

TĀRANĀTHA'S "TWENTY-ONE DIFFERENCES WITH
REGARD TO THE PROFOUND MEANING" —
COMPARING THE VIEWS OF THE TWO *GĪZAN STON*
MASTERS DOL PO PA AND ŚĀKYA MCHO G LDAN¹

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1. Historical Background

The distinguishing feature of *gīzan ston* Madhyamaka in the Jonangpa school, to which Tāranātha (1575-1634) belongs, is the fact that it normally restricts the validity of the common Madhyamaka assertion "all phenomena are empty of an own-being" to phenomena on the level of apparent truth. The ultimate, which is inseparably endowed with innumerable Buddha-qualities, is considered to be not "empty of an own-being" (*ran ston*) but "empty of other" (*gīzan ston*), namely accidental stains and so forth². It was the famous Jonangpa Dol po pa Śes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361) who is said to have gained such an insight during a Kālacakra retreat³. From the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, which is one of the first works in which Dol po pa expressed his new *gīzan ston* understanding, it becomes clear that the latter's full-fledged *gīzan ston* theory requires including even an ultimate *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* within an ultimate realm of truth, which is equated with *dharmatā*, or the unchangeable perfect nature. This, we are told, is in line with extraordinary Mantrayāna⁴.

¹ The present article is an enlarged version of a paper read at the Eighth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in Bloomington (USA) in July 1998. Thanks to a scholarship from the German Research Council (DFG) I have been able to continue my research on *tathāgatagarbha* during the last three years and can now rest my original study of Tāranātha's comparison on a much broader basis. Improvements to my English by Philip H. Pierce (Nepal Research Centre, Kathmandu) are gratefully acknowledged.

² Mathes 2000:195-6.

³ Dol po pa's disciple Lha'i rgyal mtshan (1319-1401) informs us that his master's realization was connected with the *Kālacakratāntra* (see Stearns 1995:829-31).

⁴ Dol po pa: *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, 343, ll. 19-21 & 344, ll. 8-9: "As to the two aspects of the form-kāyas, they are here the commonly known *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* of the apparent [truth]. As to the ultimate *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*,

But as a commentator of non-Tantric texts, such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, Dol po pa explains that the *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* are brought forth by a fortified potential which arises from virtuous deeds being newly adopted with effort⁵, and it is only in texts such as the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho* that we are informed that the created *kāyas* are merely the ones pertaining to apparent truth. In view of this hermeneutic strategy⁶, the differences between the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho* and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary appear to be so fundamental that Hookham wonders if the latter is by Dol po pa at all and not rather by the Third Karmapa Rañ byuñ rdo rje (1284-1339)⁷.

Still, Dol po pa to some extent reads his originally Kālacakra-based *gzan ston* into the Sūtras and such non-Tantric treatises as the

they are completely [contained] in the *dharmatā*, perfect [nature] and suchness. [...] Therefore the ultimate *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* are known by way of the extraordinary Mantra[yāna].” (*de la gzugs sku rnam pa gñis ni kun rdzob kyi loñs spyod rdzogs pa dañ sprul pa'i sku ste thun moñ du rab tu grags pa'o // don dam pa'i loñs spyod rdzogs pa dañ sprul pa'i sku ni chos ñid yoñs grub de bzin ñid la tshañ ste / [...] des na don dam gyi loñs spyod rdzogs pa dañ sprul pa'i sku ni thun moñ ma yin pa sñags kyi tshul la grags pa'o /*).

⁵ Dol po pa: “Ñi ma'i 'od zer”, 986, l. 6-987, l. 3: “For example, in the same way as the inexhaustible treasure underground is naturally present, not newly brought about by effort, while the tree with its fruits gradually grows in a garden by bringing about [the necessary conditions] with effort, the Buddha-potential, which has the ability to bring forth the three *kāyas*, should be known to be twofold as well. It is both the natural potential, [namely] the pure *dharmadhātu* (which latter is intimately present as the nature of [one’s] mind throughout beginningless time), and the fortified potential [which is] supreme in terms of virtues (which are conducive to liberation). [The latter potential] arises from [virtuous deeds] being newly adopted with effort, [namely by] something being done, such as focusing on [the naturally present potential] and studying.” (*dper na 'bad rtsol gyis gzar du ma bsgrubs śiñ loñs spyod zad mi śes pa dañ ldan pa'i gter chen sa'i 'og na rañ bzin gyis gnas pa dañ 'bad rtsol gyis bsgrubs pas 'bras bu dañ bcas pa'i śiñ ljon sa skyed mos tshañ du rim gyis skye ba ji lta ba bzin du sku gsum 'byuñ du ruñ ba'i sañs rgyas kyi rigs de yañ rnam pa gñis su śes par bya ste / thog ma med pa'i dus nas sems kyi rañ bzin du ñe bar gnas pa'i chos kyi dbyiñs rnam par dag pa rañ bzin gyi rigs dañ / de la dmigs te thos pa la sogs pa byas pas 'bad rtsol gyis gzar du yag dag par blañs pa las byuñ ba'i dge ba thar pa'i cha dañ mthun pas mchog tu gyur pa rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ñid do*).

⁶ The possibility that Dol po pa wrote his *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary before achieving his insight into *gzan ston* can be ruled out, for he also refers to ultimate qualities in his “Ñi ma'i 'od zer” (911, ll. 3-4).

⁷ She reinforces her view with the assertion that the text was copied by Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas nearly *verbatim* (Hookham 1991:173-4). But such an assumption is unlikely, since the text is signed by “One Endowed with the Four Reliances” (*rton pa bzi ldan*), which was the most common pseudonym used by Dol po pa in his works (Stearns 1999:201).

Tathāgatagarbhasūtras and the Maitreya works. The hermeneutic principles according to which he interprets the Buddhist teachings are laid out in his "bKa' bsdu bži pa" (i.e., his own "fourth council"⁸), in which the whole of Buddhist doctrine is "reckoned" by dividing the teaching into four epochs. Alongside the four epochs of varying quality which make up a cosmic age, Dol po pa uses a lesser set of four epochs to refer to the qualitatively different periods of the teaching. He thus allocates philosophical doctrines to epochs (*yuga*) according to purely dogmatic criteria⁹. The teachings transmitted by Śākyamuni and also the Maitreya works, for example, belong to the Kṛtayuga of doctrine, while other works, such as the ones by Ārya Vimuktisena and Haribhadra, represent the teachings of the inferior Tretāyuga. The common interpretation of the Yogācāra works of Maitreya, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu as mere *cittamātra* itself reflects for Dol po pa the historical degeneration of the Dharma. The Maitreya works are only "Kṛtayuga" Dharma when they are explained as "Great Madhyamaka" (*dbu ma chen po*)¹⁰.

The theories of *tathāgatagarbha* ("Buddha-nature") and *trisvabhāva* ("three natures", i.e., the *imagined, dependent and perfect natures*) in the Maitreya works offer good canonical support for a distinction between *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ*, and it is thus no surprise that an interpretation which supports such a distinction is a major concern for the Jonangpas. Dol po pa takes the ultimate to be absolutely unconditioned, and it is the *Ratnagotravibhāga* among the Maitreya works which is adduced as the best support for this stance. Thus Dol po pa comments RGV I.5a in his *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho* in the following way:

Even though [the verse RGV I.5a]: "[Buddhahood] is unconditioned and spontaneously present"¹¹, and other [passages] teach that the ultimate Buddha is not conditioned, the underlying intention is that he is [also] free from moments¹².

⁸ Virtually the entire Buddhist tradition accepts only three great councils in India held for the purpose of consolidating the teaching after the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*.

⁹ Kapstein 2000:115-6.

¹⁰ Kapstein 1992:24-5.

¹¹ Cf. RGVV 7, ll. 14-5: *asaṅskṛtam anābhogam aparapratyayoditam / buddhatvaṃ jñānakāruṇyaśaktyupetaṃ dvayārthavat //*

¹² Dol po pa: *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, 97, ll. 15-7: '*dus ma byas śiñ lhun gyis grub / ces pa la sogs pas mthar thug gi sañs rgyas 'dus ma byas su gsuñs pa yañ skad cig dañ bral ba la dgoñs pa yin no /*

For Dol po pa's disciple Sa bzañ Mati pañ chen (1294-1376) the ultimate or Buddhahood is thus permanent in the sense of being beyond the three times (i.e., past, present and future), as becomes clear in Mati pañ chen's *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary on RGV I.6cd:

Buddhahood is unconditioned, since in the beginning, middle and end it has the nature of being free from conditioned phenomena which arise, abide and pass out of existence, as has been said in the [*Mahāpari*]nirvāṇasūtra: "A phenomenon that abides in permanence does not belong to the three times. Likewise, the Tathāgata does not belong to the three times, and is therefore permanent."¹³

It is obvious that in this case the perfect nature of the Yogācāra must be restricted, as Tāranātha has done in his final summary of the *trisvabhāva* theory¹⁴, to its unchangeable aspect (*nirvikāra*), since in an absolutely permanent and atemporal Buddhahood or Buddha-nature (both are ontologically the same for the Jonangpas) there is no room for an unmistaken (*aviparyāsa*) wisdom cultivated on the path, namely — according to MAV III.11cd — the perfect in terms of being unmistaken.

Already at the time of Dol po pa, the Third Karmapa Rañ byuñ rdo rje (1284-1339) was propounding a different "*gzan stoñ* position", or rather a position that was eventually called *gzan stoñ* by a few later Kagyupas¹⁵ such as Karma Phrin las pa (1456-1539)¹⁶. Rañ byuñ rdo rje bases his distinction between the true nature of mind or Buddha-nature and that from which it is free on *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.45-9, in which an impure *ālayavijñāna* is strictly distinguished from a "transmudane mind"¹⁷. In this context Rañ byuñ rdo rje stresses the need to distinguish

¹³ Sa bzañ Mati pañ chen: "Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi mam par bśad pa ñes don rab gsal snañ ba", 55, ll. 2-3: *sañs rgyas ñid thog ma dañ dbus dañ mtha' mar 'dus byas kyi chos skye ba dañ gnas pa dañ 'jig pa rñams med pa'i rañ bñin can yin pa'i phyir 'dus ma byas pa ste / mya ñan las 'das pa'i mdo las / rtag tu gnas pa'i chos ni dus gsum la (text: las) ma gtogs te / de bñin gśegs pa yañ de dañ 'dra bar dus gsum la ma gtogs pa de bas na rtag pa'o źes gsuñs pa ltar ro.*

¹⁴ See Mathes 2000:219-220.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the term *gzan stoñ* is found nowhere in the works of Rañ byuñ rdo rje.

¹⁶ Karma 'Phrin las pa: "Dris lan yid kyi mun sel źes bya ba lcags mo'i dri lan bźugs so" 91, ll. 1-4.

¹⁷ This is clear from Rañ byuñ rdo rje's autocommentary on the *Zab mo nañ gi don* (9b4-10b1) and commentary on the *Dharmadhātustotra* (12b1-13b6).

“ground-consciousness” (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzi rnam śes*) from “ground” (*kun gzi*) in terms of suchness¹⁸. Referring to this passage, Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899) proceeds in his commentary on the *Zab mo nañ gi don* to use the *gžan stoñ* term *kun gzi ye śes* for the transmundane mind of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*¹⁹. Koñ sprul's use of the term *kun gzi ye śes*²⁰ does not imply, though, that he took Rañ byuñ rdo rje's position to be the same as Dol po pa's. It rather suggests that Koñ sprul himself maintains a *gžan stoñ* whose “basis of emptiness” (*stoñ gzi*) is defined in accordance with Rañ byuñ rdo rje's *Zab don rañ 'grel*, which in this crucial point follows not the *Ratnagotravibhāga* but the *Mahāyānasamgraha*. Rañ byuñ rdo rje is a *gžan stoñ pa* for Koñ sprul, but one who explains that which remains in emptiness in a way different from Dol po pa. And indeed, in the ninth chapter of his *Zab mo nañ gi don* Rañ byuñ rdo rje takes the stainless Buddha-nature (which is liberated from everything else (Tib. *gžan grol*) — i.e., the basis of emptiness) as being endowed with the two truths²¹. From the autocommentary it is clear, however, that it is not the normal apparent truth which is included in Buddha-nature here, but only a pure aspect of the latter, namely the “non-existence of the stains [or] delusions in the eight consciousnesses”²².

¹⁸ Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *Zab mo nañ gi don gsal bar byed pa'i 'grel pa*, fol. 8a6-7: “In this regard, if ‘ground’ (*kun gzi*) is not mentioned [together with] the word ‘consciousness’, ‘ground’ may refer to suchness. Therefore, consciousness is mentioned [together with it].” (*‘di la kun gzi źes bya ba rnam par śes pa'i sgra ma smos na de bžin ñid la yañ kun gzi brjod du ruñ ba'i phyir rnam par śes pa smos so /.*)

¹⁹ Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas: *Zab mo nañ gi don gyi 'grel pa*, 17b4-6.

²⁰ A term thought to be newly coined by Dol po pa.

²¹ Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *Zab mo nañ gi don*, 22b6: “The [Buddha]-element in sentient beings, the stainless Buddha-nature, is endowed with the two truths.” (*/ sems can khams ni sañs rgyas kyi // sñiñ po dri med bden gñis ldan /.*)

²² Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *Rañ 'grel*, 62a7-62b2: “What exists ultimately? It is the mind beyond every net of thought, the naturally pure element of sentient beings, [and] the Buddha-nature (*sañs rgyas kyi sñiñ po*). Because these two exist, they have been expressed by way of these [terms]. Therefore it is stated: “as for the element of sentient beings, the stainless Buddha-nature is endowed with the two truths.” In this regard, the Buddha-nature is simply the non-existence of stains [or] delusion in the above-mentioned eight accumulations [of consciousness].” (*don dam par gañ žig yod na / rtog pa'i drva ba thams cad las 'das pa'i sems rañ bžin gyis dag pa'i sems can gyi khams sañs rgyas kyi sñiñ po dag ni yod pas de'i tshul brjod pas / sems can khams ni sañs rgyas kyi / sñiñ po dri med bden gñis ldan źes smos so // de la sañs rgyas kyi sñiñ po ni sñar smos pa'i tshogs brgyad kyi 'khrul pa dri ma med pa kho na yin mod kyi...*)

What this latter term exactly refers to is explained a little further down in the *Zab don rañ 'grel*, where the use of the word “truth” in the term “apparent truth” is justified on the grounds that one cannot deny mere appearance as such, even though its interpretation as a perceived object and perceiving subject is not true:

What has been imagined as the duality of a perceived and a perceiver does not exist at all, given the pronouncement [in MAV I.3] by the Venerable Maitreya: “A consciousness arises which has the appearances of objects, sentient beings, a self and perceptions. It does not have a [corresponding outer] object, and since [such] an object does not exist, it (i.e., a perceiving subject) does not exist either.”²³ Thus it has been said that no perceived [objects] or perceiving [subjects] of the imagined [nature] exist at all. Well then, how can it be presented as a truth? [The answer is:] Even though it does not exist, [something] appears. This is what is called apparent truth, for it has the nature (*rañ gi ño bo ñid*) of not being deceptive²⁴.

In response to the objection that these mere appearances would then be the ultimate truth, since the latter is defined as not being deceptive in the treatises on logic, Rañ byuñ rdo rje further clarifies his understanding of the ultimate truth as follows:

These [mere appearances] are presented as the expressible ultimate (*paryāya-paramārtha*), while the ultimate truth [here] is that which²⁵ is related to the reasoning of *dharmatā*, [namely] the natural emptiness previously mentioned during the presentation of the eighteen [types of] great emptiness²⁶.

In other words, the Buddha-nature or the pure mind includes “mere appearances” in the form of the expressible ultimate truth, and it is only

²³ MAVBh, 18, ll. 21-2: *arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsam prajāyate / vijñānañ nāsti cāsyārthas tadabhāvāt tad apy asat*. My additions in brackets are accordings to Vasubandhu's *bhāṣya*.

²⁴ Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *Rañ 'grel*, 63a3-5: / *gzuñ ba dañ 'dzin pa gñis su kun btags (text: brtags) pa ni rnam pa thams cad du med pa dag yin te / 'phags pa byams pa'i 'zal śha nas kyañ / [MAV I.3] / ces kun btags (text: brtags) pa'i gzuñ ba dañ 'dzin pa thams cad rnam pa thams cad du med pa ñid du gsuñs so // 'o na bden pa ji ltar b'zag ce na / med b'zin du yañ snañ ba tsam de ni kun rdzob kyi bden pa 'zes bya ste / bslu ba med pa'i rañ gi ño bo ñid yin pa'i phyir ro /*

²⁵ The use of the plural particle *dag* should be noted here. It indicates that there is more than one truth related to *dharmatāyukti*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 63a5-6: *'di yañ rnam grañs kyi don dam par b'zag pa yod mod kyi / chos ñid kyi rigs pa'i rjes su 'brel pa dag ni stoñ pa ñid chen po bco brgyad kyi rnam par b'sad pa'i rañ b'zin stoñ pa ñid śnar smos pa de ñid don dam pa'i bden pa yin no /*

the latter which is taken as apparent truth here. That it is different from what is ordinarily included in apparent truth is clear from Rañ byuñ rdo rje's *Dharmadhātustotra* commentary, where the two aspects (*nirvikāra* and *aviparyāsa*) of the perfect nature in MAV III.11cd are explained in the following way:

The two [aspects of the perfect], the unchangeable and unmistaken, are taken [respectively] as the defining characteristics of the two truths. Acceptance by common consent (*lokaprasiddha*) and by reason (*yuktiprasiddha*) are varieties of the apparent truth²⁷.

In other words, the unchangeable perfect is taken as the ultimate, and the perfect in terms of being unmistaken as a restricted form of apparent truth, which does not include acceptance by common consent and the like.

It should have become clear by now that Rañ byuñ rdo rje, in contrast to the Jonangpas, fully accepts the Yogācāra theory of *trisvabhāva*, that is, two aspects of the perfect nature. This entails that the latter possesses moments, in the *Zab mo nañ gi don* the true nature of mind which is free from everything else (*gžan grol*) being consequently equated with dependent arising²⁸. In this context, it is of interest that Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, who otherwise strictly follows Dol po pa's *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, deviates from the latter's *gžan ston* understanding of the term "unconditioned" (*asaṃskṛta*) in his commentary on RGV I.6. Referring to Roñ ston Śeś bya kun rig's (1367-1449) explanation of four ways of understanding "unconditioned", Koñ sprul states that the *dharmakāya* only shares this quality of being unconditioned to a certain extent, inasmuch as it does not appear to disciples. If one claimed that it is completely

²⁷ Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *dBu ma chos dbyiñs bstod pa'i nmañ par bśad pa*, 7b1-2: *bden pa gñis kyi rañ gi mtshan ñid kyiś 'gyur ba med pa dañ phyin ci ma log pa gñis so / 'jig rten pa dañ rigs pa'i grags pa ni / kun rdzob bden pa'i bye brag ste /*

²⁸ Rañ byuñ rdo rje: *Rañ 'grel*, 10b3-4: "As to the 'beginningless [mind-essence]', since a beginning and end of time is a [mere] conceptual superimposition, [the cause of everything] is here [taken as] the true nature (*rañ gi ño bo*) of both the stainless [mind] and the [mind] mingled with stains — it is precisely this dependent origination; and it is completely liberated (i.e., free) from [all] else. Since there is no other beginning than it, one speaks of beginningless time." (*thog med la źes bya ba ni / dus kyi thog ma dañ tha ma ni rtoğ pas sgro btags pa yin pas 'dir ni dri ma med pa dañ dri ma dañ bcas pa'i rañ gi ño bo ni rten ciñ 'brel bar 'byuñ ba de ñid dañ gžan las nmañ par grol ba ste / de las thog ma gžan med pa'i phyir thog ma med pa'i dus źes bya ste /*)

unconditioned, this would contradict the fact that it possesses knowledge, compassion and power.²⁹

To sum up, whether one wants to call Rañ byuñ rdo rje's "free from other" (*gžan las grol ba*) "empty of other" (*gžan stoñ*) or not, there is an alternative way of defining how the pure mind or Buddha-nature is free from or empty of other (i.e., adventitious stains), and some Kagyupas decided to call this *gžan stoñ*, too. It should be noted that with an ultimate that still possesses moments a distinction founded on *gžan grol* (or *gžan stoñ*) can be better brought into line with *mahāmudrā* teachings³⁰, and this is exactly what Rañ byuñ rdo rje did³¹. It is thus no longer so puzzling how Situ pañ chen Chos kyi byuñ gnas (1699/1700-1774) "blended the seemingly irreconcilable *gžan stoñ* and *mahāmudrā* positions"³².

Another famous scholar whose *gžan stoñ* differs from the Jonang position is gSer mdog pañ chen Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507). Georges Dreyfus (1997:29) has observed that Śākya mchog ldan fully endorses a *gžan stoñ* view only in works written after his first meeting with the Seventh Karmapa (1454-1506) in 1484, and it is thus interesting that Śākya mchog ldan's *gžan stoñ* differs from the Jonang position in a way similar to Rañ byuñ rdo rje's *gžan grol* (or *gžan stoñ*). Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas notices in his *Encyclopedia of Knowledge* (*Śes bya kun khyab mdzod*) that Śākya mchog ldan has his own views on what is exactly empty of what, or, to use the technical terms, how the negandum (Tib. *dgag bya*), the basis of negation (Tib. *dgag gži*) and the mode of being empty (Tib. *stoñ tshul*) are defined.

Koñ sprul says that *gžan stoñ pas* take the perfect nature as the basis of negation, the imagined and the dependent natures as the negandum, and the mode of being empty as the absence of these two neganda in the basis of negation³³. He adds, however, that Śākya mchog ldan holds a view

²⁹ Koñ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas: *rGyud bla ma'i bśad srol*, fol. 12b1-5; see also Tsultrim Gyamtsho & Fuchs 2000:103-4.

³⁰ A *dharmakāya* that possesses moments it not entirely transcendent and can be experienced as the true nature of thoughts and the like.

³¹ For further information on this topic I refer to my forthcoming habilitation thesis.

³² Smith 1970:34.

³³ In the subchapter on ascertaining the view (7.3.), Koñ sprul (*Śes bya kun khyab mdzod*, vol. 3, 61, ll. 19-24) defines the tradition of the *gžan stoñ* Madhyamaka as follows: "The basis of negation is the perfect, the sphere (*dhātu*), suchness, what is beyond [any]

different from this, and illustrates this by quoting from Śākya mchog ldan's "Zab źi spros bral gyi bźad pa":

As to the basis which is empty, it is the dependent, the entire "mind" (*śes pa*), which takes on various forms of a perceived object and perceiving subject. The negandum is the imagined. Given its division into perceived and perceiver, it [consists of] two. [...] ³⁴

As to in what sense it is empty, the basis of negation is empty of the negandum by virtue of being "empty of other", not by virtue of being "empty of self", for the following reason: The negandum, namely the duality of a perceived and a perceiver, is an "other-being" with regard to the basis of negation, [namely] the mind" (*śes pa*), which appears as two, [duality] not being taken as its own-being. What is then the own-being of this mind which appears as two? It is non-dual wisdom, namely mere awareness and luminosity that experience knowable objects ³⁵.

Koñ sprul continues his presentation of *gźan stoñ* along this (namely Śākya mchog ldan's) line of thought, elaborating it on the basis of the sixteen forms of emptiness in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. Koñ sprul's position on *gźan stoñ* still needs further clarification, but it is at least noteworthy that while in the sixth chapter of his *Śes bya kun khyab mdzod* he quotes nearly the entire *dbu ma chen po* paragraph of Tāranātha's *gźan*

mentally fabricated object. The negandum is the two defining characteristics of the imagined and the dependent. The mode of being empty is: 'empty of these two neganda in the basis of negation' Only the perfect, therefore, is empty of other. Thus says the Yogācāra, the proponents holding the tradition of *gźan stoñ*." (*dgag gźi yoñs grub dbyiñs de bźin ñid spros pa'i yul las 'das pa / dgag bya kun btags (text: brtags) dañ gźan dbañ gi mtshan ñid gñis / stoñ tshul dgag bya de gñis kyis dgag gźi la stoñ pas yoñs grub ñid gźan gyis stoñ pa yin ces rnal 'byor spyod pa ste gźan stoñ gi srol 'dzin pa rnam smra'o /*).

³⁴ Koñ sprul: *ibid.*, vol. 3, 62, ll. 1-3: *gañ stoñ pa'i gźi ni gźan dbañ ste gzuñ 'dzin gñis snañ can gyi śes pa mtha' dag go / dgag bya ni kun btags (text: brtags) pa ste gzuñ ba dañ 'dzin pa'i dbye bas gñis yin la /*. This is a literal quote from Śākya mchog ldan's work "Zab źi spros bral gyi bźad pa stoñ ñid bdud rtsi'i lam po che", 114, ll. 3-4.

³⁵ Koñ sprul, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 62, ll. 4-10: *ji ltar stoñ pa'i tshul ni / dgag bya des dgag gźi de gźan stoñ gi tshul gyis stoñ pa yin gyi / rañ stoñ gi tshul gyis ni ma yin te / dgag bya 'kun btags (text: brtags) kyī gzuñ 'dzin gñis po de ni dgag gźi gñis snañ gi śes pa gñis po de la ltos pa'i gźan gyi ño bo yin gyi / de'i rañ gi ño bor mi 'jog pa'i phyir / gñis snañ gi śes pa de'i rañ gi ño bo gañ ze na / gñis med kyī ye śes śes^b bya myoñ ba rig cñ gsal tsam de ñid do. (= "Zab źi spros bral gyi bźad pa", 114, l. 7 – 115, l. 2).*

^a Added by Koñ sprul.

^b The edition of the collected works of Śākya mchog ldan reads *zes*, the editors probably having thought that *zes* had changed into *śes* according to an old sandhi rule.

stoñ sñiñ po, he skips the last part, where — against the purport of the Yogācāra works — the *trīsvabhāva* theory is brought into line with that of *tathāgatagarbha* by restricting the perfect nature to its unchangeable aspect³⁶.

To sum up, from the time of Dol po pa it is possible to trace, parallel to the Jonang position, another “*g’zan grol*” or *g’zan stoñ* which distinguishes the basis of negation from the negandum in a different way. Whereas for the Jonangpas the basis of negation is a perfect nature which is restricted to its unchangeable aspect and thus transcendent and doctrinally mainly based on the *tathāgatagarbha* theory, Śākya mchog ldan, Rañ byuñ rdo rje and some other Kagyupas adhere to a distinction based on Yogācāra, that is, mainly the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.

2. Tāranātha’s Twenty-One Differences with regard to the Profound Meaning³⁷

For a short but brilliant analysis of the positions of Dol po pa and Śākya mchog ldan we are very much indebted to the Jonang master Tāranātha, who is considered to be a follower and proponent of Dol po pa’s doctrine. In each of the *Twenty-one Differences with regard to the Profound Meaning* a fictive initial statement of Śākya mchog ldan is followed by a similarly fictive reply of Dol po pa, Tāranātha being, of course, well aware of the fact that this is all ahistorical³⁸. To be sure, it is not possible to establish Śākya mchog ldan’s or Dol po pa’s views on the basis of this short text alone, but it does sharpen our awareness of the subtle aspects of *g’zan stoñ* when studying the bulky and often not very systematic works of these masters. Furthermore, critically evaluating these doctrinal differences against the background of pertinent Indian texts in such traditions as the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha promises to be a second interesting task. Both are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. Such an evaluation will, however, be undertaken with regard to the different presentations of *trīsvabhāva* as an example of how one might proceed.

³⁶ See Koñ sprul: *ibid.*, vol. 2, 546-9.

³⁷ Tib. *zab don khyad par ñer gcig pa*, which is the title according to the colophon (Tāranātha: “Zab don ñer gcig pa”, 795, l. 5.

³⁸ Tāranātha: “Zab don ñer gcig pa”, 792, l. 4.

Tāranātha begins his somewhat delicate task of comparing the two masters Dol po pa and Śākya mchog ldan in a conciliating manner, by explaining that both supposedly see what is profound reality and hence should not have different thoughts about it. It is only in order to accommodate the different needs of their disciples that they enunciate variant views. Even though the essential *g'zan ston* view and meditation practices of both masters are the same, there are a lot of minor differences regarding tenets (*grub mtha'*) that arise when formulating the view on the level of apparent truth³⁹.

The first four of the twenty-one points address differences in the exegesis of the Madhyamaka and Maitreya texts which are considered to be commentaries on the Buddha's intention underlying the second and third turnings of the "Wheel of the Dharma" (*dharmacakra*)⁴⁰. Points 5-8 embody Śākya mchog ldan's and Dol po pa's different understanding of non-dual wisdom. In points 9-16, their views on the *trisvabhāva* theory are distinguished. In a related topic, Tāranātha also elaborates the different understandings of self-awareness (point 11), entities and non-entities, and conditioned and unconditioned phenomenon (all in point 13). Next, our attention is drawn to different ways of relating the four noble truths with the apparent and ultimate (point 17). The last four points deal with the two masters' views on the Buddha-nature.

2.1. Translation: The Twenty-One Differences

Difference No. 1

Śākya mchog ldan⁴¹: All the views of the Prāsaṅgika- and Svātantrika- [Madhyamaka] are logically correct [and accurately represent] the Buddha's

³⁹ These remarks should not be taken too seriously, though. 'Ba' ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzañ (1310-1391) launches into his "Chos rje mam gñis kyi dgoñs bśad ñi ma'i 'od zer" (496-8) by stating, in a similar way, that Dol po pa and Bu ston (*sic*) are both omniscient and must see the same reality, but teach it in various ways with hidden intentions.

⁴⁰ The Indo-Tibetan exegetical traditions summarize the teachings of the Buddha in three circles or "[turnings of the] Wheel of the Dharma" (*dharmacakra*). See Mathes 1996:155.

⁴¹ Lit. "The one named Śākya claims that...." Here and in the following sentences simply the proponent's name is given in bold letters.

intention in the middle turning and the corpus of analytical works⁴². The explicit teaching of the middle [turning], in addition, [has to] be taken literally, and the corpus of analytical works is not in accordance with the explicit teaching of the last turning.⁴³

Dol po pa⁴⁴: Even though [the *rañ stoñ pas*] are proud that these Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika views [represent] the intention of the middle turning and the corpus of analytical works, [their interpretation of this] intention is not free from mistakes. Although the explicit teaching of the analytical works generally appears to be consistent, it is not so in a great number of cases. Since many passages⁴⁵ of the treatises of the middle turning clearly teach *gžan stoñ*, the explicit teaching of the middle turning and the analytical works [should] not be [taken] literally. The explicit teaching of most passages of the middle turning and the analytical works contradicts neither the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika nor the *gžan stoñ*. Nevertheless, for those appealing to the extraordinary tenet known as *rañ stoñ*, it has become a cause of confusion. On the other hand, given that [these texts] do not teach different tenets, that they contradict other traditions, and that there are [in fact] many extraordinary passages which only teach *gžan stoñ*, even the middle turning and the analytical works [can be said to] teach *gžan stoñ* Madhyamaka. From these texts [of the middle turning], however, the extraordinary points of *gžan stoñ* — namely [those reached by] following only the lines of commentary on the intention of the last turning — have not clearly or extensively emerged. They are the extraordinary tenets of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika. What is nowadays known as the *rañ stoñ* view was not taught [in the middle turning]; nevertheless, this *rañ stoñ* [interpretation of] the intention of the Buddha and his sons is taught in detail [nowadays]⁴⁶.

⁴² E.g., the analytical works of Nāgārjuna, such as the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

⁴³ Tāranātha: “Zab don űer gcig pa”, 782, ll. 3-5: *de la śākya'i mshan can ni / thal rañ gi lta ba 'di kun 'khor lo bar pa dañ / rig tshogs kyi dgoñs don 'thad ldan yin ciñ / bar pa'i dños bstan sgra ji bžin pa yañ yin / rig tshogs dañ 'khor lo tha ma'i dños bstan mi mthun par bžed la /*

⁴⁴ Lit. “the great omniscient one from Jonang”.

⁴⁵ Lit. “words”.

⁴⁶ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 782, l. 5 – 783, l. 6: *kun mkhyen jo nañ pa chen po ni / thal rañ gi lta ba 'di 'khor lo bar pa dañ rig tshogs kyi dgoñs par rlom pa yin kyañ / dgoñs pa rma med pa ma yin la / rig tshogs dños bstan gyi tshig phal cher la 'byor ba ltar snañ yañ /*

Difference No. 2

Śākya mchog ldan⁴⁷: With regard to the fact that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* teaches both the tenets of *rañ ston* and *gzan ston*, [Maitreya] considered the necessity of *gzan ston* in terms of a meditation practice, and that of *Prāsaṅgika* and *Svātantrika*, [which are at the same time] the *rañ ston* of the subsequent three works⁴⁸, when it comes to cutting through mental fabrications with the help of the view. The remaining four Maitreya works⁴⁹ teach only *gzan ston*⁵⁰. With regard to these [latter four] there are two types: In the *Ratnagotravibhāga* ultimately only one single path is taught and the possibility of a cut-off potential refuted. In the other three [Maitreya] works (i.e., *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga* and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*) ultimately three paths and a cut-off potential⁵¹ are explained⁵².

Dol po pa: There are no different tenets in the five Maitreya works at all. The tenet of the so-called *rañ ston* is not explained even in the

mi 'byor ba yañ mañ du yod la / 'khor lo bar pa'i gzuñ tshig mañ pos gzan ston gsal bar ston pas 'khor lo bar pa dañ rig tshogs kyi dños bstan sgra ji bzin pa ma yin no / de la 'khor lo bar pa dañ rig tshogs kyi tshig phal cher gyi dños bstan ni thal rañ dañ gzan ston gñis ka la mi 'gal yañ / rañ ston par grags pa'i thun moñ ma yin pa'i grub mtha'i khuñs la 'dren pa rñams ni / de rñams ñid la 'khrul gzi byuñ ba yin gyi / grub mtha' de dañ de mi ston ciñ / de las gzan de'i lugs dañ 'gal žiñ / gzan ston kho na ston pa thun moñs ma yin pa'i tshig kyañ du ma yod pas / bar pa dañ rig tshogs kyis kyañ gzan ston dbu ma ñid ston no / 'on kyañ de dag nas / 'khor lo tha ma dgoñs 'grel dañ bcas pa tsam du gzan ston thun moñs ma yin pa rñams gsal žiñ rgyas par 'byuñ ba min la / thal rañ gi thun moñs ma yin pa'i grub mtha' / deñ sañ rañ ston gi lta bar grags pa de mi ston kyañ / rgyal ba sras bcas kyi dgoñs pa'i rañ ston de rgyas par bstan te / ces gsuñ so /

⁴⁷ From here on, Śākya mchog ldan and Dol po pa are referred to as “the former” and “the latter”.

⁴⁸ I.e., the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*.

⁴⁹ I.e., the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, and *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

⁵⁰ This does not obviously exclude recourse to a *Prāsaṅgika* view when cutting through mental fabrications in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* etc.

⁵¹ Usually a cut-off potential and the potentials for entering on the paths of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas and on the *Mahāyāna* are distinguished.

⁵² Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 783, l. 6–784, l. 3: *mñon rtogs rgyan gyis / rañ ston gzan ston gi grub mtha' gñis ka ston pa ni / lta bas spros pa gcod pa la thal rañ gzuñ phyi gsum gyi rañ ston dañ / sgom pas ñams len gzan ston dgos pa la dgoñs la / byams chos lhag ma bžis gzan ston kho na ston mod / de la'añ rigs gñis te / rgyud blar mthar thug theg gcig bśad / rigs chad bkag gzuñ gzan gsum du mthar thug theg gsum dañ / rigs chad bśad gsuñ /*

Abhisamayālamkāra. A real cut-off potential and three ultimate paths are not explained in the [*Mahāyāna*]sūtrālamkāra and so forth⁵³.

Difference No. 3

Śākya mchog ldan: *Raṅ stoṅ* is considered to be more profound when it comes to cutting through mental fabrications with the help of the view. When it comes to the practice of meditation, however, it is said that *gžan stoṅ* is more profound. The *raṅ stoṅ*⁵⁴ of the latter in turn, namely Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, is acknowledged in the tradition of the subsequent three works (i.e., the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* etc.)⁵⁵.

Dol po pa: The view of *raṅ stoṅ* as taught by the Buddha and his sons is superior in cutting through mental fabrications. Nevertheless, it is contained in *gžan stoṅ*, and therefore view and practice are not opposed to each other⁵⁶. To maintain that the *raṅ stoṅ*, [namely,] the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika — as it is known nowadays — is the view of the subsequent three works, [thinking that according to the latter] nothing exists ultimately, is wrong. [Such a *raṅ stoṅ*] is therefore not better in cutting through mental fabrications with the help of the view, for this would be a false denial⁵⁷.

Difference No. 4

Śākya mchog ldan: Even though *gžan stoṅ* goes beyond Cittamātra and is thus acceptable to Madhyamaka, *raṅ stoṅ* is superior to it with regard

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 784, ll. 3-4: *byams chos sde lha la grub mtha' so so ba ye med / raṅ stoṅ par grags pa'i grub mtha' mñon [rtogs] rgyan nas kyaṅ ma bśad / mdo [sde] rgyan sogs nas kyaṅ / gtan nas rigs chad pa daṅ mthar thug theg gsum ma bśad / źes gsuṅ ño /*

⁵⁴ The *gžan stoṅ* view includes a *raṅ stoṅ* that refers to the negandum, but not to what is left over in emptiness.

⁵⁵ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 784, ll. 4-5: *lta bas spros pa gcod pa la raṅ stoṅ zab / sgom pas ñams su len pa la gžan stoṅ zab ces te / de'i raṅ stoṅ yaṅ thal raṅ gžuṅ phyi gsum gyi lugs la ños 'dzin (text: 'dzi).*

⁵⁶ As would be the case if the former were strictly *raṅ stoṅ* and the latter strictly *gžan stoṅ*.

⁵⁷ Tāranātha, *op. cit.*, 784, ll. 5-7: *rgyal ba sras bcas bźed pa'i raṅ stoṅ gi lta ba de spros pa gcod byed mchog yin kyaṅ / gžan stoṅ du 'dus pas lta grub logs logs pa min la / deṅ saṅ grags pa'i raṅ stoṅ thal raṅ gžuṅ phyi gsum gyi lta ba don dam bden med du 'dod pa ni nor ba yin pas / lta bas spros pa gcod pa la bzaṅ ba min te / skur 'debs su 'gyur ba'i phyir yin źes gsuṅ /*

to the view. Still, the former (i.e., *g'zan stoñ*) is not wrong, for it accords with the experiential object of meditation⁵⁸.

Dol po pa: *Raṅ stoñ*, too, goes beyond Cittamātra, and thus falls under Madhyamaka within the system of the four tenets. It is not the pure ultimate, however, the highest view being *g'zan stoñ* alone⁵⁹.

Difference No. 5

Śākya mchog ldan: For this reason non-dual wisdom is not analyzed when following the Maitreya works. When critically analyzing it, after having excluded [its] opposite, [wisdom] cannot withstand such analysis. Therefore, since it cannot withstand a critical analysis [aimed at] ascertaining the ultimate, *raṅ stoñ* is more profound in terms of the view. Even though it does not withstand analysis, this wisdom is experienced uninterruptedly. Therefore it abides like the experiential object of meditation, namely *g'zan stoñ*⁶⁰.

Dol po pa: Non-dual wisdom does withstand critical analysis⁶¹. Therefore, this very analysis itself is self-delusion⁶².

Difference No. 6

Śākya mchog ldan: Non-dual wisdom is momentary awareness (*rig pa*), not permanent, and has no chance to abide⁶³.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 784, l. 7–785, l. 1: *g'zan stoñ sems tsam las 'das pas dbu ma go chod po yin kyañ / lta ba'i ṅos nas de bas kyañ raṅ stoñ mtho / 'on kyañ śha ma de nor bar (text: par) ni mi 'gyur te / sgom don dañ mthun pas so gsuñ /*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 785, ll. 1-2: *raṅ stoñ yañ sems tsam las 'das pas / grub mtha' b'zi'i dbu mar bsdu ba tsam yin kyañ / rnam dag mthar thug min la / lta ba'i mtho śos g'zan stoñ kho na yin no gsuñ /*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 785, ll. 2-4: *de'i rgyu mtshan du / byams chos rjes 'brañ dañ bcas par / gñis med kyi ye śes la dpyad pa mi byed pa yin la / spyi ldog nas de yañ rig pas dpyad na dpyad mi bzod pas / don dam gcod byed kyi rig pas dpyad bzod mi srid pas lta ba raṅ stoñ zab / dpyad ma bzod kyañ ye śes de ṅams myoñ rgyun mi 'chad pas / sgom don g'zan stoñ ltar gnas gsuñ /*.

⁶¹ For it is beyond one and many. Moreover, wisdom is omnipresent, in that the Bud-dhas embrace with their non-dual wisdom the all-pervading suchness of all phenomena (cf. 2.2. below).

⁶² Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 785, l. 4: *gñis med ye śes rigs pas dpyad bzod yin pas / de la dpyod pa de rañ gi 'khrul gsuñ /*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 785, l. 5: *gñis med ye śes de rig pa skad cig ma yin / rtag pa min / gnas pa'i go skabs med pa cig yin gsuñ /*

Dol po pa: This [wisdom] is not momentary, but permanent and stable, in that it is beyond the three times (i.e., past, present and future)⁶⁴.

Difference No. 7

Śākya mchog ldan: Likewise, given that it is knowledge (*śes pa*), wisdom [can be] taken to be an entity/existent (*dños po*)⁶⁵.

Dol po pa: And it [can be] taken to be beyond both [the state of] an entity/existence and a non-entity/non-existence⁶⁶.

Difference No. 8

Śākya mchog ldan: Likewise it [can be] taken to be conditioned⁶⁷.

Dol po pa: It [can be] taken to be unconditioned, too⁶⁸.

Difference No. 9

Śākya mchog ldan: If one isolates its specific aspects (*rañ ldog*), all knowledge is — as generally accepted in Tibet — only clarity and awareness, and here an entity of the dependent [nature]. The isolation of the specific aspects of mere dualistic appearances which arise in this [clarity and awareness] results in the imagined nature. When viewed under its aspect of being accompanied by these dualistic appearances, clarity and awareness constitute the dependent nature. From the perspective, however, that it is unstained by these dualistic phenomena throughout beginningless time, this clarity and awareness constitute the perfect nature. Based on that, dependent entities as such are by nature the same as the perfect nature, even though they are different as isolates (*ldog cha*) and different in terms of their respective defining characteristics⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 785, ll. 5-6: *de skad cig ma ma yin / dus gsum las grol bas rtag pa britan pa yin gsuñ.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 785, l. 6: *de bzin du śes pa yin pa'i phyir dños por bžed pa dañ /.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 785, l. 6: *dños po dños med gñis ka las grol bar bžed pa ste /.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 785, ll. 6-7: *de bzin du 'dus byas su bžed pa dañ /.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 785, l. 7: *'dus ma byas su bžed pa yañ ste /.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 785, l. 7–786, l. 3: *bod spyi dañ mthun ruñ du śes pa thams cad kyi rañ ldog gsal rig tsam 'di ka gžan dbañ gi dños po yin la / de ñid la śar ba'i gñis snañ kho na'i*

Dol po pa: The imagined aspect, which is imputed by the mind's multitude of thoughts, and its appearances in the form of external objects, is the perceived. The isolation of its specific aspects is the imagined nature. The isolation of the specific aspects of the mind and mental factors results in the dependent nature, namely knowledge constituted by knowledge or consciousness of apparent truth. Clarity and awareness, by nature free from mental fabrication, is the perfect nature. Thus the imagined and the dependent are substantially the same; their defining characteristics are very different, however. Not only are the perfect and the dependent different as isolates and in terms of their defining characteristics, but they are also not the same by nature (*ño bo gcig pa*)⁷⁰. The previous presentations of this [*trīsvabhāva*-theory] were mainly in line with Cittamātra, but [Dol po pa] thinks that the tradition of Madhyamaka is only this [*trīsvabhāva*]⁷¹.

Difference No. 10

Śākya mchog ldan: The imagined nature fully pertains to what is not true, the perfect to what is true, and the dependent to both⁷².

rañ ldog nas kun btags (text: brtags) yin no / gsal rig gñis snañ de dañ bcas pa'i cha nas gžan dbaň dañ / gsal rig de la gñis chos gdod nas ma gos pa'i cha nas yoňs grub yin pas / gžan dbaň yoňs grub ldog cha nas tha dad ciñ / mtshan ñid kyi cha nas tha dad kyaň gžan dbaň gi dños po de ñid dañ / yoňs grub ño bo gcig par bžed do /

⁷⁰ This negation of identity has been often misunderstood and misleadingly represented. (Cf. Newland, who writes that for Dol po pa the two truths are different entities (*ño bo tha dad pa*). Instead of referring directly to the Jonang material, however, he quotes Seyfort Ruegg, Hopkins and Thurman (Newland 1992: 30 & 260). In fact, Dol po pa negates not only identity but also difference. In his "bDen gñis gsal ba'i ñi ma", 23, ll. 2-3) he explains that "the two truths should be called neither identical (*de ñid*) in terms of their nature nor different (*gžan*) [in terms of their nature].^a Cf. also Mathes 1998:465-6.

^a For Tib. *de ñid dañ gžan*, Skt. *tattvānyatva*, see MAVBh, 23, l. 10.

⁷¹ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 786, ll. 3-6: *blo rnam rtoḡ sna tshogs pas brtags pa'i btags cha dañ / phyi don du snañ ba'i snañ cha ste / gzuñ ba'i rañ ldog kun btags (text: brtags) dañ / sems sems byuñ šes pa'i rañ ldog kun rdzob pa'i šes pa'am rnam šes kyi bsdus pa'i šes pa gžan dbaň dañ / spros pa dañ bral ba'i rañ bžin gsal rig yoňs grub ste / des na kun btags (text: brtags) ni gžan dbaň las rdzas tha dad du med kyaň / mtshan ñid kyi sgo nas ni šin tu tha dad do / yoňs grub dañ gžan dbaň ni / ldog cha dañ mtshan ñid tha dad par ma zad / ño bo gcig pa yaň ma yin no / sna ma'i rnam gžag ni sems tsam dañ mthun šas che la / dbu ma'i lugs ni 'di kho na'o žes dgoňs so /*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 786, ll. 6-7: *kun btags (text: brtags) la bden med kyi khyab / yoňs grub la bden yod kyi khyab / gžan dbaň la cha gñis mžad /*

Dol po pa: The imagined and the dependent both fully pertain — that is to say, through and through — to what is not true⁷³.

Difference No. 11

Śākya mchog ldan: All self-awareness — understood as the isolation of its specific aspects — [belongs] exclusively to the ultimate [truth]⁷⁴.

Dol po pa: Given that the self-awareness⁷⁵ of consciousness [belongs] exclusively to the apparent [truth], self-awareness, too, has both an apparent and an ultimate aspect⁷⁶.

Difference No. 12

Śākya mchog ldan: The perfect [nature] is emptiness. The imagined [nature] is not emptiness, even though it is purely empty⁷⁷. Emptiness fully pertains to the ultimate [truth]⁷⁸.

Dol po pa: Everything, phenomena and their true nature, can only be called emptiness. Emptiness does not pertain to (lit. “is not pervaded by”) the ultimate truth. It is not counted unambiguously among the synonyms [of the ultimate]: [emptiness] is related to [the ultimate only] in a general sense⁷⁹.

Difference No. 13

Śākya mchog ldan: The works on valid cognition, the Abhidharma etc. are mostly [written] in accordance with general Dharma terminology.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 786, l. 7: *kun btags (text: brtags) gzan dbaṅ gn̄is ka la mtha' gcig tu bden med kyis khyab par mdzad do /*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 786, l. 7–787, l. 1: *raṅ rig thams cad raṅ rig gi raṅ ldog nas don dam kho na yin gsuṅ la /*

⁷⁵ The Tibetan uses the plural: “moments of self-awareness”.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 787, ll. 1-2: *kun rdzob rnam śes kyi raṅ rig rnam kun rdzob kho na yin pas / raṅ rig yaṅ kun rdzob don dam gn̄is yod par bzed do /*

⁷⁷ I.e., it is the negandum and nothing more.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 787, l. 2: *yoṅs grub stoṅ pa ṅid yin / kun btags (text: brtags) stoṅ pa tsam yin kyaṅ stoṅ pa ṅid min / stoṅ pa ṅid la don dam gyis khyab par bzed /*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 787, ll. 2-3: *chos daṅ chos ṅid thams cad la stoṅ ṅid tsam du brjod dgos / stoṅ ṅid la don dam gyis ma khyab / miṅ gi rnam graṅs la khyab mtha'i ma rtsi / gts'o bo'i don du sbyor gsuṅ /*

This being the case, the attainment of pacification fully pertains to both categories, those of entities/existence and non-entities/non-existence⁸⁰; knowledge (*śes pa*)⁸¹ [only] to that of entities⁸². The ultimate is not an entity. Since it is not conditioned, it is a non-entity, [like] the sky and so forth. There are different aspects of the unconditioned — suchness not being conditioned by causal defilements, or mere clarity and awareness not being newly produced, etc. Therefore, when one enumerates categories, these are designated as unconditioned. They are, however, not the [real] unconditioned as opposed to the conditioned (*'du byed*) and the defining characteristics (*mtshan ñid*); therefore, they are unconditioned only in a metaphorical sense⁸³.

Dol po pa: Explanations along the lines of Pramāṇa or Abhidharma belong to traditions that mainly ascertain the apparent truth. With regard here to definitive meaning, when it is mainly the ultimate truth that is being ascertained, entities and non-entities fully pertain to the apparent [truth] and vice versa⁸⁴. The ultimate truth is neither an entity nor a non-entity; therefore, the attainment of pacification⁸⁵ certainly does not pertain to the ultimate. [If it did,] wisdom would not be an entity, while being knowledge at the same time. Therefore, knowledge would not pertain to [the category of] entities, while to maintain that the ultimate truth

⁸⁰ Pacification, or cessation, falls under this latter category by virtue of being unconditioned.

⁸¹ In the context of the Abhidharma: usually the "knowledge of the destruction [of passions etc.]" (Skt. *kṣayajñāna*, Tib. *zad pa śes pa*) and the "knowledge of no further occurrence [of passions etc.]" (Skt. *anutpādayñāna*, Tib. *mi skye ba śes pa*).

⁸² In the following Tib. *dños po* is rendered as "entity", even though the Sanskrit equivalent *bhāva* also means "existence".

⁸³ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 787, ll. 3-6: *tshad ma'i gzuñ dañ mñon pa sogs spyi skad dañ phal cher mthun par / / Źi grub pa la dños po dños med gañ ruñ gis khyab / śes pa la dños pos khyab / don dam dños po min / 'dus ma byas (text om. byas) pas ni dños med nam mkha' sogs yin / de bñin ñid la las ñon gyi 'dus ma byas dañ / gsal rig tsam gсар du 'dus ma byas sogs / 'dus ma byas pa'i cha re yod pas / rnam grañs kyi sgo nas 'dus ma byas su btags pa yin gyi / 'du byed dañ mtshan ñid 'gal ba'i 'dus ma byas ma yin te / des na 'dus ma byas btags pa ba yin gsuñ /*

⁸⁴ This means that the totality of entities and non-entities is exactly identical with the apparent truth.

⁸⁵ *Dol po pa* restricts the ultimate truth to the actual cessation, which exists throughout beginningless time. The actual pacification attained thus still forms, together with suffering, a dualistic concept yet to be transcended.

is a non-entity would be improper Dharma⁸⁶. To maintain that the ultimate is an entity [is in accordance with] the tradition of maintaining the [ultimate existence of] entities. All non-entities like the sky etc. which the Ābhidharmikas take to be unconditioned, are there considered to be conditioned, and for this reason, both entities and non-entities fully pertain to the conditioned. The ultimate is the real unconditioned. The sky etc. are thus unconditioned [entities] only in a metaphorical sense⁸⁷.

Difference No. 14

Śākya mchog ldan: The “very face” (*rañ ño*) of the dependent, being empty of the imagined, that is, the negandum, is the basis of emptiness. It may be taken as the ultimate being empty of the apparent⁸⁸.

Dol po pa: The perfect is the basis of emptiness. It is empty of the two neganda, the dependent and the imagined, in that the ultimate is empty of the apparent. [The explanation of] the dependent as being empty of the imagined applies only when ascertaining mere apparent truth⁸⁹.

Difference No. 15

Śākya mchog ldan: Even though the “pure dependent” is widely known in Tibet, it is in reality not the dependent but rather what is “perfect in

⁸⁶ This *reductio ad absurdum* presupposes the inclusion of wisdom under the ultimate truth.

⁸⁷ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 787, l. 6–788, l. 3: *tshad mñon sogs su bśad pa de / kun rdzob gtso bor gtan la 'bebs pa'i lugs yin / don dam gtso bor gtan la 'bebs pa'i ñes don gyi skabs 'dir / kun rdzob la dños po dañ dños med kyis khyab ciñ / dños po dños med la'añ kun rdzob kyis khyab / don dam dños po yañ min / dños med (text: mod) kyañ min pas źi (text: gźi) grub la ñes ma khyab / ye śes dños po ma yin la śes pa yin pas / śes pa la dños pos ma khyab dños med don dam du 'dod pa chos mi rigs la / don dam dños por 'dod pa dños smra ba'i lugs so / mñon pa ba rñams 'dus ma byas su 'dod pa'i nam mkha' sogs / dños med thams cad kyañ skabs 'dir 'dus byas yin pas / dños po dños med la 'dus byas kyis khyab / don dam 'dus ma byas dños yin / nam mkha' sogs 'dus ma byas btags pa ba yin gsuñ /*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 788, l. 4: *stoñ gźi gźan dbañ gi rañ ño de dgag bya kun btags kyis stoñ pa ste / de ñid kun rdzob kyis stoñ pa'i don dam du mdzad do /*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 788, ll. 4–6: *stoñ gźi yoñs grub / dgag bya gźan dbañ kun btags (text: brtags) gñis kyis stoñ pa / don dam kun rdzob kyis stoñ pa'i don yin la / gźan dbañ kun btags (text: brtags) kyis stoñ pa ni / kun rdzob bden pa kho na gtan la 'bebs pa'i skabs kho na yin par bźed do /*

terms of being unmistakable." The latter is the actual perfect nature. Since the origin and usage of the conventional [term] "pure dependent" is not clear, it is not good to use it⁹⁰.

Dol po pa: Even though the usage of the conventional [term] "pure dependent" is not clear — the term is not found in the treatises — its meaning is fully established [in them], and therefore it is proper to use it. This follows from the fact that the Buddha's teaching is based on meaning [rather than words proper], and that in olden times in Tibet all agreed on such a convention. Therefore, it is appropriate not to find any fault in the transmitted pith-instructions deriving from Maitreya. Even though some [parts of the] wisdom of the noble [path of] learning are [called] "perfect in terms of being unmistakable" in [certain] passages of the [Maitreya works], the presentation of its conventional [term] (i.e., the term "pure dependent") is good. This is because of [instances] where some [phrases] such as "for those who have attained the [Bodhisattva]-levels the ground appears as gold" are also [taken as denoting] "perfect in terms of being unmistakable"⁹¹.

Difference No. 16

Śākya mchog ldan: The perfect in terms of being unmistakable fully pertains to the actual perfect nature⁹².

Dol po pa: This [being unmistakable] is only taught as being the expressible perfect, in the same way as the twelve limbs of the Buddha's speech

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 788, ll. 6-7: *dag pa gžan dbaṅ źes bod spyi la grags kyaṅ / don la gžan dbaṅ min ciṅ phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs grub yin la / phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs grub kyaṅ yoṅs grub mtshan ṅid pa yin ciṅ / dag pa gžan dbaṅ gi tha sñad pa'aṅ khuṅs gsal med pas / de'i brda 'chaṅ byed pa mi legs par dgoṅs so /*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 788, l. 7–789, l. 3: *dag pa gžan dbaṅ źes pa'i tha sñad gzuṅ las gsal po ma byuṅ yaṅ / don tshaṅ bas tha sñad byar ruṅ ste / saṅs rgyas kyi bstan pa don la brton pa yin pa daṅ / bod sṅa ma thams cad tha sñad de lta bu mthun par byed pas / byams pa nas brgyud pa'i man ṅag ma nor ba yin du ruṅ bas so / de'i naṅ tshan 'phags pa slob pa'i ye śes 'ga' źig phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs grub yin kyaṅ / sa thob pa rnams la sa gži gser du snaṅ ba sogs 'ga' źig phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs grub yin pa'aṅ yod pas / de'i tha sñad mnam gžag legs par dgoṅs so /*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 789, l. 4: *phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs grub la / yoṅs grub mtshan ṅid pas khyab par bzed /*

have been also said to be the perfect [in terms of being unmistakable]. Thus the latter, in contrast to the unchangeable perfect nature, is in reality something that belongs to the pure dependent and is the perfect only in a metaphorical sense. The unmistakable perfect which is the same as the unchangeable [perfect] is called the “ultimate perfect in terms of being unmistakable.” It is purely unchangeable⁹³. Therefore, when one ascertains the true state of being, it is only this “[ultimate] perfect”. When one explains in detail [its] synonyms, both types [of the perfect] (i.e. the unchangeable and the perfect in terms of being unmistakable) are presented⁹⁴.

Difference No. 17

Śākya mchog ldan: The [noble] truth of the path also [belongs to] the ultimate truth⁹⁵.

Dol po pa: Among the four noble truths the truth of cessation is the ultimate, and the other three are the apparent truth. To be more precise, only the actual cessation, which exists throughout beginningless time, [is called] ultimate [truth]. The other three [noble] truths and the analytical cessation fully pertain, in reality, to the apparent truth. Hence the actual [noble] truth of the path fully pertains to the apparent [truth], and the actual truth of cessation to the ultimate [truth]. This follows from the fact that the [noble] truth of the path in its ultimate aspect is one with the beginningless

⁹³ The distinction between “perfect in terms of being unmistakable” and “ultimate perfect in terms of being unmistakable” reflects the Jonangpas’ view that wisdom,^a like all other Buddha-qualities, mainly pertains to the unchangeable ultimate truth and only to limited extent to the apparent truth.

^a In the Yogācāra, “the perfect in terms of being unmistakable” usually refers to non-conceptual wisdom cultivated on the path.

⁹⁴ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 789, ll. 4-7: *de ni nam graṅs kyi yoṅs grub tu bstan pa tsam ste / gsuñ rab yan lag bcu gñis kyañ yoṅs grub tu gsuñs pa dañ 'dra'o / des na / 'gyur med yoṅs grub kyi zlas draṅs pa'i phyin ci ma log pa de ni gzan dbaṅ dag pa pa yin ciñ / yoṅs grub btags pa ba yin / 'gyur med ñid dañ gcig pa'i yoṅs grub phyin ci ma log pa de la / don dam pa'i phyin ci ma log pa'i yoṅs su grub pa zes bya ste / 'gyur med kho na'o / des na / gnas tshul gian la 'bebs pa'i skabs su yoṅs grub de ñid kho na yin la / rnam graṅs rgyas par bśad pa'i skabs su gñis kyi rnam gzag byed do gsuñ /*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 789, l. 7 – 790, l. 1: *lam bden yañ don dam par mdzad la /*

[ultimate truth]. Because it is [in reality] the [noble] truth of cessation, [this ultimate aspect] is the [noble] truth of the path [only] in a metaphorical sense⁹⁶.

Difference No. 18

Śākya mchog ldan: There is no Buddha-nature in the mind-stream of sentient beings. The natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings is merely the cause of the Buddha-nature and [its] "basic element" (*khams*). Therefore, there is a Buddha-nature or basic element as a cause in all ordinary sentient beings, but it is not like the actual [Buddha-nature], which is rather the [same as] Buddha-wisdom⁹⁷.

Dol po pa: The actual Buddha-nature is nothing else than [the Buddha-nature] of the mind-stream of sentient beings, and if it is the actual [Buddha-nature] of a Buddha, then it is established that sentient beings possess it, precisely because it is the *dharmatā* of sentient beings. This is proven, in particular, by a number of canonical passages. The explanation [of the Buddha-nature] as the basic element and cause [refers to] a cause different from the sphere/element (*dbyiñs*)⁹⁸, given that the latter is neither an efficient cause nor an efficient sphere⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 790, ll. 1-3: *bden pa bźir phye ba'i 'gog bden don dam dañ / bden pa gźan gsum kun rdzob tu bźed / źib mor na / 'gog bden mtshan űid pa gdod ma'i 'gog bden la don dam kho na dañ / gźan bden pa gsum dañ / so sor brtags 'gog la kun rdzob kyis khyab par don la gnas pas / lam bden mtshan űid pa la kun rdzob kyis khyab / 'gog bden mtshan űid pa la don dam gyis khyab / don dam pa'i lam bden ni gdod ma dañ gcig pa'i phyir / 'gog bden űid yin pas / lam bden btags pa ba yin gsuñ /*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 790, ll. 3-5: *sems can kyi rgyud la bde gśegs sñiñ po med sems can kyi sems rañ bźin 'od gsal de / bde gśegs sñiñ po'i rgyu dañ khams tsam yin pas / rgyu bde gśegs sñiñ po'am khams bde gśegs sñiñ po sems can thams cad la yod kyañ / de ni de 'dra mtshan űid pa min / sañs rgyas kyi ye śes bde gśegs sñiñ po'o /*

⁹⁸ The Buddha-nature with all its qualities is already present in one's mind-stream and thus does not need to be generated. Here, Buddha-nature as cause means that focusing on the true nature of mind, which is the Buddha-nature, causes the removal of all defilements.

⁹⁹ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 790, ll. 5-7: *sems can gyi rgyud kyi de ka bde gśegs sñiñ po mtshan űid pa yin te / sañs rgyas de kyi mtshan űid pa yin na / de űid ka sems can gyi chos űid yin pas / sems can bde gśegs sñiñ po can du grub la / khyad par luñ mtha' yas pas grub bo / khams dañ rgyur bśad pa yañ / skyed rgyu dañ skyed khams min par dbyiñs dañ bral rgyu la dgoñs pa'o gsuñ /*

Difference No. 19

Śākya mchog ldan: [Passages which] state that the Buddha-nature is endowed with essentially inseparable qualities refer only to the fruit [of the path]. On the level of the cause, the qualities still have to be developed. Having this capability, the Buddha-nature exists only as seeds [in ordinary sentient beings]¹⁰⁰.

Dol po pa: The essentially inseparable qualities are naturally present. They exist even in the Buddha-nature of the basis, since [firstly] something that arises, [in the sense of being] newly [acquired], may possibly be not naturally present; [secondly], the division of basis, path and fruit applies only to the level of “phenomena” (*dharmin*)¹⁰¹ [or] apparent truth; and [thirdly], there is, [in terms of] the nature [of phenomena], only one Buddha-nature. It must henceforth be the Buddha-nature, adorned with all the qualities of the ultimate¹⁰².

Difference No. 20

Śākya mchog ldan: The major and minor marks and the like [of a Buddha] do not belong to the qualities of the *dharmakāya*^{103, 104}.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 790, l. 7 – 791, l. 1: *sñiñ po la yon tan ño bo dbyer med rañ bñin ñid ldan du gsuñs ba 'bras bu kho na'i skabs yin la / rgyu'i skabs su yon tan 'byuñ ruñ gi nus pa sa bon tsam yod par bñed l.*

¹⁰¹ In the context of phenomena (*dharmā*) and their true being (*dharmatā*), *dharmin* refers to the *dharmas* which possess *dharmatā* (see Mathes 1996:185).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 791, ll. 1-4: *yon tan ño bo dbyer med / rañ bñin ñid ldan de gñi bde gñe sñiñ po la yañ yod de / gsar du byuñ bas rañ bñin gyis ldan par mi 'gro ba'i phyir dañ / gñi lam 'bras bu gsum kun rdzob chos can gyis phye ba ma gtogs / rañ bñin bde gñe sñiñ po gñi kho na yin pa'i phyir / bde gñe sñiñ po yin phyin chad don dam pa'i yon tan thams cad kyis brgyan pa yin dgos par bñed do l.*

¹⁰³ The Yogācāras use the term *dharmakāya* in an exclusive as well as in an inclusive sense. In its exclusive sense, the term *dharmakāya* is defined as the transformation of the basis which results in the non-conceptual wisdom of the purity of suchness. In its inclusive sense, it refers to the totality of Buddhahood including all *kāyas*. The interpretation of the *dharmakāya* as a distinct *kāya*, which does not include the *sambhogakāya*, is also found in the particular four-*kāya* theory of Haribhadra's commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Haribhadra qualifies the *dharmakāya* for the first time with the compound *jñānāmaka* “the *dharmakāya* consisting of wisdom”, and understands it as conditioned *jñānas* on the level of apparent truth. It is only the *svābhāvīkākāya* which encompasses suchness, or the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena. Contrary to this, Ārya Vimuktisena

Dol po pa: With regard to all types of Buddha-qualities, there is an aspect of them that pertains to the ultimate qualities of the *dharmakāya*, and appears only to the Buddha himself, and another aspect that pertains to the apparent qualities of the form-*kāyas*, and appears to others, namely the disciples [of the Buddha]. As for the explicit teaching of the *Ratnadārikāsūtra*¹⁰⁵ and the *Uttaratantra* [*Ratnagotravibhāga*], in general it is necessary to explain them in terms of the qualities of the two *kāyas*¹⁰⁶. On the whole, with respect to the major and minor [marks of a Buddha], [Dol po pa] only makes analogies in accordance with what is generally accepted. When taken as taught in other Sūtras, and the Tantras, both [the *dharmakāya* and the form-*kāyas*] share aspects common to all of them¹⁰⁷. What is different [from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*] when Mantra[yāna is taught] with regard to *gžan stoñ* is precisely this [inclusion of all qualities in the ultimate]^{108, 109}.

Difference No. 21

Śākya mchog ldan: Only the seeds of the fruit are inherently present in the form of the natural luminosity of mind. [Their] improvement is achieved by meditating on the path, until the fruit is finally actualized¹¹⁰.

takes *dharmakāya* as a synonym of *svābhāvīkākāya*, and as such the totality of Buddhahood comprising all *kāyas* (see Makransky 1997:9-13 & 39-41).

¹⁰⁴ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 791, l. 4: *chos sku'i yon tan la mtshan dpe sogs mi bžed /*.

¹⁰⁵ The explanation of the sixty-four qualities in the third chapter of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is based on the *Ratnadārikāsūtra* (see Takasaki 1966:14).

¹⁰⁶ I.e., the thirty-two qualities of the *dharmakāya* and the thirty-two qualities of the form-*kāyas*.

¹⁰⁷ Which means that the *dharmakāya* possesses aspects of the major and minor marks, and the form-*kāyas* aspects of the thirty-two qualities of the *dharmakāya*.

¹⁰⁸ This sentence is the beginning of the following paragraph, but refers to the previous one.

¹⁰⁹ Tāranātha: *op. cit.*, 791, ll. 4-7: *sañs rgyas kyi yon tan gyi rigs thams cad la / chos sku'i yon tan don dam pa sañs rgyas rañ snañ re dañ / gzugs sku'i yon tan kun rdzob pa gdul bya gžan snañ gi cha re thams cad de yod pa yin la / bu mo rin chen gyis žus pa'i mdo dañ / rgyud bla ma'i dños bstan ni spyir sku gñis ka'i yon tan 'chad dgos pa la gts'o che chuñ gi dbañ las / grags pa spyi dañ mthun pa dper brjod tsam du mdzad la / mdo gžan rñams dañ rgyud sde sogs las gsuñs pa ltar na / gñis ka la thams cad kyi char yod pa yin no gsuñ / [...] de ni sñags kyi skabs su gžan stoñ la mi 'dra ba ni 'di yin te /*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 791, l. 7 – 792, l. 1: *sems rañ bžin 'od gsal la 'bras bu'i sa bon tsam rañ chas su yod pa / lam bsgoms pas goñ 'phel thob / mthar 'bras bu mñon gyur du 'byuñ bar bžed /*

Dol po pa: Throughout beginningless time wisdom is effortlessly perfect in the form of the ultimate *maṇḍala*. On the path, stains are removed by meditating on it, and [this ever-present wisdom] is actualized¹¹¹.

2.2. *Tāranātha's Conclusion*

Having elaborated Śākya mchog ldan's and Dol po pa's twenty-one differences with regard to the profound meaning, Tāranātha concludes by pointing out one fundamental difference, to which all the other ones basically refer:

Paṅ chen Śākya mchog ldan takes non-dual wisdom to be non-abiding and impermanent in every moment, in that it is not something single but multiple. [For the] omniscient Jonangpa (i.e., Dol po pa) it is in reality neither one nor many; provisionally he accepts it as reasonable when [wisdom] is presented as being single, and takes it as being permanent, impartible, all-pervading, free from mental fabrication and ineffable. In view of this, the [main] difference is, in short, that [the former] takes [wisdom] as being impermanent, and [the latter] takes it as being permanent¹¹².

We are further informed that Dol po pa infers from the omnipresence of non-dual wisdom that all qualities of a Buddha are already present in ordinary beings. For the same reason, non-dual wisdom cannot be impaired by reasoning, such as that it is neither one nor many, and hence withstands analysis. On these grounds the tenets of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, which assert the destruction of non-dual wisdom by analysis, is wrong, and hence these Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika views are impure. One comes to know this by way of analysis which makes use of reasoning without distorting the original intention of the middle turning. Dol po pa and Śākya mchog ldan agree, however, that ultimately the Buddha-nature is beyond words and thoughts, and the unmistakable object of

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 792, ll. 1-2: *gdod ma nas ye śes don dam pa'i dkyil 'khor du lhun grub tu rdzogs pa de lam bsgoms dri ma bsal te mñon du gyur pa yin par bžed do /*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 792, ll. 5-6: *paṅ chen śākya'i mtshan can ni / gñis med kyi ye śes de gcig pu ma yin pa du ma'i tshul can / skad cig gis mi gnas pa mi rtag par bžed pa dañ / kun mkhyen jo nañ pa ni / de dños gnas la gcig min du ma yañ min par ñes mod / gnas skabs su gcig pu'i (text: bu'i) nmam gžag 'thad ldan du mdzad ciñ / de rtag pa / cha med kun khyab / spros bral brjod bral yin par bžed pa'i dbaṅ las te / mdor na mi rtag pa dañ rtag par bžed pa'i khyad par ro /*

non-conceptual wisdom. Tāranātha concludes by explaining at length that Dol po pa's "permanent" is not the ordinary opposite of impermanent:

This ["permanent"] is free from mental fabrications. It is the unchangeable sphere which is free from both the impermanence of an established entity and the permanence of a negated non-entity. It is free from the characteristic signs of permanence¹¹³.

3. Tāranātha's Presentation of Dol po pa's and Śākya mchog ldan's Positions

A comparison of Tāranātha's summary of Dol po pa's position with what we find in the latter's pertinent works, such as the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, shows that the subject matter is correctly presented. Of particular interest are Tāranātha's elaborations on difference no. 20, where he confirms my own observation that Dol po pa explains the Buddha-nature more in line with general Mahāyāna when commenting the *Ratnagotravibhāga*¹¹⁴. Also, the presentation of the *trisvabhāva* theory is in accordance with the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, in which Dol po pa explains:

The basis which is empty of the imagined is the dependent, and the basis which is empty of even the dependent is the true nature of phenomena, the perfect¹¹⁵.

A little further down Dol po pa further explains:

It has been taught that phenomena which [belong to] the imagined [and] the dependent do not really exist, and that the true nature of phenomena, [namely] the perfect really does. The meaning of *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ* is taught in these two statements¹¹⁶.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 794, ll. 6-7: 'di ni spros bral te / dños po sgrub pa mi rtag pa dañ / dños med dgag pa rtag pa gñis ka las grol ba'i dbyiñs 'gyur med de yin / rtag pa'i mtshan ma las grol žiñ /.

¹¹⁴ See my introductory remarks on Dol po pa in the first paragraph of this paper.

¹¹⁵ Dol po pa: *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*, 148, ll. 3-4: ... kun btags (text: brtags) kyis stoñ pa'i gži ni gžan dbaň no // gžan dbaň gis kyaň stoñ pa'i gži ni chos ñid yoňs grub bo (text: po) /.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149, ll. 8-10: ... kun btags (text: brtags) gžan dbaň gi chos mams ni yaň dag par med pa daň / chos ñid yoňs grub ni yaň dag tu yod par bstan te 'di dag gis kyaň raň stoñ daň gžan stoñ gi don bstan pa yin no /.

These two quotes clearly show that it is only the perfect which really exists as the basis which is empty of the dependent (and thus also the imagined). Moreover, the following passage from the *Ri chos nes don rgya mtsho* confirms Tāranātha's observation in difference no. 14 that "[the explanation of] the dependent as being empty of the imagined applies only when ascertaining mere apparent truth":

As to the lack of an own-being in the imagined, the [imagined] does not exist in terms of its own defining characteristics. Being established as the mere apparent, [or rather as] the mere mistaken apparent, it is established neither as apparent truth nor as the correct apparent. As to the lack of an own-being in the dependent, even though [the dependent] exists on the level of apparent [truth] as an own-being which arises from something else, it does not exist as an own-being which arises from itself, and is not in the least established in reality. In this way, the two lack an own-being, because they are *rañ stoñ*. As to the true nature of phenomena, the perfect, or the basis of the non-existence of these two (i.e., the imagined and dependent), even though it is not the case that it lacks an own-being, it is the basis for the lack of an own-being in the phenomena of apparent [truth], which are different from [this basis]. Therefore it is the own-being of the ultimate truth, or the "body belonging to the own-being" (*svābhāvīkākāya*)¹¹⁷.

That the ultimate basis of emptiness is restricted to the unchangeable perfect becomes clear in the following passage where the perfect in terms of being unmistaken is equated with the form-*kāyas* of the apparent truth:

Thus the ultimate Buddha is the *kāya* of the five self-arisen wisdoms. He abides permanently in the form of [these] five wisdoms, which are suchness and the unchangeable perfect. The form-*kāyas* of the apparent [truth] possess correct wisdom, namely the perfect in terms of being unmistaken, and [thus] the wisdom of the Mahāyāna[-path] of no more learning which is not beyond moments¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 319, ll. 16-24: *kun btags ño bo med pa ni rañ gi mtshan ñid kyi med pa ste kun rdzob tsam mam log pa'i kun rdzob tu grub pa tsam las kun rdzob bden pa'am yañ dag kun rdzob tu yañ ma grub bo / gzan dbañ ño bo ñid med pa ni kun rdzob tu gzan las skye ba'i ño bor yod kyañ rañ las skye ba'i ño bor med ciñ yañ dag par na cir yañ ma grub pa ste de ltar de gñis ni rañ stoñ yin pa'i phyir rañ gi ño bo med pa'o // de gñis med pa'i gzi chos ñid yoñs grub ni rañ gi ño bo med pa ma yin yañ de las gzan pa kun rdzob kyi chos rnam kyi ño bo ñid med pa'i gzi yin pa'i phyir don dam bden pa'i ño bo ste ño bo ñid kyi sku....*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356, l. 22 – 357, l. 2: *de ltar don dam pa'i sañs rgyas ni rañ byuñ ye šes lha'i sku yin la / de yañ de bzin ñid dañ 'gyur med yoñs grub ñid ye šes lhar rtag tu bžugs pa'o*

For Dol po pa, the ultimate is beyond moments and the three times (i.e., the past, present and future). The permanence of the ultimate wisdom is thus not an ordinary permanence as opposed to impermanence, but one that is, as Tāranātha puts it, beyond these latter two categories. To be sure, for Dol po pa all *kāyas* have an ultimate aspect that is beyond the three times:

That the permanent Buddha and the liberation of the Buddha are form, that even space is the form of the Buddha, and so forth — the meaning of such statements must be understood in the context of forms etc. being explained [on the level] of suchness or as forms etc. which are beyond the three times and the threefold world¹¹⁹.

Such an extreme form of transcendence explains Dol po pa's sharp distinction between the ultimate and apparent truths — which he defines with the phrase: "a difference in terms of a negation of an identity" (*gcig pa bkag pa'i tha dad pa*). From this it does not follow, though, that the two truths are different entities¹²⁰, but simply that the ultimate exists and the apparent does not (negation of identity). To be sure, since there is only one essence for Dol po pa, namely that of the ultimate, it does not make sense to speak of an essential difference, since this would require the existence of another essence from which it differs. This also means that Dol po pa's distinction between ultimate and apparent *kāyas* does not entail the absurd ontological view that there really are two different sets of *kāyas*¹²¹. It is rather that only the ultimate *kāyas* exist ontologically. The *kāyas* of apparent truth, which are equated with the perfect in terms of being unmistakable, do not really exist, any more than the apparent world does. Still, on the level of apparent truth they are produced to the same extent as the accidental stains of the apparent truth are removed (which

// kun rdzob gzugs kyi sku ni yañ dag ye śes phyin ci ma log pa'i yoñs grub dañ ldan pa ste theg chen mi slob pa'i ye śes skad cig las ma 'das pa dañ ldan pa'o /

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 142, ll. 17-9: *sañs rgyas rtag pa dañ sañs rgyas kyi thar pa gzugs yin pa dañ nam mkha' yañ sañs rgyas kyi gzugs yin / źes pa la sogs pa'i don ni [...] de bźin ñid kyi gzugs sogs dañ / khams gsum dañ dus gsum las 'das pa'i gzugs sogs źes pa la sogs pa 'chad par 'gyur pa'i skabs su rig par bya....*

¹²⁰ See Dol po pa: "bDen gñis gsal ba'i ñi ma", 23, ll. 2-3: *bden pa gñis ni ño bo de ñid dañ gźan du brjod du med pa gcig pa bkag pa'i tha dad pa yin te /*

¹²¹ See also Broido (1989:88), who has made the same observation with regard to two sets of *skandhas* in the *Ri chos ñes don rgya mtsho*.

enables the ultimate to manifest on the level of apparent truth), and in this sense there are accumulations of merit and wisdom. Tāranātha's restriction of the perfect to its unchangeable aspect is thus perfectly in line with the position of Dol po pa.

Things become a bit more complicated in the case of Śākya mchog ldan. Even later Tibetan thinkers had difficulties in pinning down his position¹²². To give an example, in his short presentation of the Buddha-nature which was written in 1474¹²³, Śākya mchog ldan endorses Bu ston Rin chen grub's (1290-1364) and Sa skya paṇḍita's (1182-1251) Madhyama hermeneutics¹²⁴ of ascribing a provisional meaning (*neyārtha*) to the *tathāgatagarbha* theory. But in difference no. 21 Śākya mchog ldan is said to hold that the seeds of the fruit (Buddhahood) are naturally present in the form of the natural luminosity of mind. This is strikingly similar to the position of 'Gos Lo tsā ba g'Zon nu dpal (1392-1481), who speaks of "subtle qualities" or "seeds of qualities" in the mind-stream of sentient beings. By explaining a natural growth of qualities, g'Zon nu dpal is able to read the *Ratnagotravibhāga* as a teaching with definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), without being forced to accept the ontological consequences of the *tathāgatagarbha* theory¹²⁵. It is likely that Śākya mchog ldan later adopted such a stance, Tāranātha being right in this point, but only a careful study of Śākya mchog ldan's works written after 1484 will tell.

The notion in points 1-4 that *rañ stoñ* is more profound when mental fabrications are cut through with the help of the view finds support in Śākya mchog ldan's *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* commentary, in which the commentator shows that the teaching of a transformation of the basis (*āśrayaparivṛtti*) does not contradict the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika views¹²⁶.

¹²² For a short description of Śākya mchog ldan's position see also Tillemans & Tombechi (1995: 891-6).

¹²³ Śākya mchog ldan: "Sañs rgyas gyi sñiñ po'i mam bśad mdo rgyud kyi sñiñ po", 136, l. 3.

¹²⁴ See Seyfort Ruegg 1973:29-33.

¹²⁵ See Mathes 2002:88-9. In his *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, g'Zon nu dpal refers to these qualities in sentient beings as "seeds" (see Mathes 2003:121, ll. 6-7).

¹²⁶ Śākya mchog ldan: "Byams chos lña'i lam gyi rim pa", 154, ll. 1-7. See also Mathes 1996:176.

A comparison with the "Zab ŷi spros bral gyi bŷad pa"¹²⁷ shows that Tāranātha also got the main points of Śākya mchog ldan's definition of the basis of emptiness and the negandum right. Tāranātha's difference no. 14, though, which has Śākya mchog ldan equating the emptiness of the dependent from the imagined with the ultimate which is empty of the apparent, is problematic. In fact, Śākya mchog ldan takes the dependent to exist ultimately only when describing Cittamātra. Thus he says in his "ŷiñ rta srol gñis nram dbye"¹²⁸:

Outside objects and what is explained as general characteristics are the imagined, and empty of an own-being. What appears as [the imagined] through mental imprints is the dependent and truly established. Emptiness which [is taken as] the basis of negation (the dependent), empty of the negandum (the imagined), is the perfect. Therefore it is the ultimate truth¹²⁹.

The Yogācāras, on the other hand, who according to Śākya mchog ldan¹³⁰ belong to the Madhyamaka, are not said to claim the ultimate existence of the dependent nature. Ultimate truth is equated rather with the unchangeable perfect nature:

The Yogācāras explain: "The imagined is empty of an own-being, and the dependent empty of an other-being. The remainder left over as something which does not lack an own-being is precisely the nature of the dependent or the so-called perfect. [...] When both Mādhyamikas (i.e., the Yogācāras and the Asvabhāvavādins) postulate what must be meditated upon or experienced in the meditative equipoise of the Noble Ones, their perception is in mutual accordance: both explain it as the wisdom of *dharmadhātu*. When labelling it after rising from meditative equipoise, they differ: The Yogācāras label it [the experiential] wisdom of *dharmadhātu* or non-dual wisdom, which goes by the name "unchangeable perfect" — the actual ultimate truth,

¹²⁷ I.e., the two passage (114, ll. 3-4 & 114, l. 7 – 115, l) quoted above in the first paragraph of this paper.

¹²⁸ According to Dreyfus (1997:29) this work was written in 1489.

¹²⁹ Śākya mchog ldan: "ŷiñ rta srol gñis nram dbye", 476, ll. 3-5: [*sems tsam pa'i mñam bŷag gi lta ba ni... des drañs pa'i rjes thob kyi grub mtha' ni*] *phyi rol gyi don dañ spyi mtshan du bŷad pa rñams ni kun btags dañ rañ gi ño bos stoñ pa'o // bags chags kyi der snañ ba ni gŷan dbañ dañ bden par grub pa'o // dgag gŷi gŷan dbañ de dgag bya kun btags kyi stoñ pa'i stoñ pa ñid ni yoñs grub dañ / des na don dam pa'i bden pa'o /*.

¹³⁰ The Yogācāra treatises on the Maitreya works, for example, are taken to go beyond Cittamātra and thus to be in accordance with the intention of the Madhyamaka. See Śākya mchog ldan: "Byams chos lña'i ñes don rab tu gsal ba", 6, ll. 3-7; and Mathes 1996:174.

the supreme self, the permanent, stable, quiescent, steady and truly established.¹³¹

In other words, Śākya mchog ldan restricts the ultimate truth in the same way as the Jonangpas to the unchangeable perfect nature, which is also equated with wisdom. Against the background of this passage, the quintessence of Tāranātha's comparison of Dol po pa with Śākya mchog ldan, namely that they take wisdom to be respectively permanent and impermanent, appears questionable. The main difference is rather that Śākya mchog ldan does not define *g'zan stoñ* as the ultimate being empty of the apparent, but includes the dependent nature within the basis of negation. This is also clear in the following passage from the “Zab źi spros bral gyi b'zad pa”, where Śākya mchog ldan disagrees with a popular *g'zan stoñ* position:

The apparent [truth], [comprising] all conditioned entities, is empty of an own-being (*rañ stoñ*), while the ultimate, everything¹³² unconditioned, is empty of other (*g'zan stoñ*). This explanation is the assertion of the great Mādhyamika Vasubandhu, for this is how it is explained in the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*. Such an explanation does not hold true, since it is not in accordance with the basic Maitreya works, and contradicts the clear *g'zan stoñ* teachings of the indisputable works of Asaṅga and his brother as well as the text tradition of Dignāga and his disciple¹³³.

¹³¹ Śākya mchog ldan: “Śiñ rta srol gñis mam dbye”, 483, l. 7–484, l. 4: *rnal 'byor spyod pa pas ni / kun btags rañ gi ño bos stoñ pa dañ / g'zan dbañ g'zan gyi ño bos stoñ pa dañ / de'i śul du rañ gi ño bos mi stoñ par lus pa ni / g'zan dbañ gi ño bo'am yoñs grub ces bya ba de ñid do / źes 'chad [...] dbu ma pa de gñis ka yañ 'phags pa'i mñam g'zag gis bsgom bya'am mñam su myoñ bya źig khas len pa'i tshe ños 'dzin tshul ni mthun pa yin te / gñis kas kyañ chos kyi dbyiñs kyi ye śes la 'chad pas so / mñam g'zag de las lañs pa'i rjes thob tu tha sñad 'dogs tshul ni mi mthun pa yin te / rnal 'byor spyod pa pas ni 'gyur ba med pa'i yoñs grub ces bya ba'i miñ can / chos dbyiñs ye śes sam gñis su med pa'i ye śes de ñid don dam pa'i bden pa dños dañ / b'dag dam pa dañ / rtag brtan źi ba g.yuñ druñ dañ / bden par grub pa ñid du tha sñad 'dogs par byed la /*

¹³² The plural particle shows that there is more than one unconditioned element.

¹³³ Śākya mchog ldan: “Zab źi spros bral gyi b'zad pa”, 117, ll. 1-3: *kun rdzob 'dus byas kyi dños po thams cad rañ stoñ dañ / don dam 'dus ma byas rñams g'zan stoñ du 'chad pa 'di ni dbu ma pa chen po dbyig gñen gyi b'zed pa yin te / yum gyi gnod 'joms las de ltar b'zad pa'i phyir / źes 'chad pa ni rigs pa ma yin te / rje btsun gyi g'zuñ rtsa ba dañ mi mthun źiñ / thogs med sku mched kyi g'zuñ rtsod med rñams dañ / phyogs glañ yab sras kyi g'zuñ lugs las g'zan stoñ gi 'chad tshul gsal par gsuñs pa rñams dañ 'gal ba'i phyir ro /*

Śākya mchog ldan continues by presenting his own definition of *gžan stoñ* based on the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, namely that the dependent is empty of the imagined, and explains:

Just as in the lines: "False imagining [equated with the dependent nature] exists. Duality is not found in it"¹³⁴ the dependent is "phenomena" (*dharmīn*), or the basis of emptiness, and both [aspects of the] imagined, the perceived object and the perceiving subject, are the neganda, or that of which [the dependent] is empty. There is an explanation of the wisdom beyond the duality of a perceived object and the perceiving subject as an entity which is empty, but [the latter] is not taken as the subject, or the basis of emptiness¹³⁵.

It should be noted that for Śākya mchog ldan the dependent nature, or false imagining, exists in terms of its own-being, specific marks and its own nature, but not truly, on the level of ultimate truth, or in reality. It is like an illusion¹³⁶. This presentation is based on the reasonable interpretation of the Yogācāra works as implying that the dependent nature only exists on the level of apparent truth. Śākya mchog ldan is, of course, well aware that in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* and the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* the perfect nature is taken to be empty of the imagined¹³⁷.

¹³⁴ MAVBh, 17, l. 16 (MAV I.1ab): *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate /*

¹³⁵ Śākya mchog ldan: "Zab ži spros bral gyi bžad pa", 117, l. 5: *ji skad du / yañ dag ma yin kun rtog yod // de la gñis po yod ma yin / žes 'byuñ ba ltar / gžan dbañ stoñ gži'i chos can dañ / gžuñ 'dzin kun btags (text: brtags) gñis po gañ gis stoñ pa'i dgag bya dañ / gžuñ 'dzin gñis med kyi ye šes la stoñ pa'i dños por bšad pa žes bya ba žig yod pa yin gyi / stoñ gži'i chos can du 'jog pa ma yin te /*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 115, l. 3: *de ltar na gžan dbañ yañ dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa žes bya ba rañ bžin kyis yod pa dañ / rañ gi mtshan ñid kyis dañ / rañ gi ño bos yod pa ni yin la / bden pa dañ / don dam par dañ / de kho na ñid du yod pa ni ma yin te sgrub byed go rim bžin du / dgag bya dag gñis kyis stoñ pa'i phyir dañ / don dam pa'i bden pa ma yin pa'i phyir dañ / de kho na ñid ma yin pa'i phyir dañ / sgyu ma bžin no /*

¹³⁷ Śākya mchog ldan: "Šiñ rta chen po'i srol gñis mnam dbye", 520, ll. 2-3: *rgyud bla ma dañ yum gyi gnod 'joms su chos ñid yoñs grub dgag bya kun btags kyis stoñ par bšad pa'o*. In other words, here again the dependent nature is not included in the negandum. The *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* (Karmapa Tanjur (Tōhoku no. 3808), *šes phyin, pha*, 572, l. 5) supports the Jonangpas, however, in that the ultimate, or the perfect nature, is defined as "that which is free from these names (roughly referring to the imagined nature in the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*) and the forms of mistaken appearances (i.e., the dependent nature),^a and that which is ineffable and the form of signlessness." (*gañ miñ dañ / phyin ci log tu snañ ba'i mnam pa de dañ bral ba brjod du med pa / mtshan ma med pa'i mnam pa gañ yin pa de ni don dam pa yoñs su grub pa'i ño bo ñid de /*)

^a The expression "forms of mistaken appearances" defines the dependent nature: "The forms, which, under the sway of ignorance and so forth, appear to the consciousness in a

From what has been said till now, it is clear that the way Tāranātha summarizes Śākya mchog ldan's view on *trisvabhāva* is not strictly accurate. Even though the dependent nature is undoubtedly taken to be the basis of negation, Śākya mchog ldan describes it as existing ultimately only in the Cittamātra, but not in the Yogācāra. And it is the presentation of the *trisvabhāva* in the Yogācāra which reflects his own *gzan ston* view. It is also questionable whether wisdom is really only a conditioned entity for him; as we have seen above, Śākya mchog ldan explains the unchangeable (!) perfect nature as being non-dual wisdom.

4. The Theory of *trisvabhāva* in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and Its Commentaries

The *trisvabhāva* theory of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* plays an important role not only for those *gzan ston pas* who define the basis of emptiness in line with Yogācāra, but also the Jonangpas, whose main doctrinal support otherwise is the *tathāgatagarbha* theory. How is it possible, though, that such different positions on emptiness can be doctrinally supported by one and the same text?

The main focus for the proponents of both “Yogācāra *gzan ston*” and “Tathāgatagarbha *gzan ston*” lies on the initial two stanzas of the first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, in which the Middle Path is defined by three philosophical propositions: (a) false imagining exists; (b) subject-object duality, though created by false imagining, is not found in the latter itself; (c) false imagining is found in relation to emptiness in the sense that emptiness is found in false imagining as its true nature¹³⁸.

mistaken way as phenomena, are the dependent nature.” (*ma rig pa la sogs pa'i dbaṅ gis rnam par śes pa la chos rnam su phyin ci log tu snaṅ ba'i rnam pa gaṅ yin pa de ni gzan dbaṅ gi ṅo bo ṅid do /, ibid. 572, ll. 4-5*).

¹³⁸ While (a) and (b) are the *pādas* MAV I.1a and I.1b, proposition (c) reflects the double locative relationship between *false imagining* and *emptiness* in the second part of MAV I.1 (*But emptiness is found there (i.e., in false imagining) and [false imagining] is found in relation to it (i.e., emptiness) as well*). If the second locative (*tasyām*, i.e., *śūnyatāyām*) is taken literally in the sense that x is found in y, and y in x, x would be y. Total identity, however, of false imagining and emptiness can be excluded on the grounds that the first is considered to be conditioned and the latter not (cf. MAVBh on I.2). I therefore suggest the preliminary translation “in relation to” for the two locatives.

One has to bear in mind that the root text, which does not make much use of *trisvabhāva* terms in the initial stanzas, equates the perceived object with the imagined nature, false imagining with the dependent nature, and the absence of duality, or emptiness, with the perfect nature in MAV I.5.

As I have already noted in my paper on Tāranātha's "g'zan ston sñiñ po"¹³⁹, the relationship between false imagining and emptiness can be variously defined along the lines of two different *trisvabhāva* models, in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and its Indian commentaries. The central focus of the first model, which is mainly based on the first section of the first chapter (MAV I.1-11), lies on a false imagining or dependent nature which at times is taken to exist ultimately, though not by Maitreya and Vasubandhu. Duality and emptiness are just two different aspects of false imagining, namely the way it appears and the way it really is. In the second section (MAV I.12-22) a positively understood emptiness (comparable to suchness or the Buddha-element in the RGV) replaces false imagining at the centre of the old equation. It is now emptiness, defined as natural luminosity, which can appear in two modes, either as being accompanied by adventitious stains (under which false imagining is included) or free from these stains (see below). This results in two *trisvabhāva* models which come close to what Sponberg (1981:99) calls the pivotal and progressive exegetical model of *trisvabhāva*. The first model is centred on the dependent nature as a bearer of the perfect, which latter is understood as something abstract, like the state of suffering or impermanence. In the progressive model the focus lies more on an emptiness which pervades or transcends all phenomena of the dependent nature. This all-pervading emptiness possesses positive qualities and can exist, contrary to the first model, in its own right. The three natures represent three levels, each revealing a progressively deeper degree of reality¹⁴⁰.

This leads to the question whether the *Madhyāntavibhāga* takes the dependent nature as existing on the level of ultimate truth¹⁴¹. One might

¹³⁹ Mathes 2000:195-223.

¹⁴⁰ See Mathes 2000:204-14.

¹⁴¹ This is what Tsoñ kha pa (1357-1419), for example, claims on the basis of MAVṬ I.1, where the verse *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti* is glossed as *svabhāvataḥ*. A little further down Sthiramati does not object to an opponent's claim of its ultimate existence: "[Opp.:] If thus duality was entirely non-existent, like a hare's horn, and false imagining existed ultimately

argue that the Yogācāra does not distinguish existence on two levels of truths, its *trīsvabhāva* theory being rather an alternative to the apparent and ultimate truths of the Madhyamaka¹⁴². Many passages in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* support this. This becomes particularly evident in the third chapter (on reality), where older concepts relating to truth/reality, such as the four noble truths of early Buddhism or the apparent and ultimate truth of the Madhyamaka, are explained in terms of the new *trīsvabhāva*. Even the noble truth of cessation is subsumed under the scheme of the imagined, dependent and perfect natures. A continuity between mainstream Buddhist thought and Yogācāra is thereby established. It is noteworthy, however, that in the case of the ultimate truth of the Madhyamaka only the perfect nature is accepted as a fit candidate for it, the dependent nature, or false imagining, being dismissed as something to be ultimately given up. If one applies this to the definition of the *madhyamā pratīpat* in MAV I.1-2, it would be safe to say that the propositions “the existence of false imagining” (MAV I.1a) and “the non-existence of duality” (MAV I.1b) refer to the level of apparent truth, while “the mutual existence of false imagining and emptiness” (MAV I.1cd) defines the relation between apparent and ultimate truth. Resorting to two levels of truth not only explains the initial stanzas in a meaningful way, but also resolves some of the tensions between the two parallel *trīsvabhāva* models mentioned above. And this is exactly what Śāntarakṣita did when he explained the theory of *trīsvabhāva* in terms of his favoured Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka¹⁴³.

The first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* is divided into two sections, one on false imagining and the other on emptiness. While the latter is in perfect harmony with the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, the former seems to draw on older strands of more conservative Yogācāra material. Vasubandhu (and to some extent also the author of the root text) nevertheless managed to harmonize the originally unbalanced strands. In MAV I.1 false imagining and emptiness are said to mutually exist in each other, and based on this Vasubandhu defines emptiness in his *bhāṣya* as

in its own right....” (Sanskrit in brackets reconstructed: [*yadi evaṃ dva*]yaṃ śaśaviṣāṇavat sarvathā nāsti / *abhūtaparikalpaś ca paramārthataḥ svabhāvato 'sty...*, MAVṬ, 10, ll. 17-9). See Thurman 1989:226-8.

¹⁴² See Boquist 1993:17-22.

¹⁴³ See Lindtner 1997:193.

“the state of this false imagining being free from the relation of a perceived object and perceiving subject”¹⁴⁴.

Whereas emptiness is simply taken here as a property of the dominant “false imagining”, the latter hardly matters in the definition of emptiness in the second part of the first chapter, where emptiness is not only the absence of something in false imagining, but something more positive, the own-being of non-duality, which is associated with positive attributes such as the natural luminosity of the mind. In fact, in MAV I.22 emptiness is defined in the same way as in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*:

[Emptiness is] **neither defiled nor undefiled, neither pure nor impure.** (MAV I.22ab) How is it that it is neither defiled nor impure? It is because of the natural **luminosity of mind** (MAV I.22c). How is it that it is neither undefiled nor pure? It is because of the **adventitious nature of defilements** (MAV I.22d)¹⁴⁵.

It is obvious that the natural luminosity of the mind has taken the place of false imagining here¹⁴⁶. That the latter cannot truly partake of the luminous nature is clear from a passage in the *Sāgaramatiparipṛccha* quoted in RGVV I.68, in which the example of an ever-pure *vaidūrya* stone drawn out from mud is taken to illustrate the relation between the luminous mind and accidental stains:

In the same way, O *Sāgaramati*, the Bodhisattva knows the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. He also perceives that it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Then the Bodhisattva thinks as follows: These defilements would never penetrate into the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. These adventitious defilements have sprung from false imagining¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ MAVBh, 18, ll. 2-3: *sūnyatā tasyābhūtaparikalpasya grāhyagrāhakabhāvena virahitā*.

¹⁴⁵ MAVBh, 27, ll. 5-9: *na kliṣṭā nāpi vākliṣṭā śuddhā ’śuddhā na caiva sā / katham na kliṣṭā nāpi cāśuddhā / prakṛtyaiva / prabhāsvaratvūc cittasya / katham nākliṣṭā na śuddhā / kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ /*.

¹⁴⁶ What is defined as all defilements (*saṃkleśa*) in MAV I.10-1 can here only be the adventitious defilements.

¹⁴⁷ RGVV, 49, ll. 9-12: *evam eva sāgaramate bodhisattvaḥ sattvānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām cittasya prajānāti / tām punar āgantukopakleśopakliṣṭām paśyati / tatra bodhisattvasyaivaṃ bhavati / naite kleśāḥ sattvānām cittaprakṛtiprabhāsvaratāyām praviṣṭāḥ / āgantukā ete kleśā abhūtaparikalpasamutthitāḥ /*

It is now luminosity which is centred on and occurs in two modes, one of which is being stainless and thus even free from the false imagining which causes these adventitious stains. That the natural luminosity of the mind refers to an originally pure nature of the mind in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, too, becomes clear in stanza I.16, on the differentiation of emptiness:

How should the differentiation of emptiness be known? As being defiled as well as pure (MAV I.16a). Thus is its differentiation. In which state is it defiled and in which is it pure? It is accompanied as well as not accompanied by stains. (MAV I.16b) When it occurs together with stains it is defiled, and when its stains are abandoned it is pure. If, after being accompanied by stains it becomes stainless, how is it then not impermanent, given that it has the property of change? This is because its purity is considered to be like the one of water, gold and space. (MAV I.16cd) [A change is admitted] in view of the removal of adventitious stains, but there is no change in terms of its own-being¹⁴⁸.

It should be noted how the terms “defiled” and “pure” of the first section are explicitly equated with the imported terminology “accompanied by stains” and “stainless”. The latter doubtlessly stem from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, where the Buddha-nature is defined as suchness accompanied by stains (*samalā tathatā*) and the transformation of the basis as stainless suchness (*nirmalā tathatā*).

To sum up, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* combines the traditional Yogācāra formula “the perfect is the dependent empty of the imagined” with strands from the *tathāgatagarbha* theory, according to which an unconditioned¹⁴⁹ Buddha-element is empty of adventitious stains, but not of the inseparable Buddha-qualities¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁸ MAVBh 24, ll. 4-13: *kathaṃ sūnyatāyāḥ prabhedo jñeyāḥ / saṃkliṣṭā ca viśuddhā ca / ity asyāḥ prabhedaḥ / kasyām avasthāyām saṃkliṣṭā kasyām viśuddhā / samalā nirmalā ca sā / yadā saha malena varṭtate tadā saṃkliṣṭā / yadā prahiṇamalā tadā viśuddhā / yadī samalā bhūtvā nirmalā bhavati kathaṃ vikāradharminītvād anityā na bhavati / yas-mād asyāḥ abdhātukanakākāśasuddhivac chuddir iṣyate // āgantukamalāpagamān na tu tasyāḥ svabhāvānyatvaṃ bhavati /*

¹⁴⁹ See RGV I.5-6, where Buddhahood is taken to be without beginning or end and thus unconditioned (RGVV, 7, l. 14 – 8, l. 1: “Buddhahood is unconditioned. [...] As having neither beginning, middle nor end by nature, it is unconditioned.” *asaṃskṛtam [...] bud-dhatvaṃ [...] // anādimadhyaniḍhanaprakṛtī²tvād asaṃskṛtam /*).

^a Johnston reads *-prakṛta*.

¹⁵⁰ RGVV, 76, ll. 3-4 (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

However one wishes to combine these two formulas, a consistent reading of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* requires, as I already pointed out in my paper on Tāranātha's "g'Zan ston sñin po", operating with the Madhyamaka distinction of two truths, and following MAV III.10 in accepting only the perfect nature as the ultimate truth. In doing so, one should not overlook the fact of two models of *trisvabhāva* which reflect varied, not yet completely harmonized strands of thought. In this respect, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* does not differ from other texts of the early Yogācāra school in not only drawing on early Mahāyāna thought but also featuring a rich background of Abhidharma analysis. Sthiramati's uncertainty about the ontological status of false imagining may thus reflect the Abhidharmic background of this early Yogācāra material. Thus, it is generally asserted in the Hīnayāna schools that conditioned, dependently arising entities really exist¹⁵¹. On the other hand, such a stance would of course be incompatible with a Madhyamaka understanding of the Yogācāra, which is at least attempted in some passages.

5. Conclusion

Both Śākya mchog ldan and Dol po pa profit from the tensions between different *trisvabhāva* models in the pertinent passages of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and its commentaries, and follow the exegetical solution by restricting the ontological status of false imagining to the level of apparent truth. But from this point onwards the two masters depart from each other. Śākya mchog ldan remains more faithful to the Yogācāra, in taking the dependent nature as being empty of the imagined. What remains in emptiness is thus not only an unchangeable perfect nature, but also the perfect in terms of being unmistaken. This is similar to Rañ byuñ rdo

unsurpassable qualities, which have the defining characteristic of not being separable." (*śūnya āgantukair dhātuḥ savinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ / aśūnyo 'nuttaraiḥ dharmair avinirbhāgalakṣaṇaiḥ //*).

¹⁵¹ See v. Rospatt (1995:69ff.), who observes that in the early Yogācāra the contradiction between Abhidharma and Mahāyāna ontology was solved by more or less incorporating the doctrine of the existence of momentary caused entities into the description of the dependent nature. The Mahāyāna stance that the momentariness of the *dharmas* means nothing other than their mere non-existence could then be comfortably brought into line with the imagined nature of the *trisvabhāva* doctrine.

rje's "mere appearance", which corresponds to the apparent truth included in the Buddha-nature. Following the Yogācāra definition of emptiness in such a way, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* must be interpreted in terms of a Buddha-nature which is inside time and thus consists of moments. This allows for a theory of seeds which naturally grow into the qualities of a Buddha. For Śākya mchog ldan, the basis of emptiness is thus not the ultimate truth alone. In other words, his Yogācāra-based *gžan stoñ* is not defined along the lines of an ultimate being empty of the apparent.

Dol po pa, on the other hand, follows more the *Ratnagotravibhāga* when defining his *gžan stoñ*: an unconditioned Buddha-element interpreted as being completely transcendent (beyond the world and time)¹⁵² is taken to be empty of adventitious stains. Such a *tathāgatagarbha*-based *gžan stoñ* requires reinterpreting the *trisvabhāva* theory by taking a perfect nature restricted to its unchangeable aspect as the basis of negation. Given the *Ratnagotravibhāga* elements in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, such an interpretation is not completely out of question. One could argue in support of Dol po pa, that Śākya mchog ldan's *gžan stoñ* interpretation of the first part of the first chapter in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* which is centered on false imagining or the dependent nature defines in a first step the emptiness of the correct apparent from the false apparent. From that one still has to go one step further, though, and explain the emptiness of the ultimate from the correct (and false) apparent in line with the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

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¹⁵² It is not the case though, that all parts of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* explain Buddha-nature or Buddha-hood in such a way. Thus the explanations of the three *kāyas* in the second chapter rather suggest that the latter constantly remain in *saṃsāra* — and thus in time — as long as sentient beings need help (see Takasaki 1966:331-5).

MAVṬ: *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā*

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See also NGMPP reel no. A 38/10.

RGV: *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*

Ed. by Edward H. Johnston. Patna: The Bihar Research Society, 1950. (Includes the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*)

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