rnal 'byor bsdu ba'i 'grel par | 'khor ba dang myang 'das ltos grub tu bzhag pa'i phyir na rten 'brel du grub kyis | mya ngan las 'das pa las lhag<sup>[188]</sup> pa'i don dam bden pa ci zhig yod | rnal 'byor bsdu ba'i mdor bsdus kyi 'grel chen du sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyang rang bzhin med par bshad pas don dam gzhan stong du gang gis 'grub |

khyed kyi 'dod pa 'di rang stong ngam kun rdzob thams cad chad pa | don dam thams cad bden par khas blangs pas rtag ltar song bas | nang le'i lta ba'i mdor bsdus dang rnal 'byor bsdu ba gnyis kar don dam pa la phyogs med par bshad pa dang 'gal ba'i phyir gtan mi 'thad do ||

yang 'bros khungs 'gal 'du skyon med du'ang ma song ste | 'khor ba'i rnam par snang ba de su la 'khor ba yin la | mya ngan las 'das pa dang 'gal ba yin pa soms dang | 'gal 'du skyon med du 'jog pa la gcig la ltos nas 'gal ba de | gcig la ltos nas mi 'gal bar bsdu ba zhig ston dgos pa yin no || rgyud las | du ba'i rnam par snang bar snang yang du ba min gsung pa lta bu | tha mal pa'i me'i 'bras bu las logs su dgar ba yin la | de la 'gal 'du skyon med du bzhag pa'ang med do ||

gzugs kyi sku'i rgyu gsar 'ongs su 'chad pa ni nor ba chen po ste | dpal ldan rgyud rtsa 'grel<sup>[189]</sup> las | longs sprul du bzhag pa ni | don chen yi ge dam pa yin dang | rdul med rdul bral sna tshogs gzugs kyis bsgrubs pas | de gsar 'ongs su 'chad pas dus 'khor ba nyams dga'o ||

gzhan yang nyon mongs pa rang bzhin shes pa zhes 'chad pa rnam nyon mongs par snang ba nyid kyi dus rang bzhin med pa rig pa zhig dgos par 'chad de | de min na de rang gis rang rig par yin min rtsad ci la dgos | des na phyogs snga'i nam ma langs par gda'o || 'di'i lugs kyi gzhan stong | 'grel pa skor gsum dang bstan<sup>521</sup> nas smras so snyam nas yus pa la mtshan nyid kyi theg pa'i lung gis sun 'byin pa yang 'os par ma mthong ngo ||

'o na khyed rang gi lugs kyi gzhi gang | lam gang | 'bras bu gang snyam na | dngos po'i gnas lugs gnyis su phye ste | lus dngos po'i gnas lugs dang | sems dngos po'i gnas lugs so || des na lus kyi gnas lugs ni 'khrul pa'i cha nas 'jog pas | glo bur gyi dri ma dang bcas pa dang | sems kyi gnas lugs ni ye nas dag dag pa nyid de | spyi skad la rang bzhin gyis dag pa zhes pa de'i cha nas<sup>[190]</sup> so || glo bur ba yang gshis dang gdangs gnyis la ma grub kyang | gshis dang gdangs

<sup>519</sup> PGbc: *kyis*; PGsb, PGvv: *kyi*

<sup>520</sup> addit. *ma* as per PGbc; does not occur in PGsb or PGvv. See note in translation for rationale behind chosen reading.

<sup>521</sup> PGbg: *bstun*

su snang bas de skad brjod de | dper na thang ga la 'bur kyong dod par snang ba bzhin nam | mkhris nad can la dung ser por snang ba bzhin | ser po de dung gi gshis sam dung gi mdangs la ma grub pa dang | mkhris nad can la snang rgyu byung ba dang | yang nad dag rim gyis zhi tshul yang 'thad byung bas so ||

gal te ser po dung gi gshis sam gdangs ga la yod de yod na'ang | nad med kyis kyang mthong rigs pa la med pas ma mthong ba bzhin ma rtogs na 'khrul par snang rung | rtogs na chos skur 'char ba yang de lta bu ste | 'di gnyis ka'i mtshan gzahir | rnam par rtog pa 'di ka 'dzin pa | dung ser mthong dang ser por ma mthong ba gnyis kar ser por btags pa'i dung de ka mtshan gzahir 'dzin pa lta bu'o || gzhan yang sprin dang bcas pa'i dus na nam mkha' mi sgrib pa las ma 'gyur te | 'gyur na sprin med du 'gro mi tshugs pas so || de bas na de nam mkha' rang ngos nas 'gyur ba med la | mthong tshul 'gyur bar ston pa bzhin | sems kyi rdo rje rang ngos la 'khrul pa med pas | gzhi la 'khrul pa med |<sup>[191]</sup> rang bzhin la 'khrul pa yod na sbyang mi thub ste | sol ba 'o ma'i rgyun gyis bkrus kyang dkar por mi 'gyur ba lta bu'o ||

jo nang pas | rig ma rig la dpe smras pa rnams ni dpe skyon yin pas smras pa po rang nyid la 'jug ste | zhu na rlan gsher | ma zhu na sra ba khyag rum la mi rung bar 'gyur ba dang | ngo ma shes na mchod sbyin ma yin | shes na yin par 'gror mi rigs pa sogs mtshungs pas so ||

de bas na gzhi 'khrul med la 'khrul par sgro btags pa tsam du zad pas glo bur ba dang | 'khor ba ni med bzhin du snang ba'o zhes shes par bya'o || rnam par gzhang pa 'di ni lan mang du bshad pa'i phyir | skabs don yod tsam las ma smras so || de kas rnam par 'gyur ba 'dra bar bzung ba'i cha nas lus kyi gnas lugs te | kun rdzob kyi bden par bzhag || 'gyur ba med par mthong ba'i cha nas sems kyi gnas lugs don dam bden par bzhag go || gzhi de 'gyur bcas su song dus ngan par ma song | 'gyur med du rtogs dus bzang por ma red | de ka rang du bsdad pas bden pa gnyis su 'byed rgyu med pa |<sup>[192]</sup> 'di la bden gnyis dbyer med ces rnam par gzhang go ||

### THREE GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF *AMANASIKĀRA* (excerpt)

For annotated English translation, see Volume I, 414–420.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: In the context of a doctrinal history of Mahāmudrā that Padma dkar po sketches in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*, he offers three grammatical interpretations of *amanasikāra* according to Maitrīpa's *Amanasikāra* cycle (*yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor*) of Mahāmudrā teachings. In adducing permissible interpretations of this term according to rules governing the formation of Sanskrit compounds, the author attempts to draw attention to some of its most important meanings. An obvious precedent for such grammatical glosses on the term was Maitrīpa's *Amanasikārādhāra*<sup>522</sup>, but we may also mention as another likely influence Yang dgon pa's glosses on the Sanskrit and Tibetan variants of the

<sup>522</sup> See Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

term in his *Ri chos skor gsum* which reveal a strong Cittamātra influence.<sup>523</sup> Throughout the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* and in other works, Padma dkar po demonstrates that Maitrīpa's construal of *amanasikāra* as “mental attention (*manas[i]kāra*) on (or that *is*) nonorigination (*a-*)” aligns neatly with Kamalaśīla's interpretation of *amanasikāra* as a “well-founded mental engagement” (*yonisō manasikāra*), which he had characterized (in *Bhāvanākṛāma* I) as “well-founded” in the specific sense that it attends to the foundation or source (*yonī*) that is nonorigination or selflessness. In this way, Padma dkar po is able to bridge Mahāyāna and Mantrayāna interpretations of *amanasikāra* and preclude any attempt to link Mahāmudrā *amanasikāra* teachings with the ideoclastic strain of *amanasikāra* that was allegedly practiced and advocated by the eighth century Chinese master Heshang Mohoyen.

The following editions of the *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

PGsb: *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: 1974, vol. 21: 38<sub>5</sub>–42<sub>3</sub>

PGvv: *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*. Varanasi, Vajra Vidya Library: 2005: 38<sub>11</sub>–42<sub>9</sub>.

PGbc: *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo*. Kathmandu: 200?, vol. 44, 34<sub>1</sub>–37<sub>5</sub>

## 2b. Critical Edition of *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* (excerpt)

(PKsb vol. 21: 38<sub>5</sub>–42<sub>3</sub>) de yang yid la mi byed pa zhes pa'i don la rnam pa gsum gsungs pa'i<sup>524</sup>  
dang po |<sup>525</sup> [1] a ma na si kā ra zhes pa'i si'i i yig ni | yid la zhes pa'i la yig bdun pa'i don yin  
| bdun pa 'di la gnas gzhi'i rkyen zhes bya bar sgra'i mdor |

gang kun nas 'dzin pa de gnas gzhi'o |<sup>526</sup>

zhes 'byung | de ltar gnas gzhi can gyi don de thog ma'i a<sub>[39]</sub> yig gis bkag pas | a ma na si kā<sup>527</sup>  
ra zhes pa | gang du dmigs pa'i gnas sam rten gzhi med pa la bya dgos par shes te | sdom 'byung  
las

dngos med dngos po la brten<sup>528</sup> nas ||

<sup>523</sup> See Higgins 2006.

<sup>524</sup> PGvv: addit. |

<sup>525</sup> PGvv: om. |

<sup>526</sup> addit. |

<sup>527</sup> PGsb, PGvv: ka

<sup>528</sup> PGsb, PGvv: rten; D, Tsuda: brten

rten pa med par<sup>529</sup> dngos por<sup>530</sup> bya ||  
yid med yid ni byas nas su ||  
cung zad tsam yang mi bsam mo ||<sup>531</sup>

zhes gsungs so || de bas sems byung yid la byed pa'i 'dzin stangs kyis | dmigs pa la bsgrims  
nas sems 'dzin dam por byed pa thun mong gi zhi gnas bsgrub pa'i skabs la dgos kyang 'dir  
de bkag pa yin no || de yang **thogs med** kyis |

de la 'jog par byed pa dang | yang dag par 'jog par byed pa la ni bsgrims te 'jug  
pa'i yid la byed pa yod do<sup>532</sup> |<sup>533</sup> zhes pa'o ||

[2] gnyis pa *a ma na si kā ra* zhes pa'i bdun pa'i i de'i skyes bu'i bsdu ba byas nas *yid mi byed*  
*pa* zhes pa | *la* yig mi mngon par byas pa'i bshad pa gnyis pa mdzod do || de'i don ltar na'ang  
| *yid mi byed pa* zhes pa yid kyi las 'dir dgag byar bzhed pa ste | mngon par |

yid kyi las gang zhe na |<sup>534</sup> sems pa yid kyi las yin no<sup>535</sup> ||

zhes sems byung sems pa'i 'dzin pa'i 'dzin stangs la nan tan du byed pa de<sup>[40]</sup> dgag pa'o ||  
sems byung sems pa'ang sems mngon par 'du byed pa'i yid kyi las te | de nyid du |

dge ba dang mi dge ba lung du ma bstan pa rnam la sems 'jug par byed pa'i las  
can no zhes ba'o ||

don mngon par 'du byed pa dgag pa'o || nyes pa lnga spong ba'i 'du byed brgyad lta bu zhi  
gnas bsgrub pa la yin gyi | phyag rgya chen po la ni byas pa rnam dang bral zhing bsags pa  
las min zhes dang |

nga ni 'gro 'ong mi len mi 'dor ro |<sup>536</sup>

<sup>529</sup> PGsb, PGvv: *pa'i*; D, Tsuda: *par*

<sup>530</sup> PGsb, PGvv: *bsgom pa*

<sup>531</sup> *Śrīsaṃvarodaya* (Tib. *Dpal bde mchog 'byung ba*) D 373, 618<sub>4</sub>. For edited Sanskrit text based on eight editions, see Tsuda 1974. The edited Sanskrit passage (Tsuda, 16) reads: *abhāvaṃ bhāvaṃ āśrītya bhāvaṃ kṛtvā nīrāśrayam | amanaskaṃ manaskṛtvā na kiñcid api cintayet* || For the variants, see Tsuda, 16.

<sup>532</sup> *Śravakabhūmi* (Shukla ed.): *tatra sthāpayataḥ saṃsthāpayato balavāhano manaskāraḥ* |

<sup>533</sup> addit. |

<sup>534</sup> om. in AK

<sup>535</sup> AK 4.1c om. *yid kyi las gang zhe na* |

<sup>536</sup> *Dohākoṣagīti* (*Do ha mdzod kyi glu*) D 2224, 150<sub>2</sub>: 'gro 'ong nga yis mi len mi 'dor ro | addit. |

dang | dgves rdor las |

gang phyir yid kyis mi bsgom<sup>537</sup> par |<sup>538</sup>

zhes pas so || des na |

yid kyis de nyid dmigs dang bcas ||<sup>539</sup>

zhes yid kyis las su bya ba gang yin thams cad 'dir dmigs pa dang bcas par gzhas nas dmigs pa thams cad nye bar zhi ba cig nges par bstan no || des bas na |

kun tu rtog pas ma brtags pa ||  
rab tu mi gnas pa yi yid ||  
dran pa med cing yid byed min ||  
dmigs pa med la phyag 'tshal 'dud ||<sup>540</sup>

ces ston pas gsungs pa de legs par bshad do || dran pa med pa sogs rgyas pa 'og tu 'byung ngo ||

[3] gsum pa | *a ma na si kā ra* zhes pa'i *a yar* bcad nas | *a yig* skye ba med pa'i don du<sup>[41]</sup> byas te | *ma na si kā ra yid la byed* par bshad do || de ltar na *a yig* gi don *tshul bzhin du yid la byed* pa ni | *a yid la byed* pa zhes byar te | de yang | bar gyi tshig *mi mngon* par byas pa *lo ma la dga'ba'i rgyal po la lo ma'i rgyal po* zhes pa bzhin no | 'dir *a ni shes rab* kyis pha rol tu phyin pa'o | *a nu tpa nna* | *a ni ro dha* zhes pa lta bu'i sgo nas | *skye med 'gag med* sogs gnyis su med pa'i rnam grangs thams cad mtshon nus so | mtshan brjod las |

<sup>537</sup> *Hevajratantrarāja*; Snellgrove ed.: *sgom*

<sup>538</sup> *Hevajratantrarāja* 1.8.44a: Snellgrove ed. Skt. [*bhāvvyate<sup>a</sup> hi jagat sarvaṃ*] *manasā yasmān na bhāvvyate* ||  
<sup>a</sup>Asiatic Society of Bengal Mss. has *bhāvvyante*; Tib. *gang phyir yid kyis mi sgom par* || [*'gro ba thams cad bsgom par bya* ||]

<sup>539</sup> *Dohākoṣagīti* D 2224, 152<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>540</sup> JĀA, 146<sub>1-2</sub>: *avikalpitasaṃkalpa apratiṣṭhitamānasa | asmṛty amanasikāra nirālamba namo 'stu te* || See also *Caturmudrānvaya* (Tib. *Phyag rgya bzhi gtan la dbab pa*) D 2225, 156<sub>7</sub>–157<sub>1</sub>. For an English translation and critical edition of this important text which, despite controversy over authorship, was included in Maitrīpa's *Advayavajrasaṃgraha* (AVS), see Mathes 2015 (forthcoming). According to Mathes: "The *Caturmudrānvaya* is contained in Maitrīpa's *Advayavajrasaṃgraha*, but the authorship of this important work on the four seals has remained a controversial issue. In his introduction to the *Sekanirdeśapañjikā*, Rāmapāla attributes the *Caturmudrānvaya* to (the tantric) Nāgārjuna, which is corroborated by the colophon to it in the Tibetan translation and the *Bu ston gsan yig*, for example, but contested by Vibhūticandra (12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century), who claims in his *Amṛtakaṇīkoddhyotanibandha* that this is false. Whether taught by the tantric Nāgārjuna or not, the *Caturmudrānvaya* is of crucial importance to Maitrīpa's *Amanasikāra* cycle, inasmuch as it combines the tantric *mahāmudrā* system of the four seals with the nontantric teachings of the *Jñānālokālaṃkāra* (JĀA) and the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (or *Ratnagotravibhāga*), and thus with the Maitreya works."

*a* ni yig 'bru kun gyi mchog ||  
 don chen yi ge dam pa yin ||  
 khong nas 'byung ba skye ba med ||

sogs kyis so | mtshan brjod kyi 'grel chen las |

sngags kyi tshul gyis ni shes rab dang thabs ni gnyis so || de gcig tu gyur pa ni gnyis  
 su med pa ste | shes rab dang thabs gnyis su med pa bde ba chen po'i ngo bo nyid  
 ni gnyis su med pa yin par 'dod de<sup>541</sup> de las byung ba'o ||  
pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul gyis ni | gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'am | bdag dang bdag  
 gi'am | shes pa dang shes bya ste<sup>542</sup> ji srid du<sup>543</sup> yid kyi<sup>544</sup> rnam par g.yo ba de srid  
 du ni thams cad<sup>545</sup> gnyis so || g.yo ba thams cad dang bral zhing<sup>546</sup> spros pa med pa  
 chos thams cad bdag med pa ni gnyis su<sup>547</sup> med pa'i ngo bo nyid<sup>547</sup> chos nyid kyi  
 bdag nyid can gyi sku 'byung ste | de bas na gnyis su med par 'byung ba'o || gnyis  
 su med par 'byung ba yang mi skye ba'i rnam pas khyad par du dbye ba'i phyir |  
 mi skye'i<sup>548</sup> chos can zhes bya ba smos te<sup>549</sup>

zhes gsungs pa'o || de lta bu'i don gyis yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor zhes bya'o || de thams cad  
 slob dpon nges par sbyangs pa **gnyis su med pa'i rdo rje** zhes sam | grub pa'i slob dpon chen  
 po mnga' bdag **mai trī pas** mdzad pa'o ||

## REFUTING SA PAṆ'S EQUATION OF MAHĀMUDRĀ WITH HESHANG'S CHAN MEDITATION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following is a translation and critical edition of the opening section of a compilation of Padma dkar po's written responses to various doctrinal queries and criticisms that bears the title *Discussions to Quell Criticisms* (*Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam*). In this excerpt, Padma dkar po systematically responds to various criticisms of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā traditions by Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251).

<sup>541</sup> D: om. |

<sup>542</sup> D: om. |

<sup>543</sup> D: addit. *du*

<sup>544</sup> D: om. *kyi*

<sup>545</sup> D: addit. *ni thams cad*

<sup>546</sup> D: om. |

<sup>547</sup> PGsb, PGvv: addit. *kyi*

<sup>548</sup> D: *skye*

<sup>549</sup> *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgatiṭkā* D 2534, 250<sub>1-4</sub>; addit. | as per D

Carefully reviewing the legacy of Indian siddha-based Mahāmudrā teachings and Sa paṅ's criticisms of certain Tibetan assimilations of them, Padma dkar po is able to discount any alleged similarity between context-specific Mahāmudrā practices of *amanasikāra* of Dwags po Bka' brgyud and the *perpetual* stopping of thought and activities attributed to Heshang. Padma dkar po's principal aim is to reconcile conceptual and nonconceptual modes of Buddhist meditation by establishing their proper soteriological contexts.

The following editions of the *Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

KZsb: *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: 1974, vol. 21: 553–561<sub>6</sub>

KZbc: *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo*. Kathmandu: 200?, vol. 41, 515–525<sub>6</sub>.

### 3a. English Translation of *Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam* (excerpt)

*Discussions to Quell Criticisms* [554]

I bow to the feet of the Guru who is Mañjunātha.<sup>550</sup>

Homage to he who plays in the sky of [my] faithful mind,  
The cool-rayed moon<sup>551</sup> Mañjughoṣa who destroy the darkness of the  
Haughtiness of wrong notions through each portion of [his] nectar[-like] teachings,  
[And] opens the white night-lily<sup>552</sup> of definitive meaning.

Some intelligent ones who became followers of crooked speech have  
Abandoned this thoroughfare of the Conqueror due to doubts,  
And grown exhausted meandering on wrongful paths of despair.  
Overpowered by compassion, I shall herein guide [them] back again.

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<sup>550</sup> The epithet *'jam mgon* (Skt. Mañjunātha, “Gentle Protector”) was often prefixed to the names of Tibetan masters who were renowned for their learning such as Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846–1912), and Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419). Mi pham and Tsong kha pa were also called *'Jam mgon bla ma*. In the Indian Buddhist pantheon, Mañjunātha was an incarnation of Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist deity of wisdom, in human form.

<sup>551</sup> Tib. *bsil zer can* (Skt. *śītaṃśu*, ‘cool-rayed’) is a poetic epithet for the moon.

<sup>552</sup> Tib. *ku mud* (Skt. *kumuda*) refers to the esculent white water-lily (Latin name: *nymphaea esculenta*) that opens its petals at night and closes them in the daytime. This is another epithet of the moon. The reference to the white-lily alludes to the author's name Padma dkar po (Skt. *puṇḍarīka*) meaning white lotus, a popular Indian symbol of beauty and purity since it arises above, and remains unblemished by, the mud from which it grows.



Nowadays, certain people have proclaimed that “there is no difference between your Mahāmudrā [tradition] and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) of the Chinese tradition except for the change in terminology from “ascent from below” and “descent from above [to “gradualist” and “suddenist”]”.<sup>553</sup>

Let us analyze this: in our view, the ascertainment of things as they really are depends solely on realizing the mode of abiding through direct perception (*mngon sum du rtogs pa*) because it transcends the path of words of others and is never within dualistic mind’s sphere of operations. Thus, when it comes to expressing what the content (*don*) of this realization through direct perception is like, even all the buddhas of the three times are at a loss for words. But when it comes to putting this in language while preserving its meaning, it is said to be “free from assertions”. [In other words,] because all explanations of doxographical viewpoints apart from that [direct realization] are established through intellectual imputation, <sup>[555]</sup> none can withstand analysis by means of reasoning. If, to that extent, there is no difference from Heshang, then since [the following] was said by the Noble Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] father and sons concerning the occasion when all [metaphysical] views have been overcome, it would follow that they are not different from Heshang either.<sup>554</sup> On the occasion of having overturned all views, the eminent teacher [Nāgārjuna] father and son stated [*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XIII.7–8]:

If something non-empty existed,  
Then something empty might also exist.  
But something non-empty does not exist,  
So how could emptiness exist?

Emptiness is declared by the victors to be  
The purgative<sup>555</sup> of all [metaphysical] views.  
But those for whom emptiness is a view

<sup>553</sup> Padma dkar po here alludes to the well-known passage from Sa skya Paṇḍita’s *Sdom gsum rab dbye* 3.167: “There is no actual difference between | the Present day Mahāmudrā and | the Great Perfection of the Chinese tradition | except for a change in terminology | from “ascent from below” and “descent from above” | to “gradualist” and “suddenist”. *da lta’i phyag rgya chen po dang | rgya nag lugs kyi rdzogs chen la | yas ’babs dang ni mas ’dzegs gnyis | rim gyis pa dang cig char bar | ming ’dogs bsgyur ba ma gtogs pa | don la khyad par dbye ba med* || See Rhoton 2002, 118 (translation) and 303 (text). For discussion of this passage and references, see Jackson 1994, 162 et passim. Among the critical responses to this passage are those by Dwags ram pa, Chos grags ye shes, Shākya mchog ldan, Mi bskyod rdo rje, Dwags po Bkra’ shis rnam rgyal and Rtse le sna tshogs rang grol.

<sup>554</sup> In the text, this conclusion occurs following the two quotations.

<sup>555</sup> We follow the sense of the Sanskrit *niḥsaraṇa* (Tib. *nges par ’byin pa*) as “a remedy to get rid of” or purgative (see Böhtlingk and Monier-Williams s.v. *niḥsaraṇa*).

Are declared to be incurable<sup>556</sup>.

And as is stated in [Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 29]:

If I had some thesis,  
That fault would apply to me.  
But since I have no thesis,  
There is indeed no fault for me.<sup>558</sup>

In this regard, why *was* there a debate between the Ācārya Kamalaśīla who adhered to this line of thought and the Chinese Heshang? [This] is something you should think about. You may think “these [accounts] are not similar because the Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] father and sons said these things in the context of reasoning that analyzes the ultimate, whereas you do not have any analysis through reasoning.” But how could that be the case? The Ācāryas uttered these words in the context of reasoning that analyzes the ultimate. Since we as well utter these words in the context of ascertaining the ultimate, how are they *not* alike? Since that reasoning that analyzes the ultimate is precisely [our] method of ascertaining the ultimate as well, <sup>[556]</sup> what is the difference between these two?

[*Opponent:*] Let us grant that you alone do not have faults since you maintain things in that way. But such was not the case with [your] predecessors. [*Response:*] How can that be correct? According to Rje btsun Mi la [ras pa]:

When it comes to ascertaining the view,  
For a completely perfect buddha,  
Not [to mention] an ignorant person like me,  
It is like the joy of a mute woman or young girl.  
Apart from merely gesturing toward it,  
How would [anyone] be able to show this?<sup>559</sup>

<sup>556</sup> Sanskrit term *āsadhya* has various meanings including [1] unable to be completed or accomplished, [2] not susceptible of proof, and [3] incurable or irremediable. The Tibetan rendering as *bsgrub tu med pa* seems to follow either [1] or [2] but the context suggests [3] as a more natural reading.

<sup>557</sup> MMK XIII 7–8 (Ye 2011 ed.): Skt.: *yady aśūnyaṃ bhavet kiṃcid syāc chūnyaṃ iti kiṃcana | na kiṃcid asty aśūnyaṃ ca kutaḥ śūnyaṃ bhaviṣyati ||* [7] *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭināṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ | yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādrṣṭis tān asādhyaṇ babhāṣire ||* [8]; Tib.: *| gal te stong min cung zad yod || stong pa cung zad yod par 'gyur || mi stong cung zad yod min na || stong pa yod par ga la 'gyur || rgyal ba rnams kyis stong pa nyid || [7] | lta kun nges par 'byung bar gsungs || gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba || de dag bsgrub tu med par gsungs ||* [8]

<sup>558</sup> VV 29: Skt.: *yadi kācana pratijñā syānme tata eṣa bhaved doṣaḥ | nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ ||* (For Sanskrit text and translation, see Johnston et al 1978, 61). See translation of Westerhoff 2010, 63.

<sup>559</sup> The source of this quotation and the next have not been identified.

And he stated that:

Those who take platitudes as the truth  
I do not see as being in accord with the truth.

[Mi la] said [these things]—it is just that you yourself have not seen or heard them. While not understanding the tradition of others, you nonetheless found it necessary to bear the burden of criticizing [them]. Is it because you received an injunction by a Chinese emperor [to do so]?<sup>560</sup>

Further, some people who have not considered the matter properly, even if they grant that the view is like that [outlined above], say there is no difference between the styles of meditation and conduct [vis-à-vis Mahāmudrā and Heshang teachings]. Heshang claimed that when one has abandoned all virtuous activities of body and speech, one recognizes the mind by simply not thinking at all and thereby becomes free. We, on the other hand, first abandon all preoccupations and distractions in order to attain stability in tranquility (*zhi gnas*), also known as one-pointed mind (*cittekagrata*) or nonconceptuality (*nirvikalpa*) or signlessness (*animitta*). But if one loses oneself in this state, it is regarded as a deviation (*gol sa*). Still, if one does not have even that [one-pointed tranquility], there will be no basis for accomplishing the accumulation of wisdom. Therefore, it is indispensable. One proceeds to cultivate all possible skillful means <sup>[557]</sup> such as great compassion and so on and discerning insight by way of the unity (*yuganaddha*) of emptiness and compassion in which both [virtue and wisdom] are united. These arise and one directly recognizes the mind. It is explained that through such profound insight, the whole range of things to be relinquished are relinquished, [everything] up to and including omniscient wisdom is thereby realized. So how could there be no difference [between our approach and that ascribed to Heshang]? This cannot be the case, but if you still think there is no difference, then let us [simply] offer the prayer “May your wishes be fulfilled.”

It is not the case that this account is not explained in the sūtras. According to the *Samādhirāja*:

Once the wise know the conditioned and unconditioned  
So that all conceptions based on discursive signs are destroyed,  
They abide in signlessness and thereby  
Fully understand that all phenomena are empty.<sup>561</sup>

<sup>560</sup> Padma dkar po here alludes to Sa paṇ's close preceptor-patron relationship with the Mongol court under the Yuan dynasty, seeing this as one plausible explanation for the Sa skya hierarch's criticisms.

<sup>561</sup> D 127, 13b<sub>6</sub>.

And the [*Prajñāpāramitā*]*sañcaya*[*gāthā*] states:

[One who] with insight fully understands the nature of phenomena  
And completely transcends the three realms without exception,  
Is a supreme leader of men who, setting the precious wheel in motion,  
Teaches the dharma to living beings in order to end their suffering.<sup>562</sup>

And the [*Mahā*]*vairocanābhisambodhi*[*tantra*] states:

If one trains in acquiring skillful means and insight,  
One will discover the unsurpassed vehicle –  
That which is unconditioned.<sup>563</sup>

Therefore, why was it said that it was not explained in any sūtras and tantras? [558]

[*Query:*] You say that “at the time of nonconceptual realization one does not dwell on the past, does not speculate about the future, and does not dissect the present; one does not intentionally contemplate anything; one doesn’t even think only of emptiness. Rather, one lets mind settle naturally on its own.” According to Heshang: [“our religious tradition consists in] awakening to buddhahood by simply recognizing the mind after having cultivated nonconceptuality because one does not awaken to buddhahood through a dharma that consists of performing deeds (*bya byed kyi chos*). It is called the “Self-sufficient White Remedy” (*dkar po chig thub*) because it is a religion of “descending from above” (*yas babs*), like a garuḍa (*khyung nam mkha*)” descending from the sky onto a tree top.”<sup>564</sup>

[*Reply:*] If you think there is no difference between these accounts: given that the validation of tranquility meditation on signlessness is that one has abandoned all activities, you are just quibbling over mere words. In this regard, according to the *Madhyamakopadeśa* of Jo bo rje [Atiśa]:

<sup>562</sup> D 13 (Dpe bsdur ma ed.), vol. 34, 44<sub>7-10</sub>.

<sup>563</sup> D 494; H 462, vol. 86, 282a<sub>3</sub>. This is among the most important of the so-called *Carya* or *Ubhaya* tantras and was central to the transmission of tantric traditions in China and Japan. Kūkai (774–835) received initiation for this tantra in China from Huikuo and, on returning to Japan, took it as the basis for developing the tantric Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. There is some evidence of its importance in India and China. According to Davidson 2002, 118: “The Ch’an monk Wu-hsing remarked around 680 C.E. that the popularity of the esoteric path was a new and exceptional event in India, observable even while he was in residence. He reputedly brought back with him the earliest version of the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi* tantra, although he did not translate it.”

<sup>564</sup> The quote attributed to Heshang is taken verbatim from *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*, 94<sub>5-8</sub>. See Jackson 1994, 178.

Awareness does not think anything, does not grasp anything, and has abandoned all mindfulness and mental engagement.<sup>565</sup>

Since [Atiśa] stated [this], he must be no different from Heshang. Therefore, you also would be an adherent of Heshang's system because being a follower of Jo bo [Atiśa], you automatically accept [his teachings] without argument.

Moreover, [on your account,] all the stages of meditation of the profound yoga of signlessness in tantras such as the *Kālacakra* and all the stages of meditation in sūtras that teach the authentic path of tranquility would be no different from [the meditation] of Heshang.<sup>566</sup> Indeed, in that case, you wouldn't find anyone who does not adhere to [and believe in] the philosophy of Heshang apart from some worldly types and a few people who are averse to meditation. [559]

[*Query:*] What, then, was the controversy really about? [*Reply:*] Whereas Heshang [sought] to perpetually abandon bodily and verbal activities, we cultivate tranquility, not for all times, but only until we have grown acclimatized to it once it has arisen. Moreover, [according to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.4cd]:

One should first seek tranquility, and that is  
Joyfully accomplished by one who is free from worldly ties.<sup>567</sup>

As is also stated in the *Vimalaprabhā*[*tīkā*]:

The thieves of indecision,  
Guilt, torpor, sloth and agitation,  
Have entered the dark [house] of the relatives,  
And plundered this precious, auspicious path.<sup>568</sup>

<sup>565</sup> *Madhyamopadeśa* (*Dbu ma'i man ngag*) D 3929, 191<sub>2</sub>. (see also D 4468). In his commentary on this text, Prajñāmoṣa clarifies this passage as follows: "[The phrase] 'does not grasp anything' means [awareness] is free from subject and object. "'Has abandoned all [mnemic and thematic] attentions and mental engagements' means it has abandoned all thoughts focused on the past and future and it has abandoned forms, be they beautiful or otherwise (*gzugs sdu gu la sogs pa*).'" (D 241<sub>7</sub>–242<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>566</sup> In other words, all the valid teachings on stages of meditation (*bsgom rim*) in both sūtras and tantras are directed toward an objectless, nonconceptual state of consciousness in which reifications have been abandoned.

<sup>567</sup> See Bhattacharya 1960, 136. Stanza 8.4 reads: "Knowing that deep insight well-endowed with calm abiding vanquishes afflictive emotions, One should first seek calm abiding, and that is joyfully accomplished by one free from worldly ties." *śamathena vipaśyanā suyuṣṭaḥ kurute kleśavināśam ity avetya | śamathaḥ prathamam gaveśanīyaḥ sa ca loka nirapekṣayābhiratyā ||*

<sup>568</sup> D 1347, 110b<sub>5</sub>.

That tranquility is the well-founded mental engagement (*tshul bzhin yid la byed pa*). [According to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*:]

Thus, when one attains great serviceability<sup>569</sup> [of]  
Body and mind though that [tranquility]  
It is known as “having mental engagement”.<sup>570</sup>

Therefore, how could this be a “neutral state” as you assume? In another instance it is stated that even if worldly people meditate on emptiness they are unable to thereby reverse the belief in entities. [As the *Samādhirājasūtra* explains:]

[Although worldly people cultivate *samādhi*,  
They do not destroy the conception of self.]  
Their afflictive emotions fully reassert themselves.  
Udraka<sup>571</sup> cultivated *samādhi* in this way.<sup>572</sup>

If one does not understand selflessness, one will be unable to destroy the belief in entities. Therefore, it was stated [by Sa paṇ] that “meditation on emptiness is a cause of *saṃsāra* and lower destinies.” That said, according to the Ācārya Saraha [*Dohakoṣagīti*]:

By meditating on compassion alone, [560]  
One stays here in *saṃsāra* and will not attain liberation.<sup>573</sup>

<sup>569</sup> This is one of the eleven virtuous mental factors (*sems byung dge ba : kuśalacaitta*): [1] faith (*dad pa : śraddhā*); [2] self-respect (*ngo tsha shes pa : hrī*); (3) decorum (*khrel yod pa : apatrāpya*); [4] non-attachment (*ma chags pa : alobha*); [5] non-hatred (*zhe sdang med pa : adveṣa*); [6] non-ignorance (*gti mug med pa : amoha*); [7] effort (*brtson 'grus : vīrya*); [8] serviceability (*shin tu sbyangs pa : prasrabdhi*); [9] conscientiousness (*bag yod pa : apramāda*); [10] equanimity (*btang snyoms : upekṣā*); [11] non-harmfulness (*rnam par mi 'tshe ba : avihimsā*).

<sup>570</sup> D 4020, 19a<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>571</sup> Udraka Rāmaputra (Pali: Uddaka Rāmaputta) was one of the two teachers mentioned by name under whom the Buddha is said to have studied while he was still a bodhisattva. From this teacher he was introduced to a trance state known as the “realm of neither ideation nor non-ideation” (*naīvasaṃjñānāsaṃjñānāyatana*). After gaining proficiency in this and meditative states involving the suppression of mental activity, the Buddha eventually concluded that such trances lead only to a state of blank-mindedness but not to the goal of enlightenment, peace or *nīrvāṇa*. For the details and rhetorical function of this episode in the Buddha’s life-story, see Bronkhorst 2009, 19–20 and 51 f.

<sup>572</sup> H 129, 44b<sub>1</sub>. The first two lines of this stanza have been added for context. H 44a<sub>7</sub>-44b<sub>1</sub>: 'jig rten dag na ting 'dzin sgom byed kyang | de ni bdag tu 'du shes gzhiḡ mi byed |

<sup>573</sup> D 2224, 71b<sub>1</sub>.

If one does not understand both [kinds of] selflessness [of persons and phenomena], one is unable to destroy the belief in entities. Hence, one would also have to say that “meditation on compassion is a cause of *saṃsāra* and lower destinies” because in the same way that meditation on emptiness is mistaken if one does not understand the two [kinds of] selflessness, the same holds true for compassion. For, doesn’t one cultivate compassion as well?

In that regard, people who do not understand selflessness—being separated from the skillful means of compassion and discerning insight of emptiness—remain separated from accumulating stores of merit and knowledge. Therefore, an occasion for them to realize the two kinds of selflessness is impossible. The [*Prajñāpāramitā*]*sañcaya*[*gāthā*] states:

So long as one has not completed the two accumulations,  
One will not realize the true emptiness.<sup>574</sup>

Also, as the *Jñānasiddhi* [of Indrabhūti] states,

Whenever there is deluded meditation,  
One attains delusion by means of delusion.<sup>575</sup>

This was mentioned [in Sa paṇ’s view] because “certain methods of settling the mind in an uncontrived state have been explained as ‘deluded meditation’.”<sup>576</sup> In that way, thinking that such persons had succumbed to [this] ‘deluded meditation’, [he] refuted them. But what is the use of applying this to [all] the others? [According to this logic,] since within the practice of ethics, certain violations (*’chal pa*)<sup>577</sup> are mentioned, you would take all [cases of] ethical observance as violations.<sup>578</sup> Moreover, those who are so paranoid about failings such as pitfalls and deviations (*shor gol*) take pride in criticizing us. Since even I maintain this is this case, you [561] may as well rashly say whatever you please.

The claim that [the Bka’ brgyud meditation] is not the Mantrayāna Mahāmudrā meditation since it is the Prajñāpāramitā meditation should likewise be rejected. Why? Because [our meditation] is precisely the yoga spanning day and night which belongs to the withdrawal

<sup>574</sup> H 12, 269a<sub>1</sub> (D, H have different first line)

<sup>575</sup> This often-quoted passage was not identified in the *Jñānasiddhi* but it is first mentioned by Sa skya Paṇḍita in his *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*, on which see Jackson 1994, 182, 185.

<sup>576</sup> *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*, 51a. For Tibetan text of passage, see Jackson 1994, 185 (note: *dang* should be corrected to *ngang*).

<sup>577</sup> This refers to the ethical failings (*tshul khrims ’chal pa : duḥśīla*) discussed in MSA.

<sup>578</sup> Padma dkar po here warns against the fallacy of taking an exception as a rule.

(*pratyāhāra*)<sup>579</sup> phase of Mahāmudrā meditation as described in the *Kālacakra*.<sup>580</sup> As a *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtra states,

One who unites with space is one who unites with perfection of wisdom. One who unites with the unsurpassed is one who unites with the perfection of wisdom.<sup>581</sup>

The great sages of India [such as Nāropa] claimed that [Mahāmudrā meditation] was taught in precisely this way [i.e., in line with *Prajñāpāramitā*]. Now, please tell me how settling the mind in equipoise can be an enemy, let alone the other [i.e., transcendent] path of Great Mantra? If single-pointed mind is not attained, the Generation Stage also goes awry and one cannot elicit its potential. Isn't it explained in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* [*Prajñāpāramitā*]?

Moreover, given that our four yogas and [those of] the Alīkākāravādins are only nominally similar, how can they be [considered] the same? Since, according to above discussions, [Mahāmudrā meditation] was extensively explained as being nonamenable to invalidation, or as unity (*yuganaddha*), or as coemergent wisdom (*sahajajñāna*), this also undermines the claim that it is exclusively a sūtric path. Since in the sūtras, the basic teachings are shown concisely, whereas in the tantras [their] hidden meanings are extensively explained, there is also no [fundamental] difference concerning [their respective] stages of the path.

### 3b. Critical Edition of *Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam*

(PKsb vol. 21: 553–561<sub>6</sub>)

*Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam* bzhugs so ||<sub>[554]</sub>

'jam mgon bla ma'i zhabs la phyag 'tshal lo ||

gang gsung bdud rtsi'i cha shas re res kyang ||  
log rtog mun pa'i khengs 'joms nges don gyi ||  
ku mud 'byed pa'i 'jam mgon bsil zer can ||

<sup>579</sup> 'Withdrawal' ([*so*] *sor sdud* [*pa*] : *pratyāhāra*) refers to the first of the six limbs of the Buddhist Six-limbed Yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga* : *sbyor ba yan lag drug pa*), a *sadhana* that become closely with Kālacakra teachings. Concerning withdrawal, Francisco Sferra states that "[o]n the one hand, it consists of the interruption of the ordinary function of the senses and their external activity, and on the other hand, of their remaining at rest (*svavṛttistha*). It is said that the sense faculties act in a 'divine' way, namely, that they perceive their objects as non-differentiated realities, i.e., as realities not included among those that can be conceptually conceived. Through the withdrawal, the yogin remains in a condition of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) devoid of conceptual construction (*nirvikalpa*).” On the history and significance of *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, see Sferra 2000, 15 f. and 22 f.

<sup>580</sup> See previous note.

<sup>581</sup> This passage is quoted with minor variation in Nāropa's *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*. See SUṬ<sub>T</sub> (Sferra and Merzagora, eds.) 2006, Skt., 128; Tib., 300. For Tibetan text, see D 1351, 254a<sub>5</sub>-254a<sub>6</sub>.



dad pa'i yid mkhar rol der phyag 'tshal lo||

dpyod ldan yon po'i ngag gi rjes zhugs 'ga' ||  
 som nyis rgyal ba'i gzhung lam 'di spangs nas ||  
 tshul min mya ngan lam 'khyams dub pa dag ||  
 snying rje'i gzhan dbang song bas slar 'dir khrid ||

deng sang 'ga' zhig na re | khyod kyis phyag rgya chen po dang rgya nag lugs kyis rdzogs chen  
 gnyis yas 'dzeg dang mas 'dzeg ming 'dogs phyogs bsgyur ba ma gtogs khyad med do zhes  
 grag go |

dpyad kyis | kho bo cag gis lta ba ji lta ba bzhin du gtan la phebs pa ni gnas lugs mngon sum du  
 rtogs pa kho na la rag las te | gzhan ngag gi lam las 'das shing | yid kyis spyod pa'i yul du nam  
 yang ma gyur pas so || de ltar mngon sum du rtogs pa'i don de nyid ji lta ba brjod pa la | dus  
 gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyang tshig gis 'phongs par gyur pa nyid don la gnas pas | tha  
 snyad rnam par 'jog pa'i tshe khas len dang bral lo zhes smras so || de las gzhan du lta ba'i  
 rnam gzhag bshad pa thams cad blos btags nas <sup>[555]</sup> bzhag pa'i phyir | rigs pas dpyad bzod ma  
 yin no || de tsam gyis **hwa shang** dang khyad par med par gyur na | **slob dpon 'phags pa yab**  
**sras** kyis | lta ba kun bzlog la zhugs pa'i dus su |

gal te stong min cung zad yod ||  
 stong pa cung zad yod par 'gyur ||  
 mi stong cung zad yod min na ||  
 stong pa yod par ga la 'gyur ||

rgyal ba rnams kyis stong pa nyid ||  
 lta kun nges par 'byin par gsungs ||  
 gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba ||  
 de dag bsgrub tu med par gsungs ||

zhes dang |

gal te ngas dam bca' 'ga' yod ||  
 des na nga la skyon 'di yod ||  
 nga la dam bca' med pas na ||  
 nga ni skyon med kho na yin ||

zhes de nyid gsungs pas || de yang **hwa shang** dang khyad par med par 'gyur ro || de ltar na  
 lugs 'di 'dzin pa'i **slob dpon ka ma la shī la** dang | **rgya'i hwa shang** ci la rtsod | khyod kyis  
 bsam par bya dgos so || **slob dpon yab sras** don dam dpyod pa'i rig ngor de skad gsung la |  
 khyod la rig pas dpyad pa med pas mi mthun no snyam na | de yang ga la yin | **slob dpon** kyang

don dam dpyod byed kyī rigs ngor de skad gsung | nged kyang don dam gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshē  
de skad smra bas ji ltar mi mthun | don dam la dpyod pa'i rigs pa yang | don dam gtan la 'bebs  
pa'i tshul<sup>[556]</sup> nyid yin pas | de gnyis la bye brag ci yod |

khyod go na de ltar smra bas skyon med du chug kyang | gong ma rnams kyis ma yin no zhe  
na | de yang ci la 'thad | **rje btsun mi las** |

lta ba gtan la 'bebs tsa na ||  
rmongs pa nga 'dra ma yin pa ||  
yang dag rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyis ||  
lkug ma'am gzhon nu'i dga' ba bzhin ||  
mtshon pa tsam las ma gtogs<sup>582</sup> pa ||  
'di nyid ston par ga la nus ||

zhes dang |

kha lta don du khyer ba rnams ||  
don dang mthun par ngas ma mthong ||

zhes gsungs pa ma mthong zhing ma go bar zad la | gzhan lugs mi shes bzhin du sun 'byin byed  
pa'i ngal ba brten dgos pa khyed la rgya rgyal po'i lung zhig byung ba yin nam |

yang mno bsam ma thongs pa la la | lta ba la de ltar yin du chug na'ang | sgom pa'i tshul dang  
spyod pa la khyad par med do lo | ci **hwa shang** gis lus ngag gi dge ba thams cad khyad du  
bsad nas mi rtog pa 'ba' zhig gis sems rtogs shing de nyid kyis grol bar 'dod la | kho bo cag |  
dang por 'du 'dzi dang g.yeng ba thams cad spangs te | zhi gnas sam | sems rtse gcig pa'am |  
nam par mi rtog pa'am | mtshan ma med pa la gnas pa bsgrubs | de la 'byams na gol sar bzhag  
| de tsam zhig med na ye shes kyī tshogs bsgrub pa'i gzhi mi 'byung bas med mi rung du byas  
| de nas snying rje chen po<sup>[557]</sup> sogs thabs ji snyed pa dang | de gnyis zung 'brel gyi stong nyid  
snying rje zung 'jug gis shes rab bskyed | de skyes pa dang sems ngo 'phrod | zab mo'i shes rab  
des spang bya mtha' dag spong zhing | des nam pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyī bar du  
bsgrub par bshad pas khyad par med par ji ltar 'gyur | ma gyur kyang khyad med par gyur na  
snyam na | khyed kyī re ba rdzogs par gyur cig ces kho bo cag gis kyang smon lam 'debs rogs  
bya'o || tshul de nyid mdo las ma bshad pa ma yin te | ting nge 'dzin rgyal po las |

mkhas pas 'dus byas 'dus ma byas rig ste<sup>583</sup> ||

<sup>582</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *rtogs*

<sup>583</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *nas*; D: *ste*

mtshan ma'i 'du shes dag ni<sup>584</sup> rnam bshig nas<sup>585</sup> ||  
 mtshan ma med pa la ni de gnas na ||  
 chos rnams thams cad stong par rab tu shes ||

zhes dang | sdud pa las |

shes rab kyis ni chos kyis rang bzhin yongs shes te<sup>586</sup> ||  
 khams gsum ma lus pa las yang dag 'da' bar 'gyur ||  
 mi yi khyu mchog 'khor lo rin chen bskor byas nas ||  
 sdug bsngal zad par bya phyir 'gro la chos kyang ston ||

zhes dang | rnam snang mngon byang las |

thabs dang shes rab ldan pa la ||  
 bslab nas<sup>587</sup> bla med theg pa ni ||  
 'dus ma byas pa de thob bo ||

zhes gsungs | de bas na | mdo rgyud gang nas kyang ma bshad pa'i rgyu mtshan ci zhig yod |  
 khyod<sup>[558]</sup> kyis mi rtog pa bsgrub pa'i tshe | 'das pa mi mno | ma 'ongs pa mi bsam | da lta ba mi  
 dpyad | ched du ci yang mi bsgom | stong pa nyid tsam du yang mi sems | sems rang babs su  
 bzhag go zhes smras pa dang **hwa shang** gis

bya byed kyis chos kyis 'tshang mi rgya bas | rnam par mi rtog pa bsgoms nas sems  
 rtogs pa nyid kyis 'tshang rgya ste | khyung nam mkha' las shing rtser 'bab pa ltar  
 yas babs kyis chos yin pas dkar po chig thub yin no ||

zer ba khyad par med do snyam na | mtshan ma med pa'i zhi gnas bsgom tshad bya byed thams  
 cad spong bas tshig tsam la khyod rtsod pa zhig ste | de lta na | **jo bo rje**'i dbu ma'i man ngag  
 tu |

shes pa cir yang mi rtog cir yang mi 'dzin | dran pa dang yid la byed pa thams  
 cad spangs te ||

zhes bshad pas | de yang **hwa shang** dang khyad med du gyur bas | khyod nyid kyang **hwa shang**  
 gi lugs 'dzin par 'gyur te | jo bo'i rjes 'jug tu gtan tshigs med u tshugs kyis khas len pas  
 so ||

<sup>584</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *thams cad*; D: *dag ni*

<sup>585</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *ste*; D: *nas*

<sup>586</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *nas*; D: *te*

<sup>587</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *na*; H: *nas*

gzhan yang | dus kyi 'khor lo sogs rgyud sde zab mo'i mtshan ma med pa'i rnal 'byor gyi sgom  
rim thams cad dang | zhi lhag gi lam mtshan nyid pa ston pa'i mdo'i sgom rim thams cad kyang  
**hwa shang** gi dang khyad par med par 'gyur la | de lta na | 'jig rten pa 'ga' zhig dang | sgom la  
zhe 'gras pa re gnyis las | **hwa shang** gi grub mtha' mi 'dzin pa su yang <sup>[559]</sup> rnyed par mi 'gyur  
ro ||

don la rtsod do zhe na | **hwa shang** gis lus ngag gi bya byed gtan du spong ba yin la | nged cag  
ni zhi gnas skyed pa dang | skyes nas goms pa'i bar du ste | dus thams cad du ni ma yin no | de  
yang |

thog mar zhi gnas btsal bya de yang ni ||  
'jig rten chags pa med la mngon dgas 'grub ||

ces dang | dri ma med pa'i 'od las yang |

the tshom 'gyod pa dag dang gnyid dang ni ||  
le lo rgod pa'i chom rkun 'di<sup>588</sup> rnam kyis<sup>589</sup> ||  
gnyen 'dun 'thibs po'i nang du zhugs pa yin<sup>590</sup> ||  
lam bzang rin chen 'di<sup>591</sup> ni 'phrog par byed ||

ces gsungs pa bzhin no || zhi gnas de nyid tshul bzhin yid la byed pa yin te |

des na de yis<sup>592</sup> lus dang sems ||  
shin tu sbyang pa che thob nas ||  
yid la byed dang bcas shes bya ||

zhes gsungs pas | lung ma bstan yin no snyam pa ltar du yang ji ltar 'gyur | yang 'ga' zhig 'jig  
rten pa dag stong nyid bsgom na yang | de yis dngos por 'dzin pa bzlog mi nus ||

[ 'jig rten dag na ting 'dzin sgom byed kyang |  
de ni bdag tu 'du shes gzhi mi byed ||<sup>593</sup>  
de yi<sup>594</sup> nyon mongs phyir yang rab tu ldang ||

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<sup>588</sup> D: om. 'di

<sup>589</sup> D: addit. kyang

<sup>590</sup> D: yi

<sup>591</sup> D: dag

<sup>592</sup> KZsb, KZbc: yi; D: yis

<sup>593</sup> The first two lines of stanza from H are added for context.

<sup>594</sup> KZsb, KZbc: yis; D: yi

lhag spyod kyis ni ting 'dzin 'dir bsgom bzhin ||

zhes gsungs | bdag med ma rtogs na dngos por 'dzin pa 'jig mi nus pas | stong nyid bsgom pa  
'khor ba dang ngan song gi rgyu yin no || zer mod | 'o na **slob dpon sa ra has** |

'on te snying rje 'ba' zhig bsgoms pas kyang<sup>595</sup> ||  
'khor ba<sub>[560]</sub> 'dir gnas thar pa thob mi 'gyur<sup>596</sup> ||

zhes pas | bdag med gnyis ma rtogs na dngos por 'dzin pa 'jig mi nus pas | snying rje bsgom pa  
'khor ba ngan song gi rgyu yin no || zhes zer dgos par 'gyur la | bdag med gnyis ma rtogs par  
stong pa nyid bsgom pa 'khrul pa yin pas stong nyid mi bsgom pa bzhin du | snying rje yang  
mtshungs pas | snying rje yang mi bsgom mam |

de lta na thabs snying rje dang | shes rab stong nyid dang bral ba'i bdag med ma rtogs pa'i  
gang zag rnams | bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs gsog pa dang bral bas | de dag gis bdag  
med gnyis rtogs pa'i dus mi srid de | sdud pa las |

ji srid tshogs gnyis yongs su rdzogs par ma byas par<sup>597</sup> |  
de srid stong nyid dam pa de ni rtogs mi 'gyur<sup>598</sup> |

zhes gsungs pas so || yang ye shes grub pa las |

rmongs pa'i sgom pa gang yin pa ||  
rmongs pas rmongs pa thob par 'gyur ||

zhes blo ma bcos pa'i ngang la 'jog pa'i tshul 'ga' zhig rmongs pa'i sgom par bshad pa'i phyir  
| de yang rmongs pa'i sgom par song snyam nas dgag mod | gzhan bya ci dgos | tshul khrims  
bsrung ba'i nang nas | 'chal pa 'ga' zhig bshad pas | tshul khrims bsrung ba thams cad tshul  
khrims 'chal par yang khyod kyis gzung zhig | gzhan yang | shor gol gyi skyon 'jigs 'jigs dag  
gis bdag cag sun 'byin par rlom ste | bdag kyang de ltar 'dod pas | khyod rang<sub>[561]</sub> ci dga' bar  
byung rgyal du smros shig ||

shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i sgom yin pas | gsang sngags kyi phyag rgya chen po'i sgom  
ma yin par 'dod pa 'di yang deng phyin nas dor cig || ci'i phyir zhe na | **dus 'khor** nas gsung  
pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i bsgom pa sor sdud kyi nyin mtshan gyi rnal 'byor nyid | sher phyin  
gyi mdor |

<sup>595</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *pas kyang*; D: *na yang*

<sup>596</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *sam ci*; D: *mi 'gyur*

<sup>597</sup> D, H: *de dag dge ba'i rtsa ba ji srid ma rdzogs pa* |

<sup>598</sup> D, H: *thob mi byed*

gang nam<sup>599</sup> mkha' la rnal 'byor du byed pa de ni<sup>600</sup> | shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin  
 pa la rnal 'byor du byed pa yin no<sup>601</sup> || <sup>602</sup>gang bla gab med pa la rnal 'byor du byed  
 pa de ni<sup>603</sup> shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa la rnal 'byor du byed pa yin no<sup>604</sup> ||

zhes tshul 'di nyid kyi bstan par 'phags yul gyi mkhas pa chen po dag bzhed pas so || lar sems  
 mnyam par 'jog pa la dgra lta ci 'tshal | gsang chen gyi lam gzhan lta zhog | sems rtse gcig pa  
 ma thob na | bskyed rim kyang 'chol bar song nas nus pa mi 'byin par *brgya stong* du bshad pa  
 ma yin nam | yang kho bo cag gi rnal 'byor bzhi dang | rnam rdzun pa ming du mthun kyang  
 gcig par ga la 'gyur te | gong du bshad pa rnam kyi gnod par ma nges sam | zung 'jug dang  
 lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes rgyas par bshad pas | mdo lam rkyang par 'dod pa'ang 'jig go | mdor  
 dngos bstan mdo tsam bshad la | sngags su sbas don rgyas par bshad pas lam rim tha dad pa  
 yang ma yin no ||

## RESPONSE TO NAM MKHA' RGYAL MTSHAN'S CRITIQUE OF PADMA DKAR PO'S AMANASIKĀRA

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following is an excerpt from a short text entitled *A Reply to Objections from Shar rtse* (*Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan*) in which Padma dkar po offers a concise response to a criticism of his *amanasikāra* interpretation advanced by the Dge lugs critic Shar chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532–1592)<sup>605</sup> in his *Byang chub sems 'grel gyi rnam par bshad pa'i zhar byung 'brug Mi pham Padma dkar pos Phyag chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces par Rje Tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa'i gsung lan*, a lengthy critical response to the 'Brug pa master's criticism of Dge lugs pa doctrine in his *Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*. The *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan* is contained in a collection of responses to various criticisms entitled *Discussions to Quell Objections* (*Klan ka gzhom pa'i gtam*). Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's work is contained in a collection of Dge lugs pa polemical works entitled *Phyin ci log gi gtam gyi sbyor ba la zhugs pa'i smra ba ngan pa rnam par 'thag pa'i bstan bcos gnam lcags 'khor lo*, 607–65.

The following editions of the *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

<sup>599</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *na*; D, SUṬ<sub>T</sub>: *nam*

<sup>600</sup> D, SUṬ<sub>T</sub> om. *ni* |

<sup>601</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *yin no*; D, SUṬ<sub>T</sub>: *pa'o*

<sup>602</sup> KZsb, KZbc: om. *kau sī ka*

<sup>603</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *de ni*; D, SUṬ<sub>T</sub>: *par 'dod pa de*

<sup>604</sup> KZsb, KZbc: *pa yin no*; D, SUṬ<sub>T</sub>: *pa'o*

<sup>605</sup> On this criticism, see Volume I, 422 f.

SGsb: *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: 1974, vol. 21: 585<sub>6</sub>–587<sub>5</sub>

SGbc: *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo*. Kathmandu: 200?, vol. 41: 552<sub>1</sub>–554<sub>2</sub>.

#### 4a. English Translation of *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan* (excerpt)

Concerning [our] explanation of the term *amanasikāra*, [you have alleged] that it contradicts authoritative scripture like the statement in the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*: “Here, regarding explanations [given in] canonical texts, when one follows *only* the sense of terms based on the previous renderings of words and meanings according to grammatical analysis, [586] [one does not thereby know how and why what is expressed by the syllable [a] actually applies.]”<sup>606</sup> etc. [As for your allegation that] “taking it as an object of the mode of apprehending emptiness in equipoise, you correlate it with claims about meditation”.<sup>607</sup> This commits neither of two faults of reasoning because [1] that [above] quotation refutes the clinging to the Sanskrit language [and thus losing sight of the deeper meaning], and [2] the meaning of the syllable [given] in the *Four Explanations [on the History of Grammatical Writings]*<sup>608</sup> would otherwise not make sense.

In the latter case, it does not constitute [a fallacy of reasoning] because the meaning of that term [*amanasikāra*] as “not mentally engaging in the unfounded” means precisely “to mentally engage in the well-founded”. And, in that regard, not seeing any strands of hairs in the sky is precisely the correct seeing, whereas the strands of hair and so forth are said to be due to the influence of vitreous floaters. Unfounded mental engagement is ignorance (*ma rig pa*); well-founded mental engagement is personally realized self-awareness (*so so rang rig*). In this context, ignorance means conceptualizing.<sup>609</sup> According to a Caryātantra<sup>610</sup> [Virūpa’s *Suṇiṣprapañcatattvopadeśa*]:

Divisive conceptualizing is great ignorance;

<sup>606</sup> *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, D 1803, 141<sub>7</sub>–142<sub>1</sub>. For the complete passage and an analysis of the differing interpretations of it by Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan and Padma dkar po, Volume I, 422 f.

<sup>607</sup> See Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan’s *Byang chub sems 'grel gyi rnam par bshad pa'i zhar byung 'brug Mi pham Padma dkar po's Phyag chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces par rje tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa'i gsung lan*, 610<sub>6</sub> f. This passage is translated and discussed in Volume I, 423 n. 1218.

<sup>608</sup> On this work, see Volume I, 424 n. 1220.

<sup>609</sup> On and well-founded (*yoniso*) and unfounded (*ayoniso*) forms of *manasikāra*, see Volume I, 418 f.

<sup>610</sup> This passage is often quoted in Indian and Tibetan sources with varying attributions. The only non-quotational canonical source of the passage we could find was Virūpa’s *Suṇiṣprapañcatattvopadeśa* (D 2020, 163<sub>3</sub>) which is not a *tantra* but an *upadeśa*.

It makes one sink<sup>611</sup> into the ocean of *saṃsāra*.<sup>612</sup>

In this regard, meditation based on conceptualizing and the discriminating analysis of emptiness is that of the śrāvakas. [In the case of] the Mahāyāna path, the [*Mahāyāna*] *sūtrālaṃkāra* [19.52] states:

Wisdom that perceives suchness is  
Meditation without differentiated aspects.  
Direct perception of what exists and does not exist  
Is called the mastery<sup>613</sup> over conceptualization.

The commentary on this [Vasubandhu’s *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*] states:

It is “meditation without differentiated aspects” because no differentiation is seen between signs and suchness. This shows well what distinguishes (*viśeṣaḥ*) the signlessness of bodhisattvas from the signlessness of śrāvakas. [587] For, those (*te hi*) [śrāvakas], seeing signs and signlessness as different do not mentally engage in all the signs but mentally engage in the sphere of signlessness, and thus become absorbed in signlessness. However, bodhisattvas see even signs as signless by virtue of not seeing signs apart from suchness. Consequently, their wisdom consists in the “meditation<sup>614</sup> without differentiated aspects”.<sup>615</sup>

And, if nothing exists as a basis of analysis on the side of concepts and signs, then where would that [suchness] arise as an object of analysis which is either existent or nonexistent? According to the [*Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.140ab]:

Having not contacted any conceptualized entity,  
One does not apprehend the nonexistence of that.<sup>616</sup>

And [the *Rājādeśa sūtra*]:

<sup>611</sup> D 2020: *nub byed*; PG: *ltung byed*.

<sup>612</sup> Tib. *Shin tu spros pa med pa de kho na nyid kyī man ngag*, D 2020 (161<sub>7</sub>–167), 163<sub>3</sub>.

<sup>613</sup> The term *vikalpavibhu* in MSA is characterized as *vikalpavibhva* (“mastery over conceptualization”) in the commentary.

<sup>614</sup> Tibetan text has *bsgom pa sgom pa yin*. Sanskrit (Levi ed.) has *bhāvitam*.

<sup>615</sup> See MSA (Levi ed.) 169–70.

<sup>616</sup> Our translation follows BCA (Vaidya ed.): *kalpitaṃ bhāvaṃ asprṣtvā tadabhāvo na gṛhyate* | We here take *tadabhāva* as a genitive *tadpuruṣa* “nonexistence of that” based on the Prajñākaramati’s commentary to 9.40ab on 591.16 (Vaidya ed.).



When these entities are relinquished, you don't have to search for emptiness.<sup>617</sup>

According to the meaning of such passages, it was stated [by Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor that]

When one recognizes the nature of conceptual thought,  
Whatever arises is liberated as *dharmakāya*.<sup>618</sup>

The essential point [of these passages] is the same.

#### 4b. Critical Edition of *Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan* (excerpt)

(PKsb vol. 21: 585<sub>6</sub>.587<sub>5</sub>) *a ma na si kā ra*'i<sup>619</sup> sgra bshad la | *spyod bsdu*s kyi |

'di na gsung rab 'chad pa dag ni | *byā*<sup>620</sup> *ka ra ṇa*'i tshig don sngon du<sup>621</sup> byas nas  
sgra'i don 'ba' zhig gi rjes su 'brang ngo [...] <sup>[586]</sup>

sogs kyis lung 'gal | kho bo cag mnyam gzahag tu stong pa nyid 'dzin stangs kyi yul du byas  
nas sgom par 'dod pa'i rjes su 'brangs pa'i rigs skyon gnyis kar du mi 'gyur te | lung de ni legs  
par sbyar ba'i skad la zhen pa dgag pa yin la | gzhan du na *bshad pa bzhi*'i yig don mi rigs par  
'gyur bas so || phyi mar yang mi 'gyur te | de'i sgra don tshul min yid la mi byed pa | de ka  
tshul bzhin yid la byed pa yin pa dang | de yang nam mkha'la skra shad ci yang ma mthong ba  
nyid mthong ba yang dag pa yin par | rab rib mthu yis skra shad la sogs pa gsungs pas so ||  
tshul bzhin ma yin pa yid byed ni ma rig pa | tshul bzhin yid byed ni so so rang rig 'dir bstan  
ma rig pa'ang rnam rtog ste | *spyod rgyud* las |

rnam rtog ma rig chen po ste ||<sup>622</sup>

<sup>617</sup> *Rājādeśnāmamahāyānasūtra* (Tib. *Rgyal po la gdams pa shes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*) D 215, 421<sub>3</sub>.

<sup>618</sup> In his *Mchog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas rnam par phye ba gsang ba thams cad bshad pa'i mdzod*, PKsb vol. 13, Padma dkar po attributes this passage to "Rgyal dbang rje," i.e., 'Brug chen II Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor (1428–1476). We have so far been unable to locate this passage.

<sup>619</sup> SGsb, SGbc: *a ma nā si ka ra*'i

<sup>620</sup> Tib. *ba* = Skt. *va*

<sup>621</sup> SGsb, SGbc: *mngon du*; corrected to *don sngon du* as per *Phyag chen gyi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces par rje tsong kha pa la dgag pa mdzad pa'i gsung lan*

<sup>622</sup> addit. |

'khor ba'i<sup>623</sup> rgya mtshor ltung<sup>624</sup> byed yin ||<sup>625</sup>

zhes pas so || de yang rnam rtog dang stong pa nyid so sor 'byed pa'i sgom pa nyan thos kyi  
yin | theg chen lam yin pa mdo sde rgyan las |

de bzhin nyid dmigs ye shes ni ||  
rnam pa tha dad med bsgom zhing ||  
yod dang med don mngon sum pa ||  
rnam rtog dbang 'byor nyid ces bya |<sup>626</sup>

de'i 'grel par |

rnam pa tha dad med par bsgom pa ni mtshan ma dang de bzhin nyid dag tha mi  
dad pa nyid du mthong ba'i phyir ro || 'dis ni nyan thos kyi mtshan ma med pa las  
byang chub <sup>[587]</sup> sems dpa'i mtshan ma med pa khyad zhugs par yongs su bstan te |  
de dag gi mtshan ma dang mtshan ma med pa tha dad pa nyid du mthong nas mtshan  
ma thams cad yid la mi byed pa dang | mtshan ma med pa'i dbyings yid la byed  
pa'i sgo nas mtshan ma med pa la snyoms par 'jug go || byang chub sems dpa'  
rnams ni de bzhin nyid la ma gtogs pa'i mtshan ma mthong bas mtshan ma med  
par mthong ste | de'i phyir de dag gi ye shes ni rnam pa tha dad med par bsgom pa  
sgom pa yin no ||

zhes gsungs pa dang | dpyad gzhi rnam rtog gam mtshan ma phyogs la med na | de yod med  
dpyad rgyu gar 'ong | des

brtags pa'i dngos la ma reg par<sup>627</sup> |  
de yi<sup>628</sup> dngos med 'dzin ma yin ||<sup>629</sup>

dang |

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<sup>623</sup> D 2020: *srid pa'i*

<sup>624</sup> D 2020: *nub*

<sup>625</sup> addit. |

<sup>626</sup> Levi 19.52: *tathatālabanam jñānāmanānākārabhāvitam* | *sadasattarthe pratyakṣam vikalpavibhu cocyate* ||

<sup>627</sup> SGsb: *pa* corrected as per Vaidya ed.

<sup>628</sup> SGsb: *yis* corrected as per Vaidya ed.

<sup>629</sup> For the Tibetan, we follow the critical edition of Tibetan in Oldmeadow 1994: Appendix, 191.

dnogs 'di spangs nas stong nyid mi btsal gyi ||<sup>630</sup>

sogs kyi lung don de dang des ||

rnam rtog gi rang bzhin shes tsa na ||

gang shar 'di chos skur khrol lo lo ||

gsungs pa gnad gcig pas so ||

## AMANASIKĀRA IN THE CONTEXT OF NONREFERENTIAL MEDITATION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: The following is a short excerpt from a short text entitled *Mirror of Mind: Personal Guidance on the Quintessential Meaning* (*Snying po don gyi man ngag sems kyi me long*) in which Padma dkar po explains the role of mental nonengagement in the context of nonreferential meditation. This passage provides a concise but cogent example of how the idea of *amanasikāra* is used in Bka' brgyud meditation instructions (*man ngag*), both oral or written, to directly introduce the nature of mind. Padma dkar po uses the instruction as an opportunity to emphasize that this type of mental nonengagement does not involve the cessation of *all* mental activity, but only those mental engagements which are bound up with an apprehended object and apprehending subject.

The following editions of the *Snying po don gyi man ngag sems kyi me long* were used in preparing the translation and critical edition:

NSsb: *Padma dkar po gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: 1974, vol. 21: 414<sub>5</sub>–415<sub>3</sub>

NSbc: *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo*. Kathmandu: 200?, vol. 41: 362<sub>2</sub>–363<sub>6</sub>

### 5a. English Translation of *Snying po don gyi man ngag* (excerpt)

When body and mind relax deeply and all the movements of mind and mental factors have come to rest, it is precisely through mental nonengagement wherein one does not think about anything at all that one lets mind rest uncontrivedly in its own nature, just as it is. But in case this does not last, one should take hold of mind by way of various skillful means <sup>[415]</sup> so that thoughts are unable to go out to their objects. Then, since they are unable to do so, the thoughts of the six sense faculties will subside. When, by this method, thoughts dissipate in their expanse so that one distinguishes mind's clarity from its dregs, then the very essence of mind being free from all identifiable objects remains as pure [or clear] as the sky [or space].

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<sup>630</sup> D 215, 421<sub>3</sub>.

Since one has thereby fully transcended verbal expression, intellectual thematization, and the objects of worldly meditation, it is called “making manifest the buddha’s intent”. According to Maitrīpa [quoting the *Laṅkāvatāra*]:

So long as the mind is engaged,  
There will be no end to the vehicles.  
When mind as such is fully realized,  
There are no vehicles and no freedom [either].<sup>631</sup>

There doesn’t exist any so-called “liberation” apart from this. By ascertaining the single exalted state of liberation, the path one travels to reach it is also just this uncontrived path of mental nonengagement because other [paths] do not transcend conceptual meditation. Moreover according to venerable Nāgārjuna:

Because the *dharmadhātu* is indivisible,  
The main vehicle is not divisible [either].  
The three vehicles were taught by you  
In order to mobilize sentient beings.<sup>632</sup>

[In sum,] the three vehicles were taught extensively in order to make [others] realize the intended goal of pondering emptiness in its conceptual <sup>[416]</sup> and nonconceptual [aspects]. As for what is termed “mental nonengagement,” some have viewed it as the stupefied meditation of an impaired mind. But apart from the cessation of mental engagements involving the apprehended [object] and apprehending [subject], how could it constitute the [complete] cessation of mind? Likewise, the expression “the king’s mistress does not see the sun” does not [imply] a negation [of the existence] of the sun.<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> *Laṅkāvatāra* 2.204 (p. 135.2–3) and 10.458 (p. 322.15–16): Skt. *yānānām nāsti vai niṣṭhā yāvac cittaṃ pravartate | citte tu vai parāvṛtte na yānaṃ na ca yāyinaḥ* | Tib. *ji srid sems ni ’jug pa’i bar | [the]g pa’i mtha’ la thug pa med* ||

<sup>632</sup> The source of the quotation has yet to be identified but it is quoted almost verbatim in Maitrīpa’s *Tattvaratnāvalī*, D 2240, 119b<sub>2</sub> and with minor variation in Atiśa’s *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā*, D 3948, 259a<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>633</sup> This example is from Maitrīpa’s *Amanasikārādhāra* where it is argued that *amanasikāra* is a negation (*pratiṣedha*) of a special type where only the relevant is negated. The passage [Mathes’ translation] reads as follows: “The next [opponent] says: [True, the sense of *amanasikāra*] is also [found] in the tantra[s], [but] what it refers to does not exist, since [*manasikāra*] is the object of the negative particle in a nonaffirming negation (*prasajyapraṭiṣedha*). [Response:] That is not the case. [A nonaffirming negation] is a negation of what is relevant: Not to negate what is not applicable (*aprasajya*) is [the defining characteristic of] a nonaffirming negation, like for instance “the wives of the king who do not see the sun.” The meaning of this is as follows: The wives of the king are indeed kept secret (i.e., protected from other men), so that they even do not see the sun. This does not imply the nonexistence of the sun. Then what [does it imply]? What is applicable: that the wives of the king see the sun—that is what is negated. In the case of becoming mentally disengaged, too, it what is applicable—namely mental engagement [resulting] in something perceived, a perceiver and the like—that is negated by the

### 5b. Critical Edition of *Snying po don gyi man ngag* (excerpt)

(PKsb vol. 21: 414<sub>5</sub>–415<sub>3</sub>) lus sems khong glod la || sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba thams cad bcad nas ci la yang mi rtog par yid la mi byed pa nyid kyis sems rang gi rang bzhin la ji lta ba nyid du ma bcas par gzahag go || gal srid mi gnas na || thabs sna tshogs pa'i sgo nas sems <sup>[415]</sup>gzung bas rnam par rtog pa yul la 'phro mi nus la || de ma nus pas dbang po drug gi rtog pa nub par 'gyur zhing || tshul des rtog pa dbyings su yal bas sems dwangs<sup>634</sup> snyigs phyed pa de'i tshe sems rang gi ngo bo yang ngos gzung thams cad dang bral nas nam mkha' ltar dag pas || tshig gi brjod pa dang || blo bsam pa dang | 'jig rten pa'i sgom pa'i yul las shin tu 'das pas || sangs rgyas kyis dgongs pa mngon du byas pa zhes bya ste || **rje btsun mai tri pas** ||

ji srid sems ni 'jug bar du ||  
theg pa'i mtha' la thug pa med ||  
sems nyid yongs su gyur pa na ||  
theg pa med cing grol ba med ||

ces gsungs pas || de las gzhan du thar pa zhes bya ba ci yang grub pa ma yin no || thar pa'i go 'phag gcig tu nges pas || der bgrod pa'i lam yang || yid la mi byed pa ma bcas pa'i lam 'di kho nar zad de || gzhan ni rtog pa'i sgom pa las ma 'das pa'i phyir ro || de yang **klu sgrub zhabs** kyis ||

chos kyis dbyings la dbyer med phyir ||  
gtso bo<sup>635</sup> theg pa dbyer ma mchis ||  
khyod kyis theg pa gsum bstan<sup>636</sup> pa ||  
sems can gzhug pa'i ched du lags<sup>637</sup> ||

zhes gzungs pas || theg pa gsum rab tu bstan pa yang || rtog pa dang bcas <sup>[416]</sup>pa dang || rtog pa med pa'i stong pa snyam sems pa'i don rtogs par bya ba'i phyir ro || yid la mi byed pa zhes pa la || 'ga' zhig || blo nyams pa'i rmongs pa'i sgom par lta ste | yid la byed pa gzung ba dang 'dzin pa dgag pa las yid bkag par ga la 'gyur te || rgyal po'i btsun mos nyi ma mi mthong zhes brjod pas nyi ma bkag pa ma yin pa bzhin no ||

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privative *a*, and not the mind [itself]. Therefore there is no fault.” For Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of this passage, see Higgins 2006: 264 and Mathes 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>634</sup> NSsb: *dangs*; NSbc: *dwangs*

<sup>635</sup> NSsb, NSbc: *bo'i*; *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* D: *bo*; *Tattvaratnāvalī* D: *bos*

<sup>636</sup> NSsb, NSbc, *Tattvaratnāvalī* D: *gsungs*; *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* D: *bstan*

<sup>637</sup> NSsb, NSbc: *gzhug pa'i ched du lags*; *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* D: *'jug par bya phyir yin*

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\_\_\_\_\_ Dp: Derge dpe bsdur ma Bka' 'gyur. *dkon brtsegs*, vol. 44, 712–66
- SMP: *Sāgaramatipariṣcchāsūtra*. Anonymous. (Tibetan translation).  
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INDEX

- Abhidharma, I: 52, 105, 106, 124n322, 157, 159, 249, 281n801, 298n861, 316, 404, 416n1198-200; II: 23-24, 119n289
- Abhidharmakośa* (Vasubandhu), I: 52, 249, 404, 407n1170, 416n1200, II: 202
- Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Vasubandhu), II: 61n143
- Abhidharmakośaṭīkā* (Yaśomitra), I: 184, 267n747, 185, 284
- Abhidharmasamuccaya* (Asaṅga), I: 143n387, 249, 279, 303, 313, 416n1198 and 1201, 417 and n1202-3
- Abhidharmasūtra*, I: 75, 76, 111, 192; II: 19
- Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (Maitreya/Asaṅga), I: 19, 20, 64, 84, 85n208, 143n385, 159, 168 and n471, 176n494, 181, 184, 219n626, 220n627, 241, 248-49, 258, 422n1216; II: 178n540, 202
- abiding mode/nature (*gnas lugs*), I: 29, 64 and n139, 100, 117, 268, 276n775, 278 and 872, 358n1038, 360 and n1047, 361 and n1052, 362n1054, 363n1056, 366-68, 370-71, 373, 375n1088, 376 and n1068, 379-80, 382-85, 391, 395-97; II: 60, 113-14, 158, 167-68
- conceptual thinking, of, I: 46, 88
- conventional phenomena, of, I: 288, 340; II: 112, 153
- innate, I: 155 and n418
- mind, of, I: 48, 147, 304, 341 and n989, 350-51, 362n1054; II: 95, 113, 127, 151
- ultimate truth, as, I: 206, 218, 268, 304, 328, 333, 356, 361, 362n2054; II: 152
- abstraction. *See* object-universal
- absurd consequences (*thal ba : prasaṅga*), I: 230n650, 270, 273, 326; II: 24n37, 61, 122
- acquired potential (*bsgrubs pa'i rigs : samudā-nītagotra*), I: 185
- actual view (*lta ba dngos*), I: 48, 60-61 and n133, 133; II: 94
- adamantine mind (*sems kyi rdo rje : cittavajra*), I: 110, 379 and n1096, 381; II: 24, 88, 95, 100
- adamantine wisdom (*ye shes rdo rje*), I: 118; II: 23
- adventitious
- error (*glo bur gyi 'khrul pa*), I: 367
- mind (*glo bur gyi sems*), I: 27, 165, 214, 281-82n802, 283, 300, 316; II: 117, 119n290, 120 and n291
- obscurations (*glo bur gyi dri ma*), I: 74, 92, 152, 267, 272, 380; II: 90
- stains (*glo bur gyi dri ma*), I: 49, 59, 67, 83-84, 90, 93, 95, 97-98, 104, 110, 119, 152, 156, 163, 165-66, 177-78, 181-84, 199, 217, 220, 230, 232, 236, 239, 259, 262, 270-274, 282, 287, 290, 297-98, 303, 306-307, 310-11, 337-38, 379, 388, 390, 392, 396, 437; II: 11, 14, 87, 90-91, 94, 97, 107-8, 113-14, 117, 124, 159, 163, 167
- affirming negation (*ma yin dgag : paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*), I: 39, 73, 79-80, 82-83, 95, 103, 142, 147, 157, 162-65, 171, 260; 146, 150
- afflictions (*nyon mongs : kleśa*), I: 49, 50, 68 and n153, 69n153, 71, 108-9, 125 and n336, 133, 135-36, 139, 172, 306, 332n960
- aggregates (*skandha*), I: 33, 49 and n97, 76, 231, 248n696, 268, 258n723, 268 and n752, 272, 275, 322; II: 19, 64, 105-6, 126, 128, 163
- ākāśānantyāyatana*. *See* sphere of the infinity
- ālayavijñāna*
- buddha nature, as, I: 26 and n31, 27, 230-31, 114, 190, 230-31, 236 and n665
- mundane *ālayavijñāna* vs. supramundane mind, I: 26n30 and 31, 172, 190n548, 199-201, 213 and n651, 232 and n657, 233, 235, 279, 280; II: 87, 118n287
- substratum consciousness, as, I: 26, 231, II: 114, 122
- untenable, as, I: 231, 233, 238; II: 126
- vs. buddha nature, I: 190, 227, 229, 276n775, 280, 290, 297, 317; II: 36-37, 108n248, 114 and n268
- Alīkākaravāda (Cittamātra), I: 30, 57-58, 63, 70, 122, 126, 250-251, 285, 289, 291n835, 292n837, 293n841, 303, 354, 386 and n1117; II: 112
- Alīkākaravāda (Madhyamaka). *See* s.v. Madhyamaka.
- all-ground consciousness. *See* *ālayavijñāna*
- all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*), I: 185, 190-92, 227, 234n661, 237, 266n744, 280,

295-97 and n859, 299n864, 388, 393; II: 161  
 all-inclusive ground, I: 385; II: 158  
*amanasikāra* (*vid la mi byed pa*). *See* mental nonengagement  
 analytical meditation (*dpyod sgom*), I: 40-41, 426n1226, 434, 437; II: 53, 68n168, 70  
 analytical tradition (*mtshan nyid lugs*) of buddha nature, I: 83  
*Aṅguttaranikāya*, I: 403; II: 202  
*animitta*. *See* signlessness  
 anti-foundationalist, I: 32, 300, 303n877, 304, 343, 354. *See also* nonfoundationalist  
*anutpāda* (*skye med*). *See* nonorigination  
*apoha/anyāpoha*. *See* other-exclusion  
 apophatic, I: 32, 47n94, 64, 122, 239, 240n671, 410, 435, 438  
 apprehended object, I: 101, 173-74n491, 203, 208, 375n1088, 421; II: 60, 87, 144, 199  
 apprehending subject, I: 101, 202, 208, 334, 421; II: 87, 144, 199  
 Apratiṣṭhānavāda (Nonfoundationalists). *See* s.v. Madhyamaka  
*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*. *See* state of nonideation  
*Aśaṅga*, I: 26, 58-59, 72, 97n243, 98n243, 100, 131, 164 and n453-454, 204, 262, 270, 273, 305, 310, 311, 415, 422n1216; II: 16, 114n258, 115n268, 202-3, 205-6, 226  
*Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, I: 75, 162; II: 203  
*Asvabhāva*, I: 405-406, 409  
*Atiśa*, I: 28, 51n104, 229, 252; II: 23, 32, 42, 62, 70, 125n302, 130n321, 131n321, 184-85, 200n632  
*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*. *See* view of self  
 attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), I: 403-404  
*Avadhūtipa*, I: 411; II: 204  
*Avalokiteśvara* (deity), I: 25, 347  
*avaśiṣṭa*. *See* remainder  
*avinirmuktajñāna*, I: 194  
 'Ba' ra ba Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang, I: 26n31, 39, 246, 357n1031, 358  
 Bal po A su, I: 35, 330, 331  
 Bcom ldan Rig pa'i ral gri, I: 39  
*Bde gshegs snying po dang chos sku'i dris lan* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 217n619, 260 and n729, 275 and n771

*Bde mchog rnam bshad*, (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 70 and n158, 75n172, 84n206, 90n228, 270 and n759, 274, 287-88 and n823, 289n828, 269-70, 298; II: 111, 115, 212, 215-16  
*bden gnyis dbyer med* (inseparability of the two truths). *See* unity of two truths  
*Bdud rtsi'i char 'bebs* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 100n253; II: 216  
 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab, I: 168 and n470; II: 217  
*bhavāgra*. *See* peak of existence  
*Bhāvanākramas* (Kamalaśīla), I: 406, 408 and n1171-72, 418m1211, 438; II: 21n28, 40, 176, 203  
 Bhāv(av)iveka/Bhavya, I: 38 and n67, 82, 101n256, 114-15, 117, 140n375, 409 and n1174; II: 205, 224  
 Bhavya II, I: 252 and n708  
 Bhu dra ba. *See* Rgog tshang pa  
*bhūtapratyavekṣā*. *See* discernment of reality  
*bindu*. *See* seminal potency  
 Bkra shis dpal 'byor, Sangs rgyas mnyan pa I, I: 32, 247, 264  
 Bla ma 'od zer dbang phyug, I: 378  
 Bla ma A mdo ba, I: 243  
*Bla ma kham pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 281 and n800, 282n803; II: 117-18 and n286, 120, 211  
 Bla ma Zhang, I: 319  
 blessing from within (*svādiṣṭhāna*), I: 113, 119, II: 12, 35, 42n88, 66  
 Blo gros chos rgyal, I: 348  
 Blo ldan shes rab. *See* Rngog Blo ldan shes rab  
*Blo mchog pa'i dri lan* (Shākya mchog ldan), 75n173-174  
*Blue Annals* ('Gos Lo tsā ba), I: 158; II: 226  
*Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Śāntideva), I: 207n597, 326n944, II: 185, 196, 203  
*Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (Nāgārjuna), I: 161n442, 209n602, 231; II: 124, 126, 203  
*Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Aśaṅga), I: 185 and n526, 284 and n814, 302; II: 108 n248, 203  
*Bṛhaṭṭikā* (Daṃṣṭrāsena or Vasubandhu), I: 18, 66, 151 and n407, 170 and n480, II: 203  
*Bshes gnyen mus pa rab 'byams dris lan mthong ba don ldan gyi skor* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 60n132, 72n164  
*bskyed rim*. *See* Generation Stage(s)

- Bsre 'pho'i lam dbye bsdu* (Padma dkar po), I: 379, 380 and n1099, 381n1101
- Btsan kha bo che, I: 83 and n202
- Btsun mo dohā* (Saraha), 169n477, 180n507 and 509, 188n542, 189n544; II: 209
- Bu ston rin chen grub, I: 81
- buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*, *sugata*-°) as  
 abiding condition, I: 288, II: 113-14  
 affirming negation, I: 80, 82-84, 95, 97, 256n714  
*ālayavijñāna*, I: 26, 190, 230, 236n665, 237  
 all-ground of basic expanse, I: 296  
 all-ground wisdom, II: 160, 185, 234n661  
 being innate, I: 90-92, 171, 356, 368n1068  
 buddhahood, I: 83n201, 272-74, 362  
 buddha potential, I: 16n7, 196, 254; II: 11-12, 18, 37, 42, 107n245, 109, 117, 125n301  
 buddha wisdom, I: 166 and n461, 198  
 causal continuum, I: 238, 276 and n775, 280, 300  
 cause of buddhahood, 87n217, 189, 217, 254-565, 310  
*dharmakāya*, I: 171, 217n619, 275; II: 159  
*dharmatā* of buddha, I: 83n201  
 element in/of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*), I: 81, 112  
 element of buddhas (*buddhadhātu*), I: 81  
 innate mind, I: 282, 300  
 inseparable from qualities, I: 81, 83-84, 87, 88, 97, 97n243, 98-100, 104, 145, 165, 183, 189, 192n554, 193, 198-99, 217, 259, 264n739, 305, 307  
 ground of clearing process, I: 300  
*gzhan stong* vs. *rang stong*, I: 18, 80-83, 100, 183, 248n696, 352 and n1015, 391  
 natural awareness, I: 186-87, 189, 337  
 natural luminosity, I: 232, 248n696, 361  
 naturally present potential, I: 196, 199, II: 108, 276, 300  
 nonaffirming negation, I: 80, 82-83, 85, 99, and n208, 86-89, 97, 145-46, 186, 306-7  
 not being endowed with qualities, I: 85, 89, 99n249, 186n530  
 not being the nature of sentient beings, I: 81, 84 and n206, 89-91, 93, 94 and n234, 96, 111  
 particular, I: 162n450, 166 and n460  
 personally realized self-awareness, I: 188, 193  
 primordial/nondual wisdom, I: 300, 316, 326  
 pure vs. impure mind, I: 200, II: 87, 106n241, 232, 259  
*mahāmudrā*, I: 49, 74-75, 79, 81, 89, 95-96, 100, 111-113, 147, 198, 237, 337, 371, 381n1100  
 remainder, I: 306-7, 310, 311  
 result, I: 255-56  
 tantric buddha nature, I: 65, 96, 185, 236, 270, 274, 287 and n822, 297n858, 362, 471; II: 111  
 theory and texts, I: 19-21 and n22, 26, 42, 46, 65n142, 75 and n172, 79, 82, 165n457, 169, 184, 185n528, 229-33, 241-42, 254, 265-66, 269-70, 289, 295, 356, 379, 440; II: 105, 112, 219, 223, 228  
*śaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ*, I: 185 and n526, 266  
 subtle self, I: 248n696, 264 and n739, 271  
 substantially existing entity, II: 119, 281  
 ultimate, the, I: 26, 47, 82, 92-94, 146, 176, 200n578, 201, 262, 386; II: 113n263, 114n266, 160  
 unfolded potential, I: 196, 199  
 unity of appearance and emptiness, I, 388; II: 163  
 unity of the two truths, I: 200, 236  
*See also s.v.* names of four main authors  
 buddha wisdom (*sangs rgyas kyi ye shes* : *buddhajñāna*), I: 166 and n461, 198  
*Buddhānusmṛti*, I: 335 and n974; II: 203  
*Buddhapālita*, I: 28, 38 and n67, 229, 238  
*Buddhasaṃgīti*, I: 330, 335, 418, 421  
 Byams chen rab 'byams Sangs rgyas 'phel, I: 157  
*Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 122n316; II: 216  
*Cakrasaṃvara*, I: 53, 70 and n158, 75n172, 90, 92, 94, 96, 109, 247-48, 269-70 and n759, 274, 287 and n822, 289n826, 298, 393n1135, 410n1178; II: 55n119, 66 and n163, 76n188, 90n223, 111-12, 167n510, 203, 222  
 calm abiding (*zhi gnas* : *śamatha*), I: 78 and n189, 79n189, 130, 140, 142-43 and n367, 144, 173-174n491, 340, 415n1196; II: 21 and n28, 23, 35 and n69, 38, 41, 145, 153, 185n567

- Candrakīrti, I: 28, 30, 37n64, 38 and n67, 52, 54, 66n144, 82, 101n257, 114, 117, 141, 145, 229, 231, 238, 254n711, 260, 284, 303-5, 313, 320 and n928, 321 and n931, 336, 353 and n1017; II: 23, 62, 70, 113 and n264, 126, 205-6, 220, 220, 224, 230
- Caryadohākoṣaḡīkā*, I: 115n297; II: 67
- Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* (Āryadeva), I: 423 and n1218, 424n1220; II: 195 and n606
- cataphatic, I: 32, 47, 64, 122, 146, 223, 239, 240n671, 343, 435, 438
- Caturmudrānvaya*, I: 134 and n353, 328 and n951, 337n962, 338, 364, 412 II: 109n251, 178n540, 203
- causal continuum (*rgyu'i rgyud*), I: 118, 238, 276 and n715, 280, 300; II: 37
- cause-oriented vehicle (*hetuyāna*), I: 326; II: 162
- cessation of mind (*cittanīrodha*), I: 122, 124-26 and n322, 126, 301, 400, 403-405, 437; II: 200. *See also* state of cessation
- cessation of all conceptions and feelings, *saṃjñāved[ay]itanīrodha*, I: 404; II: 144, 199
- cetosamādhi*. *See* concentration of mind
- Nang le'i lta ba'i mdor bsdu*, I: 30n39; II: 174
- Chos 'khor lhun po*, I: 159
- Chos 'khor rim pa gsum gyi dogs gcod* (*Padma dkar po*), I: 30, 352, 353n1017, 355n1027, 356n1029; II: 213
- Chos grags rgya mtsho*, Karma pa VII, I: 17n8, 55 and n112, 58-59 and n128, 151-152 and n410, 158-159, 162-63, 165, 170 and n481, 176, 178-79, 182-83, 194n565, 198, 202, 214, 223, 243, 244n684, 245, 247, 264, 438; II: 22 and n30, 87, 90, 109n251, 208
- Chos grags ye shes*, Zhwa dmar pa IV, I: 15n6, 71, 157, 166-67, 243, 244n684, 251n703, 270n757; II: 145, 181n553, 207
- Chos grub seng ge*, I: 247-48, 258
- Chos kyi dbyings rnam par nges pa* (*Shākya mchog ldan*), I: 59n126
- Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad* (*Shākya mchog ldan*), I: 67n128, 99n251, 102n264, 104n268, 106n273, 107n275-276, 141, 142n383; II: 216
- Cittamātra* (Mind Only), I: 30, 35, 37-38, 54, 57, 63-64 and n138, 65, 67, 121, 126, 147, 161 and n444, 230, 233, 237, 250, 251, 261, 262, 264, 285, 289 and n829, 291 and n835-836, 292 and n837, 293 and n843, 294, 295, 300, 302-3, 308-11, 314, 330, 336 and n975, 354-55, 386 and n1117, 437; II: 25 and n39, 39, 41, 112, 176
- cittanīrodha*. *See* cessation of mind
- cittavajra*. *See* adamantine mind
- coemergence of thoughts and *dharmakāya*, I: 212, 215-16
- coemergence/coemergent/innate (*lhan cig skyes pa : sahaja*)
- appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*), 196-97, 203, 211 and n605, 218n622, 385 and n1112; II: 157
- ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa*), I: 91, 200, 362n1054, 367n1068, 371-72
- innate (*gnyug ma lhan skyes*), II: 159
- melting bliss (*zhu bde lhan skyes*), II: 69, 101
- mind (*lhan skyes kyi sams*), I: 182, 196-97, 211 and n605-606, 218n622, 219n625, 222, 276n715, 293n842, 340, 385 and n1112; II: 157
- nature (*rang bzhin lhan skyes*), I: 102 and n264, 134, 361, 364, 225
- union/unity (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*), I: 55, 177, 220, 348
- joy (*lhan skyes bde*), II: 162
- self and reality (*lhan skyes kyi bdag dang bden par bzung ba*), II: 153
- wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), I: 96, 111, 114-15, 118-19, 127-28, 181, 187 n537, 188 and n537, 199, 277n779, 278, 337, 338, 355, 361, 362n1055, 382, 385, 427; II: 50-53, 55, 63, 66-68, 70, 158, 162, 188
- cognitive domain(s) (*āyatana*), I: 275, 322
- common denominator (*gzhi mthun*), I: 69, 102
- compassion (*snying rje : karuṇā*), I: 111, 132, 136, 138, 153-55 and n412 and n415, 209, 324, 347, 401, 422, 431; II: 49, 52, 64, 88, 95, 132-33, 152, 161-62, 180, 183, 186-87
- Completion Stage(s) (*rdzogs rim*), I: 41, 49-50, 115, 118, 133, 137, 186, 266-67, 330, 331, 335, 337-38, 360n1047, 364, 369 and n1074, 380, 381, 382; II: 16n9, 23n33, 56n126, 65n161, 97, 101, 151
- conceived object (*zhen pa'i yul*), I: 82
- concentration of mind (*cetosamādhi*), 404

- conceptual analysis, I: 48, 50, 64; II: 21, 67
- conventional truth/reality, (*saṃvṛtisatya* : *kun rdzob bden pa*), I: 29, 36, 37n64, 69n155, 92, 108, 128, 176 and n494, 200 and n378, 201, 218, 259, 290, 295, 388, 389, 396-97; II: 41, 51, 115, 127, 158, 165, 168
- Cūlasuññata*, I: 98n243, 122n315, 301-2 and n874, 306n800, 404 and n1157; II: 203
- Dbu ma rnam par nges pa*'i *chos kyi dbang* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 68n150 and 153, 69n154; II: 216
- Du ma*'i *gzhung lugs gsum gsal bar byed pa* (Padma dkar po), I: 40, 41n86, 354n1024, 387n1117; II: 213
- deep insight (*lhag mthong* : *vipaśyanā*), I: 64, 78 and n189, 79 and n189-90, 108, 124, 130, 142-43, 173, 174n491, 208, 340, 413; II: 21-23, 38, 153, 185n567
- definitive meaning (*nges don* : *nītārtha*), I: 14, 17, 21-22, 26, 35, 69, 72-73 and n167, 74 and n170, 78, 84, 88, 92, 96, 110, 113, 123 and n318, 128, 133, 192, 194, 206-7, 210 and n603-4, 252n709, 254, 256-57n718, 284n813, 309-10, 324 and n939-40, 329, 332-33, 355, 423 and n1218, 440; II: 11, 15-17, 20-21, 25, 39, 48, 51-52, 70-71, 123, 128, 131 and n324-25, 180, 220
- deliberation(s) (*anābhogataḥ*), I: 407
- delimitation (*ldog pa*), I: 33n49, 68, 184, 203, 229, 266n746, 427n1218; II: 24
- deluded perception(s) (*'khrul pa*'i *snang ba*), I: 75, 91, 209, 272, 274, 383; II: 71 and n173
- dependent arising (*rten [cing] 'brel [bar 'byung ba]* : *pratītyasamutpāda*), I: 37, 65, 73, 131, 146, 153, 177 and n496, 202 and n581, 311-12, 353, 358, 385-86, 388-89, 390-91; II: 16, 41, 159, 162-65
- dependent [nature] (*gzhan dbang* : *paratantra*), I: 18, 66-67, 146, 165 and n455, 172; II: 16, 41, 159, 162-65. *See also* pure aspect of the dependent nature
- deprecation(s) (*skur [ba] 'debs [pa]*), I: 50, 105, 122-23, 160, 217, 245, 323, 341, 385, 395, 412, 435; II: 151, 158
- Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 250n701, 254 and n711-12, 256, 257n718, 267n750, 269n753, 276n773 and n775-76, 278n783, 308, 309n898-900, 210n904, 312, 313n909-10 and n912, 315n915, 319n925, 330 and n957, 333 and n965, 336-39 and n984 and n986, 340; II: 150-51, 153, 211
- Dgongs gcig grub mtha*'i *spyi ching* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 234-35n662; II: 211
- dharmacakra* (*chos [kyi] 'khor [lo]*)
- three turnings, I: 22, 26, 253-54, 352, 355
- middle, I: 78, 80, 83, 85, 87-88, 117n303, 146, 179, 257; II: 21
- third/final, I: 74, 78-80, 83 and n201, 88, 96, 110, 117 and n303, 118, 123, 146, 167, 179, 248n696; II: 11, 17, 21
- Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (Maitreya/Asaṅga), I: 143n385, 203n586, 276, 405 and n1161, 407, 413, 417n1204; II: 203
- Dharmadhātustava* (Nāgārjuna), 59n126, 78 and 187, 81, 90, 123n319, 160-61n442, 209n602, 229, 240n671, 280 and n791; II: 21n27, 204, 227
- dharmakāya* (*chos [kyi] sku*)
- causal *dharmakāya*, I: 86, 214
- coemergent mind, as, I: 196-97, 211 and n605, 218n622, 385n1112; II: 157-58
- emptiness, as, I: 388, 391-92; II: 159, 164
- four synonyms of, I: 99 and n249
- natural luminosity, as, I: 177, 183
- natural outflow, of, I: 234-35
- natural purity, of, I: 81, 86 and n213, 87, 111
- natural present potential, as: II: 160
- nature of mind, as, I: 170, 396; II: 95
- non-arisen nature, as, I: 150 and n403, 197, 204n588, 211, 220, 223
- qualities, of, I: 80, 152, 186 and 531, 219, 220n627; II: 100-1, 160
- realization, of, I: 145, 149 and n398, 155 and n417, 171, 174, 283; II: 98
- resultant buddha nature, as, I: 275
- resultant *dharmakāya*, I: 86, 179, 200, 215-16, 256n714; II: 160
- thoughts are *dharmakāya* (precept), I: 16n7, 150 and n399, 171, 210-19, 282-83, 331, 385, 392 and n1133, 440; II: 117, 119-20, 124
- unity of *kāyas*, and, I: 372
- Dharmakīrti*, I: 34, 160 and n440, 161 and n443-46, 163, 164 and n454, 267n751, 290; II: 206, 221, 229-30



- dharmatā* (*chos nyid*), I: 83n201, 129, 163, 171, 185n526, 191, 200n578, 203 and n586, 227n640, 231, 259, 260, 275-76, 278, 288 and n823, 381, 388, 410; II: 35, 63, 107, 124, 162, 225
- dialectician (*mtshan nyid pa*), I: 31, 47-50, 55, 146, 435; II: 68
- difference which negates identity (*gcig pa dkag pa'i thad dad*), I: 68, 203
- Dignāga, I: 34, 54, 98n245, 129n337, 160 and n440, 161 and n443-45, 163-64 and n454, 248n696, 290; II: 15n4, 35n70
- direct perception (*mngon sum : pratyakṣa*), I: 41, 48, 72, 78, 88, 91, 98n245, 102n261, 103-4, 108, 126, 129, 146, 155-56 and n420, 188, 204n588, 239-40, 291 and n834, 315, 328-29, 375, 399, 436-37, 440; II: 23-24, 35n70, 39, 114, 123, 128-29 and n314 and n317, 130 and n318-19, 181, 188n579, 196
- discernment of reality (*yang dag par so sor rtog pa : bhūtapratyavekṣā*), I: 140n376, 343, 408 and n1171, 422; II: 218
- disclosive, I: 27, 33, 54, 74, 85, 88, 194, 196, 210n604, 217, 227, 238, 250, 268-69, 271, 273-75, 351-52, 356, 425; II: 129n317
- discursive elaborations (*spros pa : prapañca*), I: 28, 31, 34-36, 40, 64n138, 69n153, 72, 122, 131, 146, 174, 179, 211n606, 222, 229, 235-36, 239n670, 251-52, 259-60, 269, 283, 311, 318, 322 and n935, 323, 331, 341, 354 and n1024, 362n1054, 372, 397, 417n1203, 420-21; II: 15-16, 52, 120, 150-51, 153
- distinct set of six cognitive domains (*skye mched drug gi khyad par : ṣaḍāyatana-viśeṣaḥ*), I: 185 and n527, 234 and n661, 235, 266 and n744
- dkar po gcig thub*. See self-sufficient white
- Dkon mchog yan lag, Zhwa dmar V, I: 220n627, 234n661, 250; II: 208
- dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs*. See actual abiding nature of reality
- Dohā Trilogy* (Saraha), I: 49, 74n170, 111, 158, 160, 168, 209n602, 249, 427; II: 13, 42n88, 50, 52
- Dohākoṣagīti* (Saraha), I: 279, 330, 417, 418n1207; II: 22n29, 177n536, 178n539, 186, 204
- Dohākoṣahrdayārthagītiṭkā* (Avadhūṭīpa), I: 411 and n1180; II: 204
- Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, I: 18, 29, 31, 57n121, 59n128, 65n142, 66-67, 79-80, 82, 103, 146, 152, 171-72, 176, 186 and n531, 191, 203, 227-28, 248, 253, 256, 258, 261, 263, 295-96, 304, 312n908, 354, 358 and n1039, 363, 386-87n1118, 390, 392n1113, 393, 397; II: 158n484, 159n487-88, 161 and n491, 164n498, 208, 225
- Don yod dpal ba, I: 52, 55
- Don yod rdo rje, I: 243
- Dpal kye'i rdo rje'i spyi don grub pa'i yid 'phrog* (Padma dkar po), I: 378, 379n1096; II: 213
- Dpal Ngag gi dbang po, I: 155, 200, 217
- Dpal phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i lha. See Karma Phrin las pa
- dpyod sgom*. See analytical meditation
- Dri lan dngul dkar me long* (Karma phrin las pa), I: 156n420, 193n559, 219n624
- Dri lan yid kyi mun sel* (Karma phrin las pa), I: 20n15, 170n482, 192n554, 195n568, 196n569; II: 87-88, 91
- dualistic consciousness, I: 193, 199, 201, 228, 231, 290, 437
- dualistic thoughts, I: 72, 125, 140, 142, 199
- Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan* (Sgam po pa), I: 211n605, 218n622; II: 215
- Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 20 and n17, 68n152, 229n643, 240n672, 248, 283n808, 285n817, 286n819, 292n838-40, 293n844, 294n848, 295n849, 308n894-95, 311n906, 312n907, 313n913, 314n914, 316n916, 318n920, 322n935 and 937, 323n938, 331n959, 332n961, 336n978; II: 211
- Dwags po Bka' brgyud
- Amanasikāra doctrine, I: 329, 334, 340; II: 180. See also mental nonengagement
- lineage/tradition, I: 14 and n1, 23, 32, 35, 56, 88, 127, 131, 150-51, 155, 160 and n441, 264, 269, 318, 333, 341, 348, 363, 378, 392, 399, 400, 429; II: 145, 151-52
- Mahāmudrā, I: 14, 15n6, 16-17, 21-22, 26, 43, 45-46, 48, 51, 55, 70-72, 73-74, 79, 95-96, 109, 116, 122, 127-28, 131-33, 135, 139-40, 150, 152-53, 159,

- 187, 212, 227, 240n673, 245, 265,  
277n780, 283, 334, 336, 338, 340-341,  
346, 351, 356, 400, 432, 440; II: 11,  
24, 51, 62-63, 70, 100, 122, 179  
meditation/contemplation, I: 139, 327, 399,  
400-1; II: 150  
view of buddha nature, I: 145  
Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal, I: 15n6,  
157n424, 348, 357n1031; II: 181n553  
Dza ri dmar, I: 159  
eighteen aspects of emptiness, I: 200n578,  
201and579, 261; II: 161  
eighteen distinctive/unshared qualities, I:  
87n219, 220  
eightfold (ensemble of) consciousness, I: 26,  
77, 124, 172, 197, 199, 201, 232, 235n663,  
237, 280, 284, 296 and n854, 316-17, 321;  
II: 20, 22, 124n301  
elements (*kham*s : *dhātus*), 49, 275, 303, 322;  
II: 106, 163  
emancipation/separation (*bral* [*ba*]), I: 255  
and n713, 269; II: 160  
empowerment (*dbang* [*bskur*] : *abhiṣeka*), I:  
50 and n100, 53, 55, 62, 71, 102 and n264,  
111, 119-21, 127-28, 133, 137, 140, 158,  
267, 337-38, 348, 363n1056, 364; II: 12-  
13, 18, 25n39, 40, 42, 51, 53, 55-56 and  
n126, 57-59, 61-63, 66, 68-70  
emptiness (*stong* [*pa*] *nyid* : *sūnyatā*)  
awareness-emptiness, as, I: 187n537, 362,  
363n1055; II: 23n34  
basis/ground of (*stong gzhi*), I: 59, 66,  
152n409, 196, 307-8; II: 91, 158, 162  
endowed with the excellence of all aspects,  
I: 32, 33n49, 96, 99 and n251, 104,  
110, 119, 123, 145, 154 and n415, 167  
and n467, 184, 198-99, 217, 258 and  
n723, 388, 391, 427 and n1228; II: 11,  
17, 52, 160-61, 165 and n500  
other-emptiness, as. *See* Rang stong  
self-emptiness, as. *See* Gzhan stong  
sheer emptiness, as, (*stong pa rkyang pa*), I:  
42, 85, 117, 123, 173, 219, 221, 343  
*See also s.v.* names of four main authors  
enduring mode (*sdod lugs*), I: 214-15, 219  
epistemic and ontological foundations, I: 32,  
354, 427  
equal flavour (*ro snyoms*), I: 348, 351  
equipoise (*mnyam* [*par*] *bzhag* [*pa*] : *samā-*  
*hita*), I: 31, 58, 78n189, 79n190, 90, 100,  
108, 126, 139, 141-42, 145, 160n440, 173-  
74, 207, 215-16, 257, 262-63, 316, 324,  
334, 423n1218, 424; II: 14, 21-22, 26, 39-  
40, 52, 54, 56, 59-60, 63-64, 67, 125n301,  
131 and n322, 145, 188, 195  
essential path (*snying po'i lam*), I: 434  
established basis (*gzhi grub*), I: 28n35,  
228n642, 236-37n665, 311; II: 126  
eternalism (*rta*g *pa*[*r smra ba*] : *śāsvata*[*vā-*  
*da*]), I: 30n40, 33, 37, 39, 58, 63 and n137,  
167 and n465, 170, 173-74n491, 175, 189,  
202 and n581, 250, 258, 308, 311, 322 and  
n936, 351, 394, 440; II: 87, 89-90  
expanse of phenomena (*chos* [*kyi*] *dbying*s :  
*dharmadhātu*), I: 27 and n31, 34, 54, 60,  
77-78, 85 and n210, 93-94, 96, 98, 103 and  
n266, 105, 111, 136, 165, 174 and n491,  
177n495, 182, 187, 190, 192, 196-97, 199,  
202, 209, 231, 233 and n659, 235n663,  
236, 258, 275-76n775, 277, 297, 337, 383;  
II: 18, 20, 52, 95, 124, 126-27 and n308,  
132-33, 160, 162, 200, 219  
experience/first hand experience (*nyams*  
*myong*), I: 31, 33, 47-48, 50, 55, 61 and  
n133, 62, 72, 108, 113, 146-47, 319, 435,  
439; I: 68  
extreme beliefs (*mthar 'dzin gyi lta ba* :  
*antagrāhadṛṣṭi*), I: 202; II: 35  
false imagining, I: 197, 214, 235n663, 258  
five wisdoms, I: 275, 284, 321; II: 164  
form *kāyas* (*gzugs sku* : *rūpakāya*), I:  
152n408, 155 and n417, 194, 196-97, 199,  
220n628, 351n1012  
formless attainment, I: 403, 404n1155  
four absurdities, I: 68  
four types of fearlessness, I: 220  
four wisdoms, I: 172, 197, 199, 236n663, 284  
four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*), I: 21, 130, 252,  
334, 348, 351; II: 12, 25n39, 53, 188  
fundamental abiding mode of reality (*gzhi*  
*dn*gos *po gshis kyi gnas lugs*), I: 383  
fundamental transformation (*gnas gyur* [*pa*]:  
*āśrayaparivṛtti*), I: 26n30, 275, 284, 337-38  
gates to deliverance (*vimokṣadvāra*), I: 405  
Gcod (tradition), I: 157, 159, 178n500  
Gdams ngag mdzod (Kong sprul), I: 168, II:  
209

- Generation Stage(s) (*bskyed rim*), I: 50, 118, 133, 137, 186, 267-68, 337, 360n1047, 364, 369 and n1074, 375n1088; II: 23 and n33, 56n126, 65n161, 97, 101, 152n473, 188
- Ghanavyūha*, I: 26, 27n31, 230; II: 204
- Gling ras pa Padma rdo rje, I: 347, 357n1031
- Glo bur gyi dri ma tha mal gyi shes par bshad pa'i nor pa spang ba* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 32n48, 240n675; II: 212
- Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, I: 184, 234n661
- goal of purification/clearing process (*sbyang 'bras*), I: 49n95, 203n584, 255n714, 266, 388
- goal realization, I: 27, 41, 43, 54, 64-65, 74, 90, 101-2, 105, 110, 122, 124, 133, 135, 139-40, 145, 196, 200, 206, 215, 217, 220, 227, 245-46, 256, 268, 274, 280, 282-83, 317, 325, 327, 338, 351-52, 361, 364, 400, 410, 429; I: 42n89, 87, 106n241, 108n248
- goal-oriented vehicle (*phalayāna*), II: 162
- Gong dkar Rdo rje pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal, I: 158
- 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, I: 15n6, 26n31, 81-82, 89, 91, 95, 156, 166, 217, 230 and n649, 245, 248n696, 264 and n739, 270-1, 274, 295n850, 368-69; II: 120n292, 209, 225
- gotra*. See potential
- gradualist (*rim gyis [pa] : krameṇa*), I: 50n100, 135, 138, 399; II: 48, 53, 181n553
- Grags pa 'od zer, I: 53
- Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*). See s.v. Madhyamaka
- Great Madhyamaka of Nonfoundational Unity. See s.v. Madhyamaka
- Great Perfection (*rdzogs [pa] chen [po]*), I: 42, 110, 113-16 and n299, 119-20, 135, 137, 154n413, 157, 213-15 and n612 and n613, 236n664, 240n673, 251n703, 252n709, 251, 296, 318, 327, 362 and n1054, 367-68 and n1069, 374, 399; II: 12, 16 and n9, 24, 36, 37n75-76, 48, 57n128, 181 and n553, 222-25. See also three Great Ones
- ground (*gzhi*)
- clearing process, of, (*sbyangs gzhi*), I: 49 and n95, 120, 265-66, 268, 276, 279, 300; II: 17, 105-6, 160-61, 163
  - continuum, I: 75, 90, 95, 111, 279, 280, 344; II: 20
  - dharmakāya*, as, I: 149, 150n399-40, 214-16, 219; II: 160
  - emptiness, of, I: 59, 152n409, 177, 196; II: 91, 158
  - groundless ground, I: 315, 318-19, 398; II: 219
  - inseparability of appearance and emptiness, as, I: 153
  - mahāmudrā*, I: 276 and n775, 351, 356, 358-59, 361n1052, 367-70, 377n1092, 379
  - single ground, I: 30n40, 228 and n642, 237, 344, 350, 352, 395, 397
- Grub pa mchog gi dgongs pa* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 45, 55, 109
- Gsang phu ne'u thog (seminary), I: 51; II: 226
- Gser gyi thur ma* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 82n199, 85n208, 105n271, 115n299, 132n347, 134n354-56, 136n361; II: 217
- Gser mdog can (monastery), I: 51n103, 55-56, 194n565; II: 11, 26, 34, 85, 220
- Gshong chen Mhas btsun bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, I: 178-79, 223; II: 209
- Gtsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo rje, I: 347, 357n1031; II: 157
- Gtsang nag pa Brtson 'grus seng ge, I: 81-82; II: 230
- Gtsug lag phreng ba, Dpa' bo II, I: 159, 246n689
- Guhyagarbhatantra*, I: 236n664, 368-69n1073, II: 204
- Guhyasamājatantra*, I: 110, 248, 279 and n788, 288 and n824, 424n1220; II: 24, 50, 165, 204
- Guruparamparākramopadeśa* (Vajrapāṇi), I: 292n837, 412
- Gzhan blo'i dregs pa nyams byed* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 46n90, 109n279; II: 11, 14, 26, 216
- gzhan dbang*. See dependent nature
- Gzhan phan chos skyong bde legs, I: 378
- gzhan sel*. See other-exclusion
- Gzhan stong. See Other-emptiness; See also s.v. Madhyamaka and s.v. names of four main authors
- Gzims khang 'og, I: 159
- Heshang Moheyan (*hwa shang mo ho yen*), I: 41-42, 126, 132, 136-39 and n372, 140, 252n709, 327 and n948, 329, 333, 339-40,

- 343, 399-42, 406, 409-10 and n1176, 412;  
II: 12, 24-25, 38-39, 49-50, 144, 150, 152-  
53, 176, 179-84 and n564, 185  
*hetuyāna*. See cause-oriented vehicle  
*Hevajratantra*, I: 53-54, 110, 130n339, 159,  
169, 185n529, 249, 266, 268, 288, 337,  
348, 368, 378-80, 393n1135, 417; II: 17-  
18n15, 23n31, 38, 90 and n223, 105, 107  
and n242, 112, 116, 130, 146, 167,  
178n537-38, 204  
Hwa shang Mo yo yen. See Heshang Moheyan  
ignorance (*ma rig pa* : *avidyā*), I: 91, 95, 144-  
45, 200, 220, 256, 281, 296, 299, 350, 362,  
366-67, 371-72, 381, 383, 424-25 and  
n1225, II: 17, 59-60 and n135, 88, 100,  
119, 124-25, 164, 168, 195  
imagined [nature] (*kun [tu] brtags [pa];*  
*parikalpita*), I: 18, 66-67, 98, 101n256,  
146, 165, 172, 201, 258 and n723, 261,  
305, 314, 388; II: 129, 160, 163  
impure mind, I: 153, 232, 277, 279-81, 297  
and n859; II: 87  
imputations, I: 31, 47, 50, 54, 106, 145,  
151n406, 173-74n491, 180, 315, 341, 385,  
395, 426 and n1226, 435; II: 88, 120, 158  
innate mind (*gnyug ma'i sems*), I: 27, 214, 227  
and n779, 278, 281-83, 300, 316; II: 117,  
120  
innatist view, I: 26, 92, 132, 152, 220  
inseparability (*dbyer med*), of  
  appearance and emptiness (*snang stong*  
  *dbyer med*), I: 27, 29, 37n64, 74, 150,  
  15354n415, 172, 176n494, 200, 203-  
  4n588, 211 and n606, 219, 223, 253,  
  351, 382-84, 428; II: 100, 126n305, 163  
  appearance and existence (*snang srid dbyer*  
  *med*), I: 385 and n1112; II: 157  
  two truths, the (*bden gnyis dbyer med*), I:  
  26-28n35, 29, 176n494, 200, 202 and  
  n581, 203 and n584, 228 and n642,  
  351-52, 359, 377n1002, 378, 380, 382,  
  384, 386, 396-97, 427, 439-40; II: 157,  
  163, 168.  
  See also unity, nonduality  
insight (*shes rab* : *prajñā*), I: 42, 56, 108, 119-  
20, 128, 131-32, 136-38, 140-44, 153-54  
and n415, 160n440, 167n467, 213, 229,  
246n688, 257, 278, 307, 309, 324n940,  
334-35, 340, 358n1042, 362n1055, 363n  
1055, 375n1088, 392-93, 401, 404n1157,  
405n1161, 406n1162, 408, 419-20, 421,  
426n1226, 437; II: 21, 49-51, 54-55, 58,  
60, 62, 64-65, 131n325, 153, 161-62, 164,  
167 and n509, 183-84, 187, 218, 227  
integration and transference (*bsre 'pho*), I:  
348, 351, 379-80  
interpretive dichotomous thinking (*nirūpaṇa-*  
*vikalpa*), I: 407  
intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bo* : *svabhāva*),  
I: 30 and n41, 36, 68, 74, 122, 134 and 355,  
160n441, 180, 200-1n579, 202n581, 215-  
16, 223, 251, 254, 261-62, 303, 306-8, 318-  
19 and n925, 322, 351-53, 369n1074, 381  
and n1099, 382, 393, 407n1170, 420; II:  
87, 89, 96, 129, 133, 162, 166  
'Jam dbyangs Chos kyi grags pa, 'Brug chen  
III, I: 347-48  
'Jam dbyangs Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, I: 241  
'Jam dbyangs Kun dga' chos bzang, I: 157  
'Jam dpal rgya mtsho, I: 159  
Jayānanda, I: 82, 320-21 and n931  
'Jig rten gsum mgon/'Bri gung 'Jig rten mgon  
po, I: 210 and n603-4, 248, 308  
*Jñānālokāṇḍikā* (Nāgārjuna), I: 144n389,  
337, 412, 418, 421; II: 178n540, 205  
*Jñānasiddhi* (Indrabhūti), I: 294, 338; II: 144,  
187 and n575, 205  
*Jñānaśrīmitra*, I: 82  
Jo nang, I: 16n7, 18, 29 and n38, 42, 65-66, 68  
and n151, 70, 82, 103 and n267, 146, 152,  
172, 178, 186, 229 and n643, 254n661, 256  
and n714, 257-58, 262, 269, 295, 304-5, 307,  
311, 314, 343, 354, 358, 385-86 and n1115,  
387-95; II: 157-58 and n484, 161 and n493,  
163 and n495, 165, 167-68, 217-18  
'jog sgom. See settling meditation  
*Kālacakra*, I: 23-24, 30n39, 107, 172, 176,  
209n602, 230, 244n685, 248, 266, 270,  
277n779, 284n811, 297n858, 298n861,  
348-49n1008, 380, 382n1104, 387, 391 and  
n1131, 393n1135; II: 23n33, 90n223, 105,  
160n489, 165 and n503, 166 and n504-5,  
167 and n510, 185, 188 and n579, 205,  
221, 230  
*Kalāpasūtra*, I: 414 and n1189-90  
*Kamalaśīla*, I: 28n34, 41-42, 82, 140n376,  
325, 343, 400, 402-3, 406, 408 and n1171,

- 409, 413, 418n1211, 421-22, 437; II: 24, 176, 182, 203, 206, 218  
 Kāṇha[pāda], I: 268 and n752, 289n826; II: 105, 107n242, 204, 228  
 Karma Pakshi, Karma pa II, I: 23n25, 28, 228, 248; II: 225  
 Karma phrin las,  
   buddha nature, view of, I: 167, 170, 182-90, 192-00, 217; II: 91  
   emptiness, view of, I: 165, 173-77, 180-81  
   life and writings, I: 156-59, 168-69  
   particulars, view of, I: 162-66  
   Rang stong/Gzhan stong, view of, I: 169-71, 178-80, 183-84, 223; II: 89-91, 94-95  
   thoughts are *dharmakāya*, view of, I: 210-217  
   three *dharmacakras*, view of, I: 167  
   three natures, view of, I: 164-65, 172-73,  
   two truths, view of, I: 175-76, 181, 200-09, 218  
   wisdom, view of, I: 151, 153, 166, 169, 172, 176-79, 186n534, 187 and n537, 188-92, 197-01, 205, 211n605, 222  
*Kaśyapaparivarta*, I: 28n34, 140n376, 325  
*kāyas*. See *dharmakāya*, *nirṇānakāya*, *sambhogakāya*  
 Khro phu Lo tsā ba Byams pa'i dpal, I: 35, 332 and n962  
 'Khrul zhig Sangs rgyas bsam grub, I: 158  
*King Dohā* (Saraha), I: 19; II: 50 n113  
 Klong chen rab 'byams pa, I: 14, 39, 246, 255n713, 279, 296, 340n988, 358, 410; II: 210  
 Ko brag pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, I: 368  
 Kor Ni ru pa, I: 35, 330  
 Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, I: 83n202, 154n415, 168 and n473, 224, 232 and n657, 284n810; II: 180n550, 209-10, 221  
*kun brtags*. See *imagined (nature)*  
 Kun dga' bzang po, I: 53, 56n115, 157; II: 165  
 Kun dga' snying po, I: 349  
*Kun mkhyen rab tu 'bar ba'i phung po bskal me 'jig byed* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 253; II: 211  
 Kun spangs Shes rab rgya mtsho, I: 348  
 Kunzang Tobgey, I: 57  
*kusulu* (yogin), I: 150 and n400, 426n1226, 436-37  
 Lam 'bras (tradition), I: 53, 71, 119, 150, 158, 185n529, 276 and n774-75, 280; II: 37-38, 41n86, 50, 63 and n154  
*Lam zab kyi rnam par bshad pa Zab lam gyi snye ma* (Padma dkar po), I: 378, 381 and n1102, 382n1107; II: 213  
*Laṅkāvatāra*, I: 26-27n31, 82, 190, 230, 232, 304, 309; II: 126, 200 and n631, 205, 229  
 latent tendencies (*bag chags : vāsanā*), I: 95, 186n531, 190 and n548, 231, 235, 255n713, 268 and n752, 284n811, 323, 358n1038, 366, 425 and n1225; II: 17, 26, 105, 107 and n243, 115n268, 126, 159  
*laukikamārga*. See *mundane path*  
 Legs bshad gling, I: 159  
 Lha dbang blo gros, I: 349  
 Lha mthongs Bshes gnyen rnal rgyal, I: 386  
 Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bzang po, I: 347n999, 349 and n1006, 357n1034  
*lhag mthong*. See *deep insight*  
*lhan cig skyes pa*. See *coemergence*  
 Lhun grub bzang po, I: 157  
 liberating knowledge, I: 41-42, 301, 343, 351, 376, 386, 389, 392, 398-99, 401-2, 438  
 liberation (*thar pa, grol ba*), I: 99, 132, 138, 153 and n412, 174, 194, 200, 237, 246, 255n713, 257 and n718, 263, 312, 340, 369, 403-4 and n1157, 430-31, 434, 437; II: 24, 41, 50, 55, 153, 186, 200, 214, 226  
 limit of reality (*bhūtakoti*), I: 125, 318; II: 60  
 limited emptiness/one thing empty of another (*nyi tshe'i stong pa : itaretaraśūnyatā*), I: 178-79, 303 and n881, 313-14, 319  
 Lo ras pa Dar ma dbang phyug, I: 347, 357n1031  
 Lokaprasiddha-Madhyamaka. See *s.v. Madhyamaka*  
 loving kindness (*byams pa : maitrī*), I: 111, 132, 136, 138; II: 49, 52  
 luminous/luminosity (*'od gsal : prabhāsvara[tā]*), I: 18, 59, 73 and n167, 77-78 and n189, 81, 83 and n203, 95, 109-11, 113, 115, 119, 121, 142, 146, 149, 152 and n409, 153 and n411, 162-64 and n453-54, 165, 177 and n495, 187, 189 and n544, 190, 196, 205, 208, 232, 240n673, 248n696, 300, 316-18, 361, 373n1081, 381-82n1103-5, 391-92n1133, 438, 440; II: 15,

- 17, 20-21, 23, 25, 40-42, 50, 52, 63, 67, 87, 90-91, 96, 107, 126
- Lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 59n125, 68n150 and 153, 69n154, 291n836; II: 216-17
- Ma hā mu drā'i man ngag lnga bcu pa* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 250, 251n702; II: 212
- Madhyamaka (Middle Way), I: 17, 20, 22, 28 and n34, 29-42, 50, 52-57, 61-63 and n137, 86, 92, 110, 113, 115n299, 116, 123n 322, 125-26, 134 and n355, 140 and n375, 141, 145, 147, 154n413, 157, 159, 161n 443, 173, 180 and n510, 184-85, 250, 252, 313, 316; II: 113, 125n301, 216, 224, 226, 229
- Alīkākaravāda as Madhyamaka, I: 30, 54, 58-59, 63, 73-74, 126, 146, 159, 291n836; II: 39
- Apratiṣṭhānavāda/Nonfoundationalist Madhyamaka, I: 28n36, 30, 32-35, 40 and n81, 41, 64, 147, 160, 166-67, 229n644, 238, 240, 250, 311, 412, 437
- Great Madhyamaka, I: 34, 37, 54-55, 115n299, 116, 147, 160 and n440, 161 and n442 and n444, 164 and n453-54, 166, 204-5, 241n676; II: 16
- [Great] Madhyamaka of Nonfoundational Unity, I: 34, 37-38, 160 and n440, 161, 164n454, 167n463 and n466,
- Gzhan stong [Madhyamaka], I: 18-20, 26, 29-32, 42, 47 and n94, 48-50, 54-65, 67, 72-73 and n167, 74, 80-81, 83, 100, 108, 122-23, 127, 142, 146-47, 151-52n409-10, 153n411, 159-60 and n439, 162-63, 165 and n437, 167, 169-70 and n481, 171-73, 176 and n494, 177-78 and n499, 179, 183, 196, 223-24, 240n671, 241, 248 and n695-96, 249, 253, 256-65, 297n858, 298n861, 304n883, 305, 311-12, 352 and n1015, 353-55, 386 and n1115 and 1117, 387 and n1118, 388-89, 391, 393, 435, 438-40; II: 13, 51, 67, 87, 89-91, 95, 159-60, 162-63, 165-67, 211, 218-21, 223, 225. *See also* other-emptiness
- Lokaprasiddha: I: 37
- Madhyamaka-Mahāmudrā synthesis, I: 41
- Mantra-Madhyamaka, I: 35, 58,
- Māyopamādvayavāda, I: 37-40, 293n842, 354
- Niḥsvabhāvavāda, I: 54-55, 57, 59, 65-66, 73-74, 114, 117-18, 121, 127-29, 160n439; 315; II: 12, 36, 39, 51, 66
- Prāsaṅgika, I: 16n7, 32, 34, 37n66, 38 and n67, 39-40, 54, 58, 64, 113, 126, 147, 160 and n441, 229, 238, 241n676, 250, 271, 295, 300, 306, 311, 315-16, 321n931, 343, 353-54 and n1024; II: 38n81, 41, 66, 122, 125n301, 230
- Rang stong [Madhyamaka], I: 20, 26, 29 and n39, 30-32, 42, 47 and n94, 48-50, 55-58 and n123, 58-59 and n128, 60, 62, 64-68, 72-74, 81, 114-15, 122-23, 127-28, 142, 146, 151-52 and n410, 153n411, 159-60, 162, 167, 169-73, 177-78 and n499, 179, 183, 223-24, 240n671, 241, 249, 253, 256, 258-65, 297n858, 301, 305, 311, 352-55, 388-89, 391, 435, 438-40; II: 12-13, 51, 66-67, 87, 89, 91, 158-60, 162, 166. *See also* self-emptiness
- Sautrāntika, I: 37 and n66, 39, 161 and n444, 184 and n525, 234n661, 267n747
- Sūtra-Madhyamaka, I: 35, 330
- Svātantrika, I: 34, 37n66, 38 and n67, 39-40, 58, 147, 160 and n441, 316, 354 and n1024; I: 41, 125n301
- Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, I: 37 and n66, 117 and n303, 127, 160n439, 164n453; II: 51. *See also* Yogācāra
- Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* (Bhavya II), I: 140n375, 409 and n1174, 410n1175; II: 130n321, 205
- Madhyamakāvātara* (Candrakīrti), I: 20 and n19, 21n22, 35, 63, 231, 248; II: 205
- Madhyamakopadeśa* (Atiśa), I: 141-142; II: 42, 184
- Mādhyamika. *See* Madhyamaka
- Madhyantavibhāga* (Maitreya, Asaṅga), I: 65, 143n385, 172, 187n535, 201n579, 214, 302, 422n1216; II: 205
- mahājīva*. *See* great life-force
- Mahāmudrā (Great Seal), I: 14-35, 41-56, 61-63, 65, 70-81, 88-89, 95-96, 99-101, 109-16, 119-41, 144-65, 167, 171, 179, 181, 196, 198-99, 217-218n622, 220, 227-29, 231, 233-38, 245, 250-53, 264-65, 269, 275-79, 283, 293, 297, 300, 304, 311, 315,

- 324-25, 328-41, 343, 346, 350-51, 353,  
355-82, 399-402, 407, 410-13, 417, 421-23,  
427-29, 432, 434-40; II: 11-26; 34-42, 48-  
71, 100-102, 118, 122-134, 144-45, 151-53,  
157-168, 175-76, 179-188, 220-26  
affirming negation, as, I: 157, 163, 165,  
240n672, 253, 300, 304  
*amanasikāra*/mental nonengagement as, I:  
139-41, 144-45, 161n442, 250 and n709,  
325-32, 334, 336-41, 362 and n1065,  
402, 410-413, 417n1204, 421  
Apratiṣṭhāna-Madhyamaka of Unity, as, I:  
160 and n441, 161 and n442, 167 and  
n463, 240n671, 293, 353, 409, 412  
awareness-emptiness Mahāmudrā tradition,  
I: 362 and n1055, 363n1055  
bliss-emptiness Mahāmudrā tradition, I:  
362 and n1055 and n1055; II: 23  
buddha nature, as I: 75, 77, 96, 100, 111,  
112-113, 276; II: 11, 17-18  
'Brug pa Mahāmudrā tradition, I: 32  
coemergent union/unity, as I: 55, 351  
four yogas, of, I: 21, 130, 158n431,  
250, 252, 334, 348, 351  
ground, as, I: 276 and n775, 358-59, 367,  
368, 379, 426, 440  
imperishable great bliss, as, I: 111  
luminosity, of, I: 78, 110-111, 113, 149,  
152; II: 15  
mode of abiding, as, I: 22, 350-51,  
29, 356-57 and n1030, 358-61 and  
n1051, 362n1054, 363, 367n1068,  
369-70, 373, 376n1000, 379-82, 385,  
397-98; II: 23, 51, 157-58  
mode of error/delusion, in the, I: 22, 29,  
351, 356-57 and n1030, 358, 363, 365-  
366, 368n1068, 369-72, 379, 381 and  
n1100, 382, 385, 398; II: 157-58  
natural awareness, as, I: 152, 283, 337-38,  
385, 423  
nonaffirming negation, as, I: 113, 157,  
240n671, 253; II: 26  
other-exclusion, in terms of, I: 163, 165  
*prajñāpāramitā*, as, I: 421; II: 25,  
remainder, as, I: 73, 78, 121-124  
Sa paṇ's criticisms of Bka' brgyud Mahā-  
mudrā, I: 15 and n6, 16, 19, 36, 114,  
125, 131-34n355-56, 135n356, 136-  
39, 142, 327-28, 364-65, 399, 401; II:  
25n39; 40, 41n86, 54-64, 179-188  
self-sufficient white remedy, similar to, I:  
74n170, 111, 113, 135-137; II: 13, 52  
trilogy (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 18-19, 45-  
47, 56, 6-61, 75, 96, 109, 112, 114,  
120, 132, 135, 145; II: 11  
unborn nature of mind, as, I: 49  
ultimate truth, as, I: 113  
view of unity (*zung 'jug*)/nonduality (*gnyis  
med*)/inseparability (*dbyer med*), as, I:  
28, 114, 159, 260, 378, 382  
*See also* Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā  
*Mahāvairocanaḥśaṃbodhitāntra*, II: 184n563  
*Mahāyānasamgraha* (Asaṅga), I: 26, 65, 164,  
172, 190 and n548, 192, 200, 229, 235,  
277, 279-80, 344, 405 and n1160, 406,  
417n1204; II: 114, 205  
*Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (Maitreya, Asaṅga), I:  
143n385, 229, 277, 284, 405; II: 186, 196,  
205  
*Mahāyānasūtrālamkārabhāṣya* (Vasubandhu),  
II: 196  
main practice (*dnegos gzhi*), I: 50, 60-62, 72,  
120, 130, 141-42, 144; II: 24, 34-40,  
42n88, 52-53, 56, 59-60, 62-63, 66, 70  
Maitreya, I: 17, 22, 34, 57-59, 63, 67 and  
n148, 74; II: 20, 25, 41, 51-52, 56, 90, 125,  
178n540, 202-3, 205-6, 226, 228  
Maitrīpa (alias Advayavajra, Maitreya-nātha),  
I: 22, 28, 33, 35-36, 63-64, 131, 133-34 and  
n356, 139-40, 154, 167, 229, 238, 240, 252  
and n709, 292-93 and n842, 294-95, 300,  
303n877, 327-28, 330, 335-36 and n975,  
338, 344, 352n1015, 354, 362-63, 402, 409,  
412-14, 419n1212, 420-421 and n1215,  
422; II: 17, 23n34, 58, 109n251, 145-46n  
438, 150-51, 175, 178n540, 200n632, 203,  
207, 225  
*Majjhimanikāya*, I: 403  
*manasikāra*. *See* mental enagement, *yoniso/*  
*ayoniśo manasikāra*  
Mang thos Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, I: 16n7, 172,  
358 and n1036, 363; II: 53n116, 210-11  
*Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, I: 420n1213-14, 423;  
II: 166n507, 205  
Mantra-Madhyamaka. *See* Madhyamaka  
Mantrayāna, I: 34, 42, 72, 110, 116, 118-19,  
127, 131, 139, 147, 153, 167, 228, 233,

- 236, 238, 252 and n704, 253, 255n713, 297n858, 304, 315, 324n940, 331, 338, 343, 351, 355, 382, 386-87, 391; II: 11-12, 56n126, 60, 65, 70, 131n325, 157, 176, 187
- Māyopamādvayavāda. *See s.v.* Madhyamaka
- meditation tradition (*sgom lugs*) of buddha nature, I: 83 and n202
- mental engagement (*manas[i]kāra : yid la byed pa*), I: 42, 75, 117-18, 143-44, 301, 327-28n949, 329 and n955, 334-35, 339-41, 343-44, 398, 402-6 and n1163, 407-10, 415 and n1196, 416n1197, n1198 and n1201, 418 and n1211-1212, 421-22 and n1216, 423n1218, 424-25 and n1225, 438; II: 19, 24, 143-47, 151, 153, 176, 185 and n565, 186, 195, 199-200 and n633. *See also yoniśo/ayoniśo manasikāra*
- mental factors (*sems byung : caitta*), I: 77, 124, 126, 144n389, 213-14, 222, 325, 390, 405-6, 416 and n1201; II: 39, 61, 159, 186n569, 199
- mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra : yid la mi byed pa*), 28n34, 33, 35, 42, 126, 131, 135, 139-40n376, 142, 145, 161n442, 301, 315, 325, 328-30, 332, 334-35, 337-38, 340-41, 354n1025, 362-63, 398-99, 402, 404-5n1161, 406n1163, 407, 409-11, 420-21, 425, 437; II: 39, 42, 143-46, 150-53, 162, 199, 200. *See also s.v.* names of four main authors
- mental representations, I: 63, 289n829, 292, 386n1117
- mere appearances (*snang [ba] tsam*), I: 200n578, 209n602, 288; II: 94, 112, 128
- Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII
- amanasikāra*, view of, I: 252 and n709, 295, 301, 315, 325-30, 332-41; II: 143-46 and n438, 150-53
- buddha nature, view of, I: 227, 229-30, 232 and n658, 233-34 and n661, 236 and n665, 237-38, 241-42, 254-56, 259-60, 262-67, 269-276, 281-82, 287-89, 295-300, 305-7, 310-11, 316, 326, 337; II: 105-7 and n245, 108-9, 111-14 and n266, 117, 119, 125
- emptiness, view of, I: 238-39, 241, 250-51, 253-265, 297n859, 300-15, 319-20, 324, 327, 331-33, 335. 339-41; II: 113, 123, 127, 131, 150-53
- life and writings, I: 242-250
- particulars and universals, view of, I: 271; II: 127
- Rang stong/Gzhan stong, view of, I: 241, 249, 253, 256, 258-65, 301, 305, 311
- thoughts are *dharmakāya*, view of, I: 282-83, 331; II: 117, 119-20, 124
- three *dharmacakras*, view of, I: 248n696, 253-54, 257
- three natures, view of, I: 251, 258, 303-5
- two truths, view of, I: 228 and n642, 229, 236, 241, 251, 259-60, 289-90, 295, 303, 307, 312, 314, 318; II: 111, 113, 115, 127
- wisdom, view of, I: 229, 234n661, 236n663, 237, 239n670, 251, 255n713, 256, 264, 266n744, 273, 275, 277-78, 280-83, 285-92, 295-99 and n864, 300-1, 303, 317, 320-26, 331, 334, 337, 341; II: 107-8, 111-14, 119, 123-25 and n301, 126, 128, 131-33, 151
- Mi pham Bkra shis blo gros, I: 349 and n1006, 357n1034
- Mi pham Bstan pa'i nyi ma, I: 349
- Mi pham Rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, I: 39
- Middle Way. *See* Madhyamaka
- mind of reality (*dharmatācitta*), I: 277, 318
- mindfulness (*dran pa : smṛti*), I: 144 and n431, 173 and n491, 174n491, 329 and n954, 334-35, 374, 398-99, 402, 410-11, 418, 425; II: 21n28, 96, 147, 185. *See also* nonmindfulness
- mirror-like wisdom, I: 296n854, 366
- Mitrayogi, I: 35, 332 and n962, 333; II: 150, 152
- Mkha' spyod dbang po'i spyan drung du 'bul ba'i mol mchid* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 71n162, 72n163; II: 216
- Mkhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje, I: 15n6, 349, 357 and n1035
- Mkhas grub rje, I: 37n64, 39, 262n733
- Mkhas pa la 'jug pa* (Sa skya Paṇḍita), I: 57; II: 216
- Mkhas pa la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 58n122
- Mkhas pa Lde'u jo sras, I: 39
- Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba), I: 157, 169n474; II: 208-9
- momentary awareness, I: 70n159, 152



- Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Nāgārjuna), I: 239n671, 240, 249, 284 and n815, 312, 353 and n1020; II: 61, 62n147, 124 and n299, 181-82n557, 205, 224, 228, 231
- mundane consciousness, I: 281, 290, 315, 390, 436; II: 114
- mundane mind, I: 280
- mundane path (*laukikamārga*), I: 404; II: 221
- Mus chen Sangs rgyas rin chen, I: 158
- Mus rabs 'byams pa'i dris lan* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 75, 82n199-200, 88n221
- Na lendra, I: 159, II: 222
- Nāgārjuna, I: 28, 32, 34-35, 54, 59, 63-64, 72, 90, 117 and n303, 131, 133-34 and n354, 141, 145, 160 and n440, 161n442, 162-64 and n453-54, 204, 229, 231, 238-39 and n671, 240n672, 257, 293-95, 307, 309, 312, 322 and n935, 336-37, 353 and n1016-17, 358, 364, 399-400, 409, 439-40; II: 15-16, 20n26, 24, 61-62, 65, 124, 126, 178n540, 181-82, 200, 203, 205, 219, 224, 227-30
- naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*. See sphere of neither conception nor nonconception
- Nalanda mkhan po'i dris lan* (Padma dkar po), I: 352n1015, II: 213
- Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, I: 16n7, 394-95, 422-23n1218; II: 194-95n606-7, 213, 215
- natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), I: 36, 59, 152 and n409, 153 and n411, 162, 174n491, 175, 177, 182, 186 and n534, 188-89, 199, 239, 277 and n779, 283, 315, 331, 333, 337-38, 385, 398, 425, 439; II: 90-91, 95, 98, 120, 152, 158
- natural luminosity, I: 18, 59, 81, 83 and n203, 110, 152 and n409, 153 and n411, 162-63, 164n454, 177 and n495, 190, 196, 232, 248n696, 361, 392n1133; II: 15, 63, 87, 90-91
- natural outflow, I: 234-35
- natural purity, I: 80-81, 84 and n206, 85, 87-88, 90, 94, 100, 145-47, 177 and n496, 182-83, 197, 199, 201, 380, 396; II: 167
- Ne ring pa 'Chi med rab rgyas, I: 261
- Ne ring pa 'phags pa'i dris lan* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 251, 252n706, 261 and n732, 262n734
- negating orientation (*dgag phyogs*), I: 32, 239, 241
- negative determination (*rnam [par] bcad [pa] : viccheda*), I: 32-33, 55, 147, 269, 426-27
- negation. See affirming negation, nonaffirming negation, radical negation
- Neo/present-day-Mahāmudrā (*da lta'i phyag rgya chen po*), I: 137, 139, 327; II: 48, 58
- Ngag dbang bKra shis grags pa, I: 243
- Ngag dbang grags pa, 'Brug pa, I: 348
- Ngag gi dbang phyug, I: 348
- Ngo khro rab 'byams pa, I: 154n413, 191n550, 194n565, 195n566, 211, 212n607; II: 213
- Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po, I: 157
- Ni ru pa ta. See Kor Ni ru pa
- nihilism (*chad pa[r smra ba] : uccheda[vā-da]*), I: 30n40, 33, 37, 63 and n137, 106n273, 167, 170, 173, 174n491, 175, 189, 202 and n581, 248n695, 250, 258, 308, 312, 322n936, 351, 394, 440; II: 87, 89, 90n222, 146
- niḥsvabhāva* (*ngo bo nyid med pa*), I: 74, 160n441, 281-82n801, 318-19, 353, 369n1074, 380-81n1099, 391, 421; II: 87. See also self-emptiness
- Niḥsvabhāvavāda. See s.v. Madhyamaka
- nirākāra*, I: 167 and n463, 289n829, 292n837 and 839, 293n841 and 843, 294, 336, 386n1117
- nirmāṇakāya* (*sprul [pa'i] sku*), I: 158, 175, 215n613, 372; II: 96
- nirodhasamāpatti*. See state of cessation
- nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*. See *nirvāṇa* without remainder
- nirūpaṇavikalpa*. See interpretive dichotomous thinking
- nirvāṇa* without remainder. (*nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*), I: 125 and n326; II: 50, 60
- nirvāṇadrśa*. See simulation of *nirvāṇa*
- nirvikalpajñāna*. See nonconceptual wisdom
- Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, I: 28n34, 252n709, 325, 335, 407-8, 412-13; II: 145, 205, 225
- Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭīkā* (Kamalaśīla), I: 140n376, 325n943, 408; II: 206
- niṣprapañca* (*spros bral*), I: 35, 206, 252, 343
- nominally existing [entity] (*btags yod [kyi dngos po] : prajñaptisat [vastu]*), I: 106 and n273, 281-83 and n801; II: 119 and n289
- nonaffirming negation (*med par dgag pa*), I: 18, 28 and n34, 36-37 and n64, 42, 48, 53, 60 and n130, 64 and n139, 65, 73, 78-84n203, 85-88, 97-99 and n251, 103-4,

- 107, 114-15, 117-18, 126-29, 140, 145-46, 151-53, 157, 162-63, 169-73, 181, 186 and n533, 218-19, 221, 306-7, 325-26, 333, 343, 394; II: 12, 20, 26, 39, 41-42, 51, 66, 69-70, 87, 89, 150, 200n633
- nonmindfulness (*dran med*), I: 329n955, 334, 398-99, 402, 418; II: 147
- nonconceptual realization, I: 48, 50, 140n376, 392; II: 184
- nonconceptual wisdom (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes : nirvikalpajñāna*), I: 27-28, 42, 326, 402-3, 405 and n1160, 406-7, 417n1204; II: 129n315, 160n490
- nonconceptuality (*rnam par mi rtog pa*), I: 144, 173n491, 206-7, 335, 398, 401, 405n1161, 406-7; II: 153, 183
- nondual awareness, I: 54, 155, 173, 203, 373, 375
- nondual wisdom (*gnyis [su] med [pa'i] ye shes*), I: 49-50, 59-61, 64, 70 and n159, 78, 101-2 and n264, 103 and n266, 105, 107, 110, 122-26, 140, 146, 153, 176 and 494, 178, 190, 201, 229, 237, 278, 285, 289, 290-92 and n839-40, 315-17, 341, 436-37; II: 11-12, 87, 111-13, 125n301
- nonfoundationalist. *See also* anti-foundationalist, I: 34, 147, 167n466, 315
- nonorigination (*skye [ba] med [pa] : anutpāda*), I: 150, 324, 330, 334-35, 344, 402, 418 and n1211, 419 and n1211-13, 420-21, 438; II: 131-32, 146-47, 150-51, 176
- nonreferential meditation, II: 199
- nonrepresentational ultimate (*rnam grangs pa ma yin pa'i don dam : aparyāyaparamārtha*) I: 41, 48, 102 and n263 and n264, 260
- Nyāyabindu* (Dharmottara), I: 249, 132n326
- objects to be cleared (*sbyang bya*), I: 32, 49n95, 213, 254n711, 255n713, 265, 269, 326, 374 and n1085, 388, 392, 426; II: 17, 18, 105, 125, 131, 163-64
- object-universal (*don spyi : arthasāmānya*) I: 41, 48, 78n189, 98n245, 101, 103-4, 113, 128, 129n337, 145, 155-56n430, 169, 206, 271, 435; II: 15 and n4, 21, 24, 51, 127.
- other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*), I: 20, 29, 47-48, 58, 61-62, 66-67, 122, 127, 142, 146-47, 151-52, 171, 176n494, 178-79, 183, 257 and n717, 259, 264 and n740, 304n883; II: 51, 67-68, 87, 91, 159-60, 162-66. *See also* Madhyamaka, Gzhan stong
- other-exclusion (*gzhan sel : anyāpoha*), I: 68, 113, 129, 145, 162-63, 165; II: 24, 35
- Padma dkar po, 'Brug chen IV
- amanasikāra*, view of, I: 362-63n1055, 398-99, 402-4, 405n1161, 406n1163, 407, 413-425 and notes, 437; II: 175-76, 178n540, 180, 194-95, 199-200n633
- buddha nature, view of, I: 352 and n1015, 356, 359, 361-62, 368n1068, 371, 379, 381n1100, 386-88, 390-91, 396; II: 159-60, 163
- emptiness, view of, I: 343, 351-53, 356-58, 362, 371-74, 381 and n1099, 382, 384-91, 392-95, 401-2, 411, 419n1212, 422n1218, 424, 427 and n1228, 428; II: 158-59, 161-66, 181, 183-84, 186-87, 195, 197, 200
- life and writings, I: 347-50
- Rang stong/Gzhan stong, view of, I: 30 and n41, 352-55, 388-89, 391; II: 158-60, 162, 166
- thoughts are *dharmakāya*, view of, I: 385, 392; II: 163n495, 164, 197
- three *dharmacakras*, view of, I: 352, 355
- three *kāyas*, view of, I: 361n1052, 365-66, 371-72, 411; II: 160, 166
- three natures, view of, II: 160 and n490, 163
- two truths, view of, I: 350-52, 356, 358-59, 378, 380 and n1009, 382-84, 386-89, 391, 396-97, 427; II: 157-59, 163, 165-66, 168
- wisdom, view of, I: 355, 360n1047, 361-62n1055, 366, 373-74 and n1086, 381n1099, 383, 385, 388-90, 392n1133, 393, 401-3, 405-7, 411-12, 417n1204, 426n1226, 427; II: 158-60 and n490, 161-62, 164-66, 183, 188, 196
- Paṇ chen 'Bum phrag gsum pa, I: 158
- Paṇ chen Rdo rgyal ba, I: 31n43, 32n44, 70n158, 245, 263n736, 264n737, 298 and n861; II: 212
- Pañcakrama*, I: 73 and n167, 119, 440; II: 42, 206
- Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* (Luipa), I: 303, 304n882; II: 206

- parikalpita*. See imagined nature  
*pāramitāyāna*. See perfections vehicle  
*paramārtha[satya]*. See ultimate [truth]  
*paratantra*. See dependent [nature]  
*pariccheda*. See positive determinations  
*parikalpita*. See imagined [nature]  
*pariniṣpanna*. See perfect [nature]  
*paripuṣṭagotra*. See potential, unfolded  
 particular [characteristic] (*svalakṣaṇa*), I: 98n245, 129, 162n450, 165-66 and n460-61, 170, 271, 304n883; II: 15n4, 35n70  
 peak of existence (*bhavāgra*), I: 404 and n1155  
 perfect [nature] (*yongs [su] grub [pa] : pariniṣpanna*), I: 18, 66-67 and n148, 78, 98, 123, 146, 165 and n455, 172, 201n579, 251, 258, 303-4, 307, 388; II: 21, 160n490  
 Perfections Vehicle, I: 110, 120-121, 127, 134 and n356, 138, 140, 153-54n413, 252; II: 11, 18, 55, 59, 62-63n154, 65, 162  
 personally realized wisdom (*so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*), I: 41, 48, 64 and n139, 77-78, 100-2 and notes, 105, 108, 117, 119, 146, 188n542, 426n1226, 436-37; II: 15, 20, 125  
 Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, I: 157; II: 36  
 Phag mo gru pa, I: 52, 55, 81, 243-44n684, 347, 350n1010, 357n1033, 378, 382; II: 214  
*phalayāna*. See goal-oriented vehicle  
 Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, I: 40, 81-82  
*Phyag chen gyi mdzod sna tshogs 'dus pa'i gter* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 187n537, 231-32n654, 239n670; II: 122-23, 134, 143, 212  
*Phyag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* (Padma dkar po), I: 16n7, 29n38-39, 30n40, 134 and n352, 349n1006, 354, 357 and n1015, 358, 363-64 and n1058, 365n1061 and 1063, 378-79, 385, 387-89, 394n1138, 395, 413, 415n1196, 418m1209, 421, 423n1218, 425n1223 and 1225, 426n1227; II: 157, 168, 175-76, 194, 195n607, 197n621, 213  
*Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig* (Padma dkar po), I: 361n1052, 366n1065; II: 214  
 Phyogs las rnam rgyal. See Karma Phrin las pa  
 positive determination (*yongs [su] gcod [pa] : pariccheda*), I: 32-34, 38, 46-47, 64, 241, 293n842, 304, 354n1024, 355, 426-27 and n1228, 435  
 potential  
   naturally present, (*prakṛtisthagotra*), I: 93-94, 183, 185, 196-97, 199, 235n663, 276, 300; II: 108, 160  
   unfolded (*paripuṣṭagotra*), I: 93-94, 107, 185-86n531, 196-97, 199, 234-35 and n663; II: 108  
*prajñā*. See insight  
*Prajñāpāramitā*, I: 52, 110, 117 and n303, 132, 137-38, 157, 166n461, 192, 201n579, 235-36, 239n670, 247, 252n709, 277n779, 294n846, 335, 338, 348, 355, 405, 408, 419, 421; II: 25 and n39, 50, 128, 161, 184, 187-88, 219, 226-27  
*prakṛtisthagotra*. See potential, naturally present  
*Pramāṇa* (epistemology) tradition, I: 17n8, 19, 38n67, 52, 159, 162, 360; II: 220  
*Pramāṇasamuccaya* (Dignāga), I: 98n245, 160n440, 249  
*Pramāṇavārttika* (Dharmakīrti), I: 161, 249; II: 206  
*prāsaṅga* (*thal ba[r] 'gyur ba*). See absurd consequences  
*Prāsaṅgika*. See s.v. Madhyamaka  
*Prasannapadā* (Dharmakīrti), I: 30 and n41, 52, 284, 353; II: 206  
*pratijñā*. See thesis  
*pratisvasaṃvedanañjāna*. See personally realized wisdom  
*pratyekabuddha*, I: 196, 316  
 predicate to be proven (*sādhyaadharma*), I: 66, 234n661, 266n744; II: 65n159  
 predispositions (*'du byed : saṃskāra*), I: 235, 290  
 primal buddha (*dang po'i sangs rgyas*), I: 90, 276, 277n779, 381; II: 162  
 primordial knowing (*gdod ma'i shes pa*), I: 118, 385  
 primordial wisdom (*gdod ma'i ye shes*), I: 70 and n157, 113, 129, 239 and n670, 300  
 provisional meaning (*drang [ba'i] don : ney-ārtha*), I: 26, 89, 113, 128, 146, 210 and n603, 230, 254, 256-57n718, 284n813, 317n917, 324 and n940, 355, 423; II: 108, 131 and n325, 132  
 pure aspect of the dependent nature, I: 172  
 pure [aspect of the] mind, I: 213-14, 232, 259, 277n779, 279-81; II: 87

- purity from adventitious stains (*glo bur rnam dag*), I: 83-84 and n206, 166, 182-83, 189  
 purity of eightfold consciousness, I: 172, 199  
 Ra ti dgon pa gzims khang ba, I: 202 and n582, 221,  
*Rab dkar gyi dris lan* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 60n130, 61n133, 75n174, 82, 88n221, 89n222; II: 217  
 radical negation, I: 28n34, 48, 153, 325-26  
*Rājādeśasūtra*, II: 196  
 Rāmapāla, I: 33 and n52, 413, 421-22; II: 178n540, 228  
 Rang byung rdo rje, Karma pa III, I: 15, 19-20, 152 and n410, 153-54n413 and 415, 157n424, 158, 168 and n471, 172-73, 176-78 and n499, 183-84, 186-90 and n548, 191 and n551, 200 and n576 and 578, 213, 220n627, 230, 232, 235n663, 240n 673, 246, 249, 256n717, 258, 266, 277, 279 and n786, 280-81, 283, 296 and n858, 368 and n1069; II: 87, 90, 105, 106n241, 118, 214  
*rang mtshan*. See particular [characteristic]  
*rang rig*. See self-awareness  
 Rang stong. See Self-emptiness; See also s.v. Madhyamaka and s.v. names of four main authors  
 Ras chung Bka' brgyud, I: 158  
*Ratnagotravibhāga* (Maitreya, Asaṅga), I: 18, 49 and n97, 69, 73, 75-77, 83-85, 87-95, 97n243, 98 and n244, 99 and n247-249, 101, 110-111, 128, 156 and n419, 162n447, 167n467, 192, 230, 264n739, 272, 274, 281, 303, 305 and n887, 306-7, 310, 316, 387; II: 11, 17 and n12, 19, 26, 51, 55-56 and n126, 118, 125n301, 127 and n307, 178, 206, 209, 220, 226, 229  
*Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* (Asaṅga), I: 83-84, 89n224, 97n243, 167n467, 255 and n714, 305-6 and n890, 311; II: 19, 127n307, 206  
 Ratnākaraśānti, I: 293, 335-36 and n975  
 Ratnarakṣita, I: 415n1191  
 Rdo rje 'dzin pa Chos kyi mgon po, I: 348  
*rdzogs chen*. See Great Perfection  
*rdzogs rim*. See Completion Stage(s)  
 Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros, I: 53  
 reflective awareness (*dran rig*), I: 213-16  
 remainder (*lhag ma : avaśiṣṭa*), problem of, I: 54, 64n138, 73, 78, 122-24 and n315, 251, 259, 265, 299-316 and notes, 320, 325-26, 340; II: 26, 153  
*Replies to Queries of Mus rab 'byams pa* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 75, 82  
 representational ultimate (*rnam grangs [dang bcas] pa'i don dam : [\*sa]paryāyaparam-ārtha*), I: 41n87, 96 and n241, 102 and n263 and n264, 260  
 responsiveness (*thugs rje*), I: 213-14 and n612, 215 and n613, 216, 240n673, 367-68 and n1068  
 Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje, I: 239-40 and n672, 347, 357n1031, 368  
 Rgyal dbang rje Kun dga' dpal 'byor, 'Brug chen II, I: 347, 351, 358, 426n1226-27  
 Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen, I: 306  
*Rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 18, 69n155, 75n172, 84n205, 86n212, 93n232, 94n235, 287n822, 290n831, 295n851; II: 217  
*Rgyud gsum gsang ba* ('Gos Lo tsā ba), I: 264n739, 269 and n757, 270 and n758; II: 105, 212  
*ri chos* (mountain/hermit teachings), I: 357 and n1032-33  
*Ri chos skor gsum* (Dol po pa), I: 386; II: 158  
*Ri chos skor gsum* (Yang dgon pa), I: 351, 358 and n1039, 369; II: 176, 357  
*Ri chos yon tan kun 'byung ba rin po che 'bar ba* (Yang dgon pa), I: 365 and n1063, 370-71n1075; II: 218  
 Rin chen dpal bzang, Cog grwa pa I, I: 349  
 Rin spungs pa (clan), I: 23, 25, 55, 243-244n684  
 Rje btsun kun dga' bkra shis, I: 158  
 Rje La yag pa, I: 334; II: 146  
*Rnal 'byor bsdu ba*, I: 30n39  
*rnam bcad*. See negative determinations  
*Rnam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos* (Rang byung rdo rje), I: 284  
*Rnam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos 'grel pa* (Kong sprul), I: 232n657; II: 210  
 Rngog Blo ldan shes rab, I: 18, 37 and n64, 40, 75 and n174, 80-81, 83, 85, 89, 199, 274, 307; II: 223  
 Rog bande Shes rab 'od, I: 39  
 Rong ston Shes bya kun rigs, I: 52, 56n115, 84, 157

- Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, I: 28 and n36, 33-34, 40, 229 and n644, 293n841; II: 218
- Rgan po'i rlung sman* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 16n7, 70n158, 89n225, 91n229, 166n460-61, 230 and n649-50, 234n661, 246n690, 248n696, 255, 267n748, 269n757, 270n761, 272n763, 273n767, 291n834, 291n835, 298n863, 299n864; II: 105, 109, 111-12, 115, 212
- Rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snying po'i rnam par bshad pa* (Padma dkar po), I: 362n1053; II: 213
- rigs* (gotra). *See* potential
- Rtse le sna tshogs rang grol, I: 14-15n6, 361n1051, 362, 367 and n1068; II: 181n553, 214
- Rwa lung, I: 347, 350
- Sa skya Paṇḍita, I: 14-15 and n7, 18-19, 21, 45-46, 50, 52, 55-57, 62, 79, 81, 101, 116, 121, 124, 131-35 and n359, 136-37, 139 and n372, 142 and n384, 153, 249, 317n917, 327 and n948, 343, 364, 399; II: 13, 16n7, 25 and n39, 39n83, 54, 59-60 and n139, 65n161, 66n164, 71, 179, 181n553, 187n575, 219, 222-23
- ṣaḍāyatanaviśeṣaḥ*. *See* distinct set of six cognitive domains
- Sāgaramatiparipṛcchā*, I: 329n955, 335; II: 147, 206
- sahaja*. *See* coemergence
- sahajacitta*. *See* coemergent mind
- Sajjana, I: 83n202
- Samādhirājasūtra*, I: 309; II: 183, 186, 206
- sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. *See* universal
- samāropa*. *See* superimpositions
- śamatha*. *See* calm abiding
- sambhogakāya* (*longs [spyod rdzogs pa'i] sku*), I: 175, 215n613
- Samḍhinirmocanasūtra*, I: 68, 203, 355; II: 21n28, 206
- Sāṃkhya, I: 113, 284n811, 360; II: 36 and n74, 115n268
- Samvarodaya*, I: 414, 415n1191, II: 177n531, 229
- saṃvṛtisatya* : *kun rdzob bden pa*). *See* conventional truth
- Sangs rgyas 'phel, I: 157
- Sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad mdo rgyud snying po* (Shākya mchog ldan), I: 18, 75n172, 83n203, 287n822; II: 217
- Sangs rgyas Mi bskyod rdo rje, I: 368 and n1071
- Sangs rgyas rdo rje, I: 15n6, 16n7, 349, 357 and n1030 and 1034-35, 358, 363, 365 and n1061-63, 366-67; II: 215
- Śāntideva, I: 92, 207n597, 238; II: 62, 203
- Śāntipa, I: 336, II: 39
- Saraha, I: 19, 28, 32, 34-36, 49, 63, 73, 75-76, 111, 114-15, 123, 150n402, 158, 160-61n442, 168-69, 179-80, 182, 188-89, 205, 212, 219n625, 220, 222, 229, 239 and n671, 240n672, 249, 252, 279, 293 and n843, 327-28, 330, 332, 334, 339, 362-63n1055, 409 and n1174, 417 and n1204, 418n1207; II: 13, 19, 22-23n34, 26, 36 and n71, 41-42 and n88, 50 and n113, 54, 70, 144-45 and n434, 167n509, 186, 204, 209, 219, 222, 225
- sarvākāravāropetaśūnyatā*. *See* emptiness endowed with the excellence of all aspects
- satyadvaya*. *See* two truths
- satyākāra*, I: 63, 289n829, 291-92n837, 293n841-42, 386n1117
- Sautrāntika. *See* s.v. Madhyamaka
- Śavaripa, I: 28, 229, 252 and n709, 335-36, 362, 363n1055
- Sdom gsum rab dbye* (Sa skya Paṇḍita), I: 15n6-7, 82n199, 115n299, 124 and n321, 125n325, 132n344 and 347, 133 and n350-51, 134n354-56, 135 and n357 and 359, 136n361, 139, 142n384, 249, 327, 358n1036, 363n1056, 364, 399; II: 16n7, 25n38, 39n83, 48n108, 49n109-10, 54n117, 55n122, 56 and n124-25, 57 and n127 and 130, 58 and n131 and 133-34, 60 and n138 and 140, 61 and n142 and 144, 65n160-62, 181n553, 211, 214, 217
- Secrets of the Three Continua* ('Gos Lo tsā ba). *See* *Rgyud gsum gsang ba*
- Sekanirdeśa* (Maitrīpa, alias Maitreyañātha), I: 33, 412; II: 178n540, 228
- Sekkodeśa* (Nāropa), I: 382
- self-awareness (*rang rig* : *svasamvedana*), I: 62, 72, 77, 79, 95, 103-4 and n266, 115, 128, 146, 149-50 and n398, 173-74 and n491, 187-88n537, 193 and n559, 197, 203-4 and n588, 207-8 and n597 and n598,

- 222, 291 and n833, 362n1054, 372-73 and n1081, 393, 437; II: 16-17, 20, 23-24, 40, 52, 67-68 and n168, 89, 97, 100-1, 113, 124-25, 129-30 and n321, 167
- self-emptiness (*rang stong*), I: 20, 47-48, 61-62, 78, 107, 114-15, 122-23, 127, 142, 146-47, 151, 176n494, 179, 183, 259, 388, 435; II: 21, 51, 67-68, 70, 87, 163. *See also* Madhyamaka, Rang stong
- self-luminosity, I: 149, 187; II: 25, 40-41, 126
- self-occurring wisdom, I: 113, 179, 199, 201, 390; II: 55, 161, 165
- self-sufficient white remedy/white panacea. *See s.v.* Mahāmudrā
- seminal potency (*bindu*), I: 162
- Sems dpa' chen po padma dkar po'i rnam thar thugs rje chen po'i zlos gar* (Padma dkar po), I: 347n999, 387n1118; II: 213
- sense-bases (*āyatana*), I: 33, 49, 76, 231; II: 19, 64, 126
- sense-faculties (*indriya*), I: 49, 76; II: 19
- settling meditation (*'jog sgom*), I: 108, 142, 155, 156n420; II: 35, 53
- Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, I: 14 and n1, 15-16n7, 18, 21, 24, 34, 37n63, 71-72, 80, 111, 113, 115 and n299, 116 and n299, 127, 130-32, 135-39, 141, 154, 158, 171, 196-97, 209n602, 210-11 and n605, 212 and n608, 217, 223, 252, 282, 327-28, 331, 334, 352, 357n1033, 362, 392, 429 and n1231, 432 and n1237, 433-34 and n1242, 435, 439; II: 11-15n3 and 5, 16n7 and 9, 17 and n11, 18, 23, 25n39, 35-36 and n71, 37 and n79, 41n86, 42 and n88-89, 50, 57n129, 67n167, 70, 117, 119, 123, 145-46, 163n495, 210, 215, 224. *See also* Zla 'od gzhon nu
- Sgam po pa Spyān snga Bkra shis rnam rgyal, I: 378
- Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan* (Shākyamchog ldan), I: 73n167, 109n278, 117n302-3, 118n304, 119n306-8, 120n309, 121n314; II: 217
- sgom lugs*. *See* meditation tradition
- Shabdrung, I: 350
- Shākyamchog ldan, Alīkāṅkaravāda Madhyamaka, view of, I: 54, 57-59, 63, 70, 73-74, 122, 126; II: 39
- amanasikāra*, view of, I: 126, 131-32, 135, 139-42, 144-45; II: 24, 39, 42
- buddha nature, view of, I: 47, 49, 65 and n142, 67, 74-75 and n172, 79-82 and n199, 83 and n201, 84 and n206, 85 and n208, 86-87 and n217, 88-94 and n234, 95-97 and n243, 98 and n244, 99 and n249, 100, 104-5, 111-13, 145-47; II: 11-12, 17-19, 37, 42, 50
- emptiness, view of, I: 46-48, 51n102, 53, 57-67, 73-74 and n170, 78, 81-86, 88-89, 95-96, 99-100, 102 and n254, 103-105, 107, 109-10, 113-18, 121-23, 126-29, 136 and n361, 137-40, 145-47; II: 11-12, 16-17, 21-23, 25n39, 34-36, 40-42, 51-53, 60-65 and n159, 66-70
- life and writings, I: 51-57
- particulars and universals, view of, I: 98n245, 129n337; II: 15n4, 35n70
- Rang stong/Gzhan stong, view of, I: 13, 51, 66-68
- three *dharmacakras*, view of, I: 74, 78-80, 83, 85, 87-88, 96, 110, 117-18, 123, 146; II: 11, 17, 21
- three natures, view of, I: 63n137, 65-67 and n148, 78, 98, 107, 146; II: 21
- two truths, view of, I: 58-59, 63, 67-68 and n153, 69 and n155, 71, 77, 81-82, 84, 90, 92-93, 95-96, 102n263, 103-6n273, 107-8, 113, 128, 146; II: 19, 40-41, 51, 70
- wisdom, view of, I: 48-50, 54, 59-65, 69-71, 73, 76-78, 83, 90-96, 100-9, 110-30, 134-36, 139-40, 142-46; II: 11-13, 15-20, 23-26, 35-42, 50-56, 59, 63-70
- Shakya Rin chen, I: 57
- Shar chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, *see* Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan
- Shar rtse zhal snga'i brgal lan* (Padma dkar po), I: 351n1013, 423-24n1222
- Si tu II Bkra shis rnam rgyal, I: 243 and n681
- Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, I: 168 and n470, 194n656, II: 208, 217
- signlessness (*animitta* : *mtshan [ma] med [pa]*), I: 401, 404-5; II: 162, 183-85, 196
- simulated wisdom (*dpe'i ye shes*), I: 118
- simulation of nirvāṇa (*nirvāṇadrśa*), I: 404
- Single Intent*, I: 35, 210; II: 150
- six cognitive domains (*ṣaḍāyatana*), *See* distinct set of six cognitive domains

- six dharmas/doctrines/yogas of Nāropa (*na ro chos drug*), I: 21, 55, 158, 360n1047, 379
- six parameters of interpretation (*mtha' drug*), I: 210 and n604
- Six-limbed Yoga (*Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*), I: 119; II: 165n503, 188n579
- Phyag rgya chen po drug bcu pa* (Chos grags ye shes), I: 157n427, 167n463 and 465; II: 207
- sixty-four qualities of dissociation and maturation, I: 152 and n408-9, 154n415, 167, 177, 183-84, 192n554, 193, 195-96, 198 and n573, 199, 217; II: 87, 90, 100-1
- skillful means (*thabs : upāya*), I: 42, 106n273, 128-29, 131, 136 and n361, 137-38, 155n418, 257, 310, 324 and n940, 325, 340, 355, 362n1055, 401, 420, 434; II: 16, 49, 51-52, 60, 65 and n161, 70, 95, 101, 131 and n325, 133, 153, 160-62, 183-84, 187, 199
- Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (Mi bskyod rdo rje), I: 228n642, 229n644, 232 and n658, 236n665, 252n709, 318n922-23, 329, 330n956, 334n967, 335 and n971, 336n976; II: 144, 147, 212
- Skye med bde chen. *See* Bal po A su
- Skyes bu chen po'i lam rim* (Phag mo gru pa), 378, 382
- Skyes bu gsum gyi lam gyi mchog rin po che'i 'phreng ba* (Padma dkar po), 378, 382n1108, 384n1110; II: 213
- Skye bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge* (Sa skya Paṇḍita), I: 139, 327; II: 54n117
- Slob dpon Sangs rgya ma, I: 173
- Snying po don gyi man ngag sems kyi me long* (Padma dkar po), II: 199
- so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes*. *See* personally realized wisdom
- sophists (*rtog ge ba*), I: 200, 318
- sphere of neither conception nor nonconception (*naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*), I: 403
- sphere of the infinity of space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*), I: 403
- spiritual potential (*gotra/khams*), I: 85, 93-94, 196, 255n713, 266, 362; II: 105, 107
- spontaneously present nature, I: 171, 368n1069
- Spyan lnga Grags pa 'byung gnas, 'Bri gung, I: 369
- Spyang lung sdings pa Gzhon nu blo gros, I: 53
- spyi mtshan*. *See* universal [characteristic]
- Śrāvakabhūmi*, I: 404, 415 and n1196; II: 108n248, 177n532, 206, 221
- śrāvakas, I: 124-25, 196; II: 49, 60-61, 196
- Śrīdākārṇavamahāyoginītantrarājavāhikaṭikā*, I: 295n853
- Stag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen, I: 37n64, 39, 292n840, 308, 310n903; II: 217
- standpoint of actuality, I: 166 and n460
- standpoint of assumption, I: 166 and n460
- state of nonideation (*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*), I: 125, 408; II: 60 and n141
- state of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), I: 122, 124-26, 403-5; II: 22, 39, 49-50, 60-61
- Steng dkar chos rje blos gros rnam rgyal, I: 158
- stong gzhi*. *See* basis of emptiness
- subitist/suddenist (*cig car ba*), I: 41-42, 352, 399; II: 181 and n553
- substantially existing [entity] (*rdzas yod [kyi dngos po] : dravyasat [vastu]*), I: 119 and n289, 281-82 and n801
- substratum consciousness. *See* ālayavijñāna
- sugatagarbha*, I: 27n31, 49, 59, 75, 83 and n203, 85, 95-96, 110-11, 152n409, 154n415, 167 and n465, 170-71, 177, 184, 189n544, 192-93, 195n566, 196, 198, 202n581, 217, 232n657, 236n664, 255n713, 277n779, 297, 310, 338, 381; II: 17, 50, 87, 91, 105. *See also* buddha nature
- Suṇiṣprapañcatattvopadeśa* (Virūpa), II: 195 and n610
- śūnyatā*. *See* emptiness
- superimpositions (*sgro 'dogs : samāropa/adhyāropa*), I: 49-50, 55, 61-62, 68 and n153, 100, 105, 146, 150, 160, 173, 202, 207, 213, 217, 238, 251, 254, 311, 343, 412, 419n1211, 435, 438-39; II: 36, 68, 144-45
- supramundane mind, I: 26, 172, 200, 235, 280
- supramundane path, I: 111, 135, 182 and n517; II: 52
- Sūtra-Madhyamaka. *See* s.v. Madhyamaka
- svabhāva*. *See* intrinsic essence
- svābhāvīkākāya*, I: 96, 100, 181, 182 and n517, 276; II: 162
- svalakṣaṇa*. *See* particular

- svasaṃvedana*. See self-awareness  
 Svātantrika Madhyamaka. See s.v. Madhyamaka  
 task-accomplishing wisdom, I: 411  
*tathāgatagarbha*, I: 18, 26 and n31, 49, 66-67, 74-76, 79, 83, 85-86, 88-89, 94n234, 97, 99, 140, 165-66 and n460, 182, 200, 201, 220, 227, 233-34 and n661, 235-36, 238, 250, 275, 277n779, 300, 303, 311, 315, 338, 343, 362, 381 and n1100, 388, 438; II: 11, 18-19, 108n248, 114n266, 220-21, 227, 229. See also buddha nature  
*Tattvādaśaka* (Maitrīpa), I: 167, 293; II: 207  
 ten powers, I: 79-80, 87 and n219, 91, 93, 97, 104, 182, 219, 324; II: 133  
*tha mal gyi shes pa*. See natural awareness  
 thesis (*pratijñā*), on having no, I: 206, 353 and n1016; II: 182  
 thoughts are *dharmakāya* (precept). I: 16n7, 150 and n402, 171, 210-216, 219, 282-83, 331, 385, 392 and n1133, 440; II: 117, 119-20, 124, 163n495. See also s.v. names of four main authors  
 three Great Ones, I: 113 and n294, 115 and n299, 116, 119, 251; II: 12, 16, 36, 57 and n128, 67  
 three *kāyas*. See *dharmakāya*, *nirṇāṇakāya*, *sambhogakāya*  
 three natures (*ngo bo nyid gsum : trisvabhāva*), I: 26, 65-66 and n144, 67, 164, 172, 388; II: 160  
 three wisdoms (*ye shes gsum*), I: 186n534  
*Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* (Sa skya Paṇḍita), I: 139, 327; II: 54n117  
 Ting 'dzin bzang po, I: 349  
*tīrthika*, I: 37 and n65, 250; II: 38 and n82, 89  
 transformation, I: 26n30, 186, 200, 223, 236n663, 256 and n715, 275, 284, 321-22, 337-38, 377, 379, 431-33, 435; II: 108n248, 124n301, 125, 160, 221  
 transmudane phenomena, I: 220, 280  
*trisvabhāva*. See three natures  
*Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter* (Sa skya Paṇḍita), I: 52  
 Tsong kha pa, I: 16n7, 29, 31, 38n68, 40 and n84, 45, 52-53, 56, 99n251, 103n265, 152, 184, 231 and n652, 234n661, 251n703, 252n709, 253, 264, 271, 305-6, 312-13, 346, 423n1218; II: 38n81, 49n111, 108-9, 125n302, 180n550, 194, 218, 220, 229  
 two delimitations of a single essence (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*), I: 68, 203, 229  
 two form *kāyas*, I: 152, 155 and n417, 194, 196-97, 199, 220n627, 351n1012  
 two great kingdoms (*rgyal khams chen po gnyis*), I: 29, 67-68, 229, 295; II: 157  
 two purities, I: 84-85 and n206, 90, 94, 174-75, 181-84, 273  
 two truths (*bden [pa] gnyis : satyadvaya*), I: 21, 26-28 and n35, 29 and n38, 30n41, 36, 65, 67-68, 71, 92-93, 95, 104, 106n273, 108, 136n364, 176n494, 200-2 and n581, 203 and n584-85, 207, 217-18 and n623, 228 and n642, 229, 236, 237n665, 241, 289, 295, 297, 307, 314, 350-52, 356, 358-59, 377n1092, 378, 380, 382-84, 386-91, 396-97, 427, 435, 439-40; II: 60, 70, 111, 113, 157, 159, 163, 168  
 ultimate *bodhicitta*, I: 49, 110, 260-61; II: 24, 11n266  
 ultimate truth (*paramārthasātya : don dam pa'i bden pa*), I: 26, 36-37n64, 54, 58-59, 63, 67-68 and n153, 69, 71, 77, 81-82, 84, 90, 92, 96, 99n249, 101n257, 102-3n265, 105, 107-8, 113, 136n364, 146, 152-53, 170, 172, 176 and n494, 177, 181, 200n578, 201-3, 208-10, 218, 229, 251, 260, 303, 307, 312, 318, 326, 358, 380 and n1099, 383, 388-89, 391, 397, 435-40  
 uncorrupted element (*zag med [kyi] khams*), I: 234-35  
 unfolded potential. See potential  
 unity (*yuganaddha*) of  
 appearance and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*), I: 27, 29, 74, 150, 153-54n415, 172, 176n494, 200, 203, 211 and n606, 219, 223, 253, 351, 382, 384, 428; II: 100, 126n305, 163  
 the two truths, I: 28n35, 29, 176n494, 200, 202 and n581, 203 and n584, 228n642, 350, 352, 377n1092, 382, 384, 439  
 thoughts and *dharmakāya*, I: 150, 212, 215. See also inseparability  
 universal [characteristic] (*spyil 'i mtshan nyid*) : *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), I: 98 and n245, 101, 103-5, 129 and n337, 156n420, 162n450, 165-



- 66 and *n460*, 206, 271, 304, 430, 435-36;  
II: 15*n4*, 24, 35, 127 and *n309*
- unreal imaginings (*yang dag ma yin kun tu  
rtog pa : abhūtaparikalpa*), I: 213-16, 303  
and *n877*, 306
- unsurpassable qualities, I: 97*n243*, 99, 156,  
178, 181, 183, 305-6; II: 90, 94-95, 97,  
127*n307*
- upadeśa* (*man ngag*, personal instructions), I:  
15, 50, 99*n251*, 117, 119, 140*n375*, 146,  
149*n395*, 154, 409; II: 22 and *n30*, 23-24,  
40, 62-63, 195*n610*, 205
- upāya*. See skillful means
- Vajradhara, I: 337
- Vajrapāṇi, I: 35, 292*n837*, 330, 334*n966*,  
354*n1025*, 393*n1135*, 412; II: 71*n173*,  
90*n223*, 109*n251*
- vajra-song, I: 155-56, 168, 221; II: 94
- Vajravārāhī, I: 53; II: 55
- vāsanā*. See latent tendencies
- Vasubandhu, I: 52, 105*n272*, 164 and *n454*,  
406, 409; II: 196, 202-4, 207, 224, 226, 230
- veiled/hidden intent (*dgongs pa can : ābhiprā-  
yika*), I: 89, 210*n604*, 317*n917*
- viccheda*. See negative determination.
- view of self (*bdag [tu] lta [ba] : ātmadr̥ṣṭi*), I:  
141, 257; II: 70, 115*n268*
- Vigrahavyāvartanī*, II: 182, 230
- Vijñāpatimātra, I: 209
- Vimalaprabhā*, I: 30*n39*, 277*n779*, 391 and  
*n1131*, 393*n1135*; II: 90*n223*, 165*n502*,  
166 and *n504-5*, 185, 207
- vimokṣa* (deliverance), I: 403, 405
- vimokṣadvāra*. See gates to deliverance
- vinaya, I: 52, 157, 168, 348; II: 120*n292*
- Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*, I: 405*n1161*, 406 and  
*n1163*, 407 and *n1168*, 417*n1204*; II: 207, 227
- vipaśyanā*. See deep insight
- Virūpa, I: 327-28; II: 41 and *n86*, 195 and  
*n610*, 204
- well-founded/ unfounded mental engagement.  
See *yonīśo/ayonīśo manas[i]kāra*
- wisdom(s) (*ye shes: jñāna*). See adamant ~,  
all-ground ~, buddha ~, coemergent ~, five  
~, four ~, mirror-like ~, nonconceptual ~,  
nondual ~, personally realized ~, primord-  
ial ~, self-occurring ~, three ~. See also s.v.  
names of four main authors
- world of appearances, I: 153
- Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal, I: 22, 29,  
240*n672*, 347, 350-51 and *n1012*, 357 and  
*n1031* and 1033, 358 and *n1039*, 359-60*n*  
1046, 361, 363 and *n1057*, 365 and *n1063*,  
366-69 and *n1074*, 370-73 and *n1081*, 374-  
77 and *n1092-93*, 378-82, 385, 392, 395; II:  
157, 164*n497*, 175, 218, 225
- ye shes*. See s.v. wisdom
- yid la mi byed pa*. See mental nonengagement
- Yid la mi byed pa'i zur khra* (Mi bskyod rdo  
rje), I: 329 and *n953*; II: 212
- Yogācāra, I: 17-18, 22, 26, 55-56, 65-67,  
101*n256*, 102 and *n264*, 117, 124*n322*, 161  
and *n443*, 164-65 and *n457*, 184, 196, 201,  
207-8, 213, 233-34 *n661*, 237, 266, 282,  
285, 290, 301-4 and *n883*, 305 and *n887*,  
306, 316, 321 and *n931*, 336, 344, 405-6  
and *n1162*, 417 *n1204*; II: 18, 87, 119,  
124*n301*, 218, 221, 223, 226-27, 229. See  
also Cittamātra and s.v. Madhyamaka
- Yogācārabhūmi*, I: 406; II: 218, 221, 227
- Yogācāra-Madhyamaka. See s.v. Madhyamaka
- yogic direct perception (*yogipratyakṣa*), I: 291  
and *n834*, 315, 436-37; II: 24, 114
- yogic vocation, I: 429, 432, 435
- yongs gcod*. See positive determinations
- yonīśo/ayonīśo manas[i]kāra* (*tshul bzhin-°/  
tshul bzhin ma yin pa-° yid la byed pa*; well-  
founded/unfounded mental engagement), I:  
42, 343-44, 402-3, 405*n1161*, 406*n1163*,  
408, 418 and *n1211*, 421-25 and *n1216* and  
*n1225*, 437-38; II: 176, 186, 195. See also  
mental engagement
- yuganaddha* (*zung 'jug*), I: 21, 26, 46, 48, 60,  
109, 143, 160-61, 163, 223, 260, 282-83,  
294-95, 359, 384-85, 401, 411, 427; II: 42,  
163, 183, 188. See also unity
- Zab mo nang don* (Rang byung rdo rje), I:  
15*n6*, 19, 154*n415*, 155*n417*, 157*n424*,  
158, 168 and *n471*, 169 and *n476*, 170-  
71*n483*, 176*n494*, 177 and *n495*, 183-84*n*  
522, 185*n526* and 528, 186*n530-31* and  
533-34, 187*n536*, 188*n538* and 541, 189  
and *n545*, 190 and *n549*, 191*n551*, 192 and  
*n558*, 193 and *n561*, 194*n562*, 195*n565*,  
196*n570*, 197*n571*, 198*n572* and 574, 199  
and *n575*, 200, 201*n580*, 202*n581*, 203*n*  
584, 213, 214*n612*, 217 and *n621*, 232*n*  
656, 234*n661*, 235*n663*, 249, 266*n746*,

## INDEX

- 267n747, 277n778-79, 279n784 and 789,  
280 and n794, 281, 296 and n858, 297n  
858-59; II: 118 and n287, 214
- Zab mo phyag chen gyi mdzod* (Mi bskyod rdo  
rje), I: 187n537, 231, 232n654, 239n670;  
II: 122-23, 134, 212
- Zhi byed (tradition), I: 113, 119-20, 178n500;  
II: 12, 36 and n73
- zhi gnas*. *See* calm abiding
- Zla 'od gzhon nu, I: 71, 197, 212; II: 14-15  
and n3, 16, 41, 48
- Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba* (Chos kyi 'byung  
gnas and 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab), I:  
168 and n470, 194n565; II: 208, 217
- zung 'jug*. *See* unity
- Zung 'jug gi gru chen* (Shākya mchog ldan), I:  
46n92, 110n279; II: 13, 48 and n107, 71, 217
- Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje, I: 15





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